
THE NAZIFICATION OF ISRAEL

Aijaz Ahmad

By brazenly resorting to Nazi-style rhetoric and methods of persecution in Palestine, Israel, with the consent of the majority of its own people and the unlimited support of the United States, perpetrates the kind of crimes that the Jewish state claims as the *raison d'être* of its own creation in 1948.

A decisive shift that has been perceptible for some time seems now to be substantially in place in Israel, from settler-colonialism of the familiar kind to full-scale Nazification. For virtually the whole of its existence, Israel has modelled itself upon the South African racist regime of the apartheid days: a settler colony, calling itself a "Jewish state" and asserting a manifest right to "the Biblical lands" for a "Chosen People" defined by race and religion, it has been unwilling to grant equal rights to the original inhabitants of the land owing to differences of race and religion, and unwilling even to pay compensation, let alone a right of return, to refugees created by its colonial wars.

Israel has of course always had the choice of dismantling its own racist character and accepting the creation of a secular, democratic bi-national state in which Israelis and Palestinians could live as equal citizens, as the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) began proposing soon after the 1967 war. Short of that, Israel could alternatively agree to a final peace settlement on the basis of two fully sovereign states, one Israeli and the other Palestinian, living side by side on the historic land of Palestine.

Chairman Yasser Arafat, the head of the Palestinian Authority (P.A.), declared his acceptance of such a solution in an unusual 'Op-Ed' article in *The New York Times* as recently as February 2002, even as Israel holds him captive in his Ramallah home and methodically assassinates his close associates.

Worse than Apartheid

Instead, Israel has relentlessly carried out a policy that Nelson Mandela has called "worse than apartheid" and the Speaker of the Greek Parliament has recently characterised as "genocide". Even in the earlier stages of the present assault, Ze'ev Sternhell, Israel's leading scholar on fascism, could already write that the government "is no longer ashamed to speak of war when what they are really engaged in is colonial policing, which recalls the takeover by the white police of the poor neighbourhoods of the blacks in South Africa during the apartheid era." This idea of "colonial policing" was in fact already there quite explicitly in the calculations of the Israeli government even when it entered the so-called 'peace process' and signed the Oslo Accords of 1993. That was clarified as early as 1998 by the Israeli academic Shlomo Ben-Ami just before

he joined the Ehud Barak government, going on to become Barak's chief negotiator at Camp David in the summer of 2000. Ben-Ami observed that "in practice, the Oslo agreements were founded on a neo-colonialist basis, on a life of dependence of one on the other forever."

However, as the Barak-Sharon combine provoked the current Palestinian uprising that came to be called the Al-Aqsa Intifida (see "Israel's Killing Fields", *Frontline*, November 24, 2001, for documentation of this deliberate provocation), and then used the Palestinian retaliation to put in place a policy of punishing the population as a whole, perceptions of the scale and nature of new brutalities began to shift. Some of the world's most prestigious newspapers, ranging from Israel's own *Ha'aretz* to the French *Le Monde Diplomatique*, have repeatedly accused it of "war crimes" that "fall under the Geneva Conventions of 1949", as the latter put it a couple of months ago. Indeed, the United Nations Security Council has time and again reminded Israel that its conduct in the Occupied Territories is fully covered by those conventions. This worldwide—and repeated—reference to the Geneva Conventions with regard to Israel's conduct is particularly significant in the sense that those conventions were originally formulated in response to the Nazi war crimes and with a view to the de-Nazification of Germany.

Nazi Model

The point that Israel is actively acting on the model of the Nazis was made, for example, by Assaf Oran, one of the more than one thousand Israeli reservists who have refused military duty in the current war on the Palestinian people, in an "Open Letter to American Jews" which he published on the eve of Passover this year, in response to a massive outpouring of anger against his 'refusenik' comrades: "Where were all these holy souls, who now scold Tikkun [an organisation supporting 'refuseniks'] because they indirectly allude to the Nazi horrors, where were they all when a senior IDF [Israeli Defence Forces] officer proudly called, 'in order to beat the Palestinians, let's be Judeo-Nazis'." The well-known Israeli daily *Ma'ariv* has also quoted an Israeli officer exhorting his men to study the tactics adopted by the Nazis during the Second World War: "If our job is to seize a densely packed refugee camp or take over the Nablus Casbah, and if this job is to be given to an Israeli officer to carry out without casualties he must before all else analyse and bring together the lessons of past battles, even—shocking though this might appear—to analyse how the German Army operated in the Warsaw Ghetto."

