



The Israel Enigma

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What explains most of the world's dislike of Israel?

Since Israeli settlers withdrew from Gaza in 2005, Palestinian terrorists have replied by consistently shooting homemade Qassam rockets at civilian targets inside Israel. Just recently, they've kidnapped a soldier and a hitchhiker (who has been killed) - and promised to do the same to others.

You'd expect these terrorist attacks on Israel to be viewed by responsible nations as similar to the jihadist violence we read about daily around the world - radical Islamists beheading Russian diplomats over Chechnya, plotting to do the same to the Canadian prime minister or threatening murder over insensitive Danish cartoons.

But that isn't the case at all. Israel is always seen as a special exception that somehow deserves what it gets. Other states can retaliate with impunity, brutally killing thousands of Muslim terrorists, while Israel is condemned when it takes out a few dozen.

When in late 1999 Russians stormed Grozny, thousands of Chechnya Muslims died. Yet the press was mostly silent. Baathist Syria went after the Muslim Brotherhood in 1982, wiping out much of the city of Hama and killing perhaps more than 10,000. Not many U.N. resolutions or international refugee efforts there.

To this day, no one knows the horrific body count from the Islamic insurrection in Algeria. Darfur finally earns occasional airtime, but only after tens of thousands have perished.

But Israel's 2002 "siege" of the West Bank town Jenin, where less than 80 died on both sides, was evoked as "genocide" by those in the Middle East who often deny the real one that took 6 million Jewish lives. When Israel retaliates by air to terrorism, it is dubbed a "blitz" by the press - as if it were akin to the Nazis carpet-bombing London.

Israel's border fence is referred to as a "Berlin Wall," but you never hear Egypt's nearby massive concrete barrier to keep Palestinians in Gaza described that way.

Then there is the open sore of the West Bank "occupation." Even if you forget that a series of offensive wars to destroy Israel in part originated from Palestine, or that Israel has given up land acquired by war in its perennial hope for "land for peace," what is so unique about the West Bank that drowns out all other crises over contested ground (from islands like Cyprus and the Falklands to entire countries like Tibet)? Why has tiny Israel alone earned more U.N. resolutions of condemnation than all those offered against all other nations of the world combined?

It is not as if Israel is a rogue state. For over a half-century, it's been the only liberal democracy in the Middle East. Israeli scientists have given the world everything from innovative computer software to drip-irrigation technology.

Oil explains some of the weird discrepancy in how the world views certain countries. It warps policy-making. Take away Iranian and

Arab petroleum - and thus the risk of another oil embargo or rigged price hike - and Western fears of Middle East oil states would diminish. Naked self-interest determines the foreign policy of most nations.

The size of Israel factors in here as well. Israel has a population of not much more than 6 million and is surrounded by nearly 350 million Muslim Arabs. Most of the world counts heads - and adjusts attitudes accordingly.

The old anti-Semitism is, of course, another ingredient that accounts for the animus shown Israel. Even sensitive, multicultural Westerners care little that Arab "allies" often portray Jews as "pigs" and "apes" in their state-run media. Odious tracts like "Mein Kampf" still sell briskly in Palestine, and Iranian and Gulf money subsidizes a mini-industry of holocaust denial.

Finally, as we know from our own southern border, anytime a successful Westernized nation is adjacent to a poorer Third World country, primordial emotions like honor and envy cloud reason. Rather than concede that Western-style democracy, capitalism, personal freedom and the rule of law explain why a prosperous, stable Israel arose from scrub and rock, Palestinians fixate on "Zionism," "colonialism" and "racism."

No wonder they do. Otherwise they would have to grapple with intractable and indigenous tribalism, gender apartheid, militias and religious fundamentalism, while building an

open society based on the rule of law.

In some ways, Israel's values and success most resemble the United States.

And that raises a final question: Is Israel hated by the world for supporting us - or are we hated for supporting it? Or is it both?

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