It is of course horrific and sinister that an officer of the Jewish state that legitimises all its crimes in the name of the Jewish victims of

the Nazi crimes would hold up one of the cardinal Nazi crimes — their brutalising of the trapped and defenceless Jewish souls of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1944—as the model of behaviour that should now be emulated by Jewish soldiery. And yet, the officer who said that does seem to possess a macabre kind of honesty—for, it is precisely on the model of the Warsaw Ghetto that the Israeli army has been treating the Palestinians in their camps and villages and townships, in Ramallah and Jenin, in the Dheheisha and Batala camps, in Bethlehem and now Nablus, and throughout the occupied territories.

And what treatment? In an article titled “The Jewish State must be deNazified, as Thoroughly as Germany after 1945”, Israel Shamir, an Israeli journalist who is based in Jaffa and often contributes to *Ha'aretz*, describes one morning's work in a small village:

It is warm in the low hills bordering the plain; purple-dark lupines, a favourite flower of March, run along the dirt track from the refugee camp to a nearby quarry. The place is swarming with soldiers, who assist the security in the selection job. Men are separated from their womenfolk; they are handcuffed by mass-produced plastic handcuffs, standard black sacks on their heads. They are taken to the quarry, beaten, some are shot, and some are tortured. Their houses were demolished by huge Caterpillar machines. Twenty men are executed by 8 o'clock. It is another morning of ethnic cleansing in Palestine ... In another world, twenty miles away, Israelis fight with heavy road traffic. It is another day of shopping and entertainment.

He then goes on to say: “In today's (March 12, 2002) *Ha'aretz*, Amnon Barzilay reports on the new opinion poll carried out by the Jaffa Institute of Strategic Studies. According to it, 46 per cent of Jews in Israel support mass deportation (transfer) of the Palestinians. If the question is asked in a more 'soft' form, the support for the Final Solution rises to 60 per cent.”

Nazis never openly declared their intention to massacre Jews and Gypsies, they spoke of 'deportation' and 'transfer' as their 'Final Solution'. Even in 1938, these ideas did not have such wholehearted support in Nazi Germany, as they have now in the Jewish state.

A good example is provided by the Jewish American law professor from Harvard, Alan Dershowitz, who writes in the *Jerusalem Post*, owned by Sir Conrad Black, (March 3, 2002): “The first act of [Palestinian] terrorism should result in the destruction of a small village which has been used as a base for terrorist operations. The residents would be given 24 hours to leave, and then troops will come in and bulldoze all of the buildings.” It was the standard practice of Nazi troops in occupied Europe. Palestinian hospitals, camps, schools, institutes and all networks of civil administration or mutual help have been attacked mercilessly. Doctors, Red Crescent staff and church caretakers have been shot and killed indiscriminately. Women have been forced to give birth to stillborn

children while waiting at Israeli checkpoints and denied medical help. Village after village, camp after camp, have been deprived of water, electricity, consumer items, methodically and on a massive scale. In Bethlehem alone, neither the university nor the city centre was spared as 140 tanks battered the population in an attack that did not spare even foreign residents. With the occupation of Nablus on April 4 the reconquest of the Occupied Territories is now well-nigh complete.

As Gideon Levy wrote in *Ha'aretz* on March 17, 2002:

Most of the suffering was experienced by the entire population: Hundreds of thousands of residents were kept under terrifying house arrest. Many were evicted from their homes or forced to spend long days with dozens of neighbours who are half-strangers in the same apartment. There were tanks in the streets, bombers and attack helicopters in the skies, frightened children held captive in their homes ... It was all inflicted on an entire nation—collective punishment on a scale not previously known.

I have cited and quoted from Israeli sources, including its most prestigious newspaper, deliberately. For, much of the horror of Israeli Nazification is that it is not something that the government alone is practising against the will of the general populace. Nor is it something practised by a fascist fringe or a militarised institution without the knowledge or active complicity of that populace. Rather, facts are known very commonly. Nazi Germany had no free press, no universal access to television and other international electronic news media, nothing resembling the modern Internet on which news circulates globally and freely. Israeli citizens have all this, and the horrors are reported in the country's own major newspapers and journals.

Courageous Minority

Most crucially, Nazi Germany was a brutal dictatorship whereas Israel is for its Jewish citizens a freewheeling, liberal democracy; everyone knows and the great majority consents. Ariel Sharon is an elected Prime Minister, heading a bipartisan government in which the Defence and External Affairs portfolios are held by the two main leaders of the Labour Party. On the other side, what happens to the courageous minority that dares to resist actively also becomes quite clear from passages such as the following, which Professor Neve Gordon of the Ben Gurion University wrote on March 6:

As to the situation here, it is getting unbearable by the day. We tried to dismantle a roadblock the other day near Hebrew U and were beaten by the police. Three women had their hands broken, one had her head opened. I was beaten while in custody with my hands handcuffed behind my back. Sharon bombed Gaza this morning.

Israel's Nazification needs no dictatorship since plenty of sturdy little Hitlers seem to be securely ensconced in a great many number of hearts.

Resistance, of course, goes on. There are, for example, influential veterans of the peace movements such as Shlomo Avinery who wrote the following for his peace group, Gush Shalom, on March 23, to help his readers make sense of the sources of Palestinian desperation and counter-violence:

When tanks run amok in the centre of a town, crushing cars and destroying walls, tearing up roads, shooting indiscriminately in all directions, causing panic to a whole population—it induces helpless rage ... When soldiers crash through a wall into the living room of a family, causing shock to children and adults, ransacking their belongings, destroying the fruits of a life of hard work, and then break the wall to the next apartment to wreak havoc there—it induces helpless rage ... When soldiers shoot at everything that moves—out of panic, out of lawlessness, or because Sharon told them "to cause losses"—it induces helpless rage ... When officers order to shoot at ambulances, killing doctors and paramedics engaged in saving the lives of the wounded, bleeding to death—it induces helpless rage... And then it appears that the rage is not helpless after all. The suicide bombers go forward to avenge, with a whole people blessing them and rejoicing at every Israeli killed, soldier or settler, a girl in a bus or a youngster in a discotheque.

'Give me a hatred gray like a sack,' wrote our poet, Nathan Alterman, seething with rage against the Germans. Hatred gray like a sack is now everywhere. Bands of armed men now roam all the towns and villages of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with or without black masks (available for 10 shekels in the markets). These bands do not belong to any organisation. Members of Fatah, Hamas and the Jihad team up to plan attacks, not giving a damn for the established institutions. Anyone who believes that Arafat can push a button and stop this is living in a dream-world.

A similar message comes from a man hardly to be identified as a peacenik, Ami Ayalon, a former head of Shabak, Israel's security service, who told *Le Monde*, "We say the Palestinians behave like 'madmen,' but it is not madness but a bottomless despair ... Yasser Arafat neither prepared nor triggered the intifada. The explosion was spontaneous, against Israel, as all hope for the end of occupation disappeared, and against the Palestinian Authority, its corruption, its impotence." He then went on to say, "I favour unconditional withdrawal from the Territories—preferably in the context of an agreement, but not necessarily: what needs to be done, urgently, is to withdraw from the Territories. And a true withdrawal. If they proclaim their own state, Israel should be the first to recognise it and to propose state to state negotiations, without conditions."

That this comes from a former security chief punctures all governmental claims that this brutalisation of the population and infinite occupation of their land and water resources is essential for Israeli security.

Refuseniks

Then there are those 'refuseniks', over a thousand now—ordinary young men, officers, even Generals—who refuse orders for active duty in their national Army, and senior former officials who defend them. Michael Ben-Yair, Attorney-General from 1993 to 1996, for example, wrote this in *Ha'aretz* (March 15, 2002):

The intifada is the Palestinian people's war of national liberation ... this process is anchored in the moral justification behind every people's war of national liberation ... No need to repeat the details of the painful phenomena entailed in the occupation regime and in our battle to prolong it. Suffice it to recall the killing of little children fleeing for safety; the executions, without trial, of wanted persons who were not on their way to launch a terrorist act; and the encirclements, closures and roadblocks that have turned the lives of millions into a nightmare.

It is against this background that one must view the refusal of IDF reservist officers and soldiers to serve in the Territories. In their eyes, the occupation regime is evil and military service in the Occupied Territories is evil. In their eyes, military service in the Occupied Territories, which places soldiers in situations forcing them to commit immoral acts, is evil, and, according to their conscience, they cannot be party to such acts. Thus, their refusal to serve is an act of conscience that is justified and recognised in every democratic regime.

Against the Nazified majority, then, there is a vocal minority which includes the country's major intellectuals and journalists as well as former senior officials, even a large number of reservists, who are not willing to buy into the government's bellicosity. And yet, Sharon's belligerence knows no bounds. In late January, he said that he was sorry he did not 'liquidate' Arafat in 1982, at the time of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. In late March, he gave an interview to the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*, in which he said: "In retrospect, there was one commitment [to Bush] that I took upon myself that was a mistake. The commitment was not to harm Arafat." In the same interview he also bragged that the rest of the world was really no longer concerned about what he had been perpetrating: "When we moved 300 metres into Area A, the entire world was shocked. Imagine what would have happened had we done then what we are doing today. I got the world accustomed to those incursions. Everyone understands us."

That is strictly not true. Despite Sharon's virtually pathological hatred of Arafat, it is precisely on the question of the latter's safety that he has had to face pressure from diverse quarters. The Foreign Ministers of China and Japan, and Morocco's King Mohammed, called either him or the Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres, to voice their concern. Jack Straw, the British Foreign Secretary, called upon Sharon to pull back his tanks from Arafat's headquarters. Germany's Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, said in a statement: "The German

government urgently appeals to the Israeli side to guarantee Palestinian President Arafat will not be harmed."

France has been proposing for a year that an international force be interposed between Israeli forces and the Palestinians to keep the peace, just as Arafat has been saying. Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, has asked the United States "to step aside" and let a much broader international coalition take charge of structuring a ceasefire. Javier Solana, the European Union's chief foreign policy official, has spoken against Israel's "military folly" and the Vatican itself has warned against "Palestinian humiliation." The Security Council has for the first time passed a resolution "affirming a vision of a region where two states, Israel and Palestine, live side by side within secure and recognised borders". In a final vote, the resolution was passed by 14-0, with Syria abstaining because it considered the text to be too "weak" since it neither established a time-frame nor addressed the problem of Palestinian refugees nor specified other terms of the larger settlement.

Sharon's claim

In this perspective, then, Sharon's claim ("I got the world accustomed to those incursions. Everyone understands us.") is either a lie or a serious case of self-delusion. Whence, then, his bellicose cockiness? First, the extent of domestic support. He has the entire political elite, with few exceptions, behind him—indeed, sitting in his government—while the Nazification of much of the general populace is well advanced and on the rise. Even much of the so-called 'peace camp' refuses to face up to the hard questions: the eventual fate of the refugees, the settlements in the Occupied Territories, or the final status of East Jerusalem. All are agreed that Israel must remain a 'Jewish state' and the Palestinian refugees—a quarter of the world's total number of refugees, according to the U.N.—therefore cannot be granted the right to return to their ancestral homes, even in theory (how many will now want to return to a 'Jewish state', after having built lives elsewhere, is of course a different question). Even Arafat's public offer that he would be willing to discuss the problem of refugees in the light of "Israel's current demographic situation"—that is, the idea that all would have the right to return is no longer realistic—falls on deaf ears. And no one is willing, of course, to confront the 400,000 rightwing bigots whom men like Sharon have been 'settling' in the Occupied Territories over the past 35 years. Much of the 'peace camp' itself does not thus stand for a settlement that Palestinians can possibly accept. This is Sharon's great domestic strength.

However, the main strength comes now, as it has always come, from the United States—in two forms. One is the virtually unlimited financial, diplomatic and military support. The U.S. has so far gifted Israel close to a hundred billion dollars—the largest gift any state has ever given to another. Similarly, Israel has always been able to get whatever military technology or weapons systems that it has wanted, with no restrictions on how the weapons are to be used. It can thus use even F-16 fighter aircraft and Apache helicopter gunships to terrorise the civilian population and attack the Palestinian police or even civilian targets without having to account for such

savageries. In the diplomatic arena, the U.S. vetoes or forces modification of any resolution or plan which is not to Israeli liking and protects it from foreign pressure. Israel can even obstruct some of the U.S. plans without fearing the kind of reprisals that are routine for Third World countries, or even the sort of pressure that allies like Britain tend to face. This is perhaps the only instance in which the client dictates to the financier more than it is the other way round. This special relationship goes back to the 1950s and 1960s when western Asia was seething with communist and radical-nationalist movements and regimes, and the U.S. was seeking a reliable, strategic ally that could keep the region at bay. As a settler colony, Israel was at odds with the very region where it was located and was seeking western allies anyway, while the U.S. was in the first flush of its project to replace Britain and France as the dominant power in the region; they needed each other. The alliance got a big boost in 1967 when Israel destroyed a large part of the Egyptian and Syrian armies, precipitating a terminal crisis of Arab secular nationalism, which is what the U.S. wanted. A decade later, the loss of military bases in Iran meant that Israel became the main, almost exclusive, military ally in a region where the U.S. has strategic oil interests, central to the containment of Soviet influence on the one hand and militant Islam on the other. Conversely, Israel has become increasingly more integrated into the militarised U.S. economy. There have been years when the aggregate transfer of funds—counting all grants, guarantees, and receipts from various budgetary allocations—from the U.S. to Israel has reached close to \$10 billion.

Invasion of Lebanon

Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, when Sharon was Defence Minister, came only when the Reagan administration gave the green signal and the Lebanese Hizbollah got listed by the U.S. as a 'terrorist' organisation because it was the main player in getting Israel to vacate the occupation of southern Lebanon; the strategic aim of Israel in the present offensive probably includes the re-occupation of that Lebanese territory. Similarly, the U.S. has clearly given the green signal for the present assault and re-occupation of the Occupied Territories. It has since then shielded Israel against unfavourable developments everywhere, as for example by using its veto in the Security Council against a resolution—supported by all other members as well as the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson—that unarmed U.N. monitors be stationed in the Occupied Territories. Richard Holbrooke simply said that "no force would be supported without Israeli approval". It is thanks to the U.S., actually, that nothing at all has ever been possible in the region "without Israeli approval".

The latest Saudi Arabian plan, which has been so much in the news and which the Arab press has taken to calling the 'American plan', should be seen in this perspective. There is actually nothing new about it, in the sense that peace and recognition for Israel in exchange for the Occupied Territories has been a staple of many a peace initiative in the past, many of them enjoying broad support from conservative Arab governments. The Security Council Resolution of January 1976 said basically the same things, as did the 1981 Fahd plan, which obviously also came with Saudi backing. The Israeli

establishment, including Shimon Peres and other such alleged "doves", has always held that Israel's security needs require that it keep part of the territories that it occupied in 1967; some 22 per cent according to the "doves" (Allon, Rabin and so on), 58 per cent according to Sharon. It is a sign of the times that Arafat seems to have embraced this American-Saudi plan as a way to salvage his skin and his so-called 'Palestinian Authority', which is already in shambles. Reservations have come from Syria and from other, radical quarters which have argued that recognition and guarantees of security and peace for Israel cannot be offered unilaterally unless and until a schedule for Israeli withdrawal from the Territories is already in place and a framework is firmly established for all other issues, such as the matter of Palestinian refugees, Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights and Lebanon's security against Israeli incursions. Israel, which is just completing its re-occupation of the Occupied Territories, of course has nothing but contempt for a plan that requires it to vacate them, but it is an "American plan" precisely to the extent that it offers Israel all sorts of concessions without engaging it on the crucial issues. It is unlikely that the Saudi plan shall be any more successful than the plethora of preceding ones.

All that the U.S. really wants is some sort of device that saves the rightwing Arab regimes from the impending wrath of their own people sufficiently to let them join the U.S. crusade against Iraq. By the same token, America's only displeasure with Israel is that its policies are preventing the formation of a coalition that it needs for that invasion. In other words, the U.S. is caught in the contradictions of its own policies. It has allowed Israel to go much too far for some settlement now to emerge quickly, but without such a settlement the U.S. itself cannot achieve its immediate goals in the region. *Time* (March 17, 2002) quotes a U.S. official in Cairo: "We've been sending dispatches for a year telling them that the only thing the people care about here is the Palestinian question, but they've ignored it ... There's not a single Egyptian who would be willing to say O.K. on Iraq unless they see a change in the way the U.S. deals with the Palestinians." And then the magazine goes on immediately to quote a U.S. official in Amman: "All I know is if we invade Iraq, I'll be on the first evacuation plane out of here because this place is going to explode." Palestinian fighters may not know it, but it is probably their courage in the face of one of the world's most infernal military machines that may yet save Iraq, at least for now. There are, after all, limits to what Israel's own Nazification can yield for the imperialism of our time. ■

Aijaz Ahmad is a left activist intellectual, author of *In Theory* and other books

BOOKS ON PEACE AND ETHNICITY

Historiography in a time of Ethnic Conflict – R.A.L.H Gunawardena

An Annotated Bibliography of Women in Conflict – Bhawani Loganathan,
Mangalika de Silva

Interventions in the Devolution Debate – Sumanasiri Liyanage

Unitarism, Devolution and Majoritarian Elitism – Charles Abeyesekara, Rohan
Edrisinha, Sumanasiri Liyanage, Pakiasothy Saravanamuttu, Jayadeva Uyangoda

Ethnic Futures – Joanna Pfaff-Czarneka, Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake, Ashis Nandy,
Edmund Terrence Gomez

Unmaking the Nation – Ed. Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail

Voices of Sanity – Ed. Kamla Bhasin, Smithu Kothari, Bindia Thapar

Sri Lankan Theater in a time of Terror – Ranjini Obeysekere

Women, War and Peace in South Asia – Ed. Rita Manchanda

Forced Migration and Changing Local Political Economics –A Study of North
Western Sri Lanka – N. Shanmugaratnam

Available at the Suriya Bookshop