

2015

Ethical Concerns & Misconceptions in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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ETHICAL CONCERNS & MISCONCEPTIONS IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN
CONFLICT

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RELG 327-LC: Business Ethics

December 18, 2014

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Introduction

The roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict go deep in its long and complicated history with many different arguments and opinions on each side. While one could write an entire essay on the history of the conflict alone, this essay aims to highlight the current situation concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Overall, this paper aims to address both sides of the conflict, to bring to light the criticisms of each side, to examine the ethics and intentions of both sides, and to draw implications for the future of the Middle East.

Terrorism in the Middle East

Ever since the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna, the lives of all Jewish people have been severely threatened (Jones and Cullinane). The Muslim Brotherhood is founded on the belief that Islam is not only a religion, but a way of life. Their “two key pillars” are: “The introduction of the Islamic Sharia (way of life or principles) as the basis controlling the affairs of state and society, and working to achieve unification among the Islamic countries and states, mainly among the Arab states, and liberating them from foreign imperialism” (Jones and Cullinane). Hassan al-Banna and his followers were initially united by a desire to overthrow the British in Egypt, and to rid their country of what they saw as “corrupting” Western influences. Their original slogan was: “Islam is the solution” (“The Muslim Brotherhood”). The MB ultimately seeks to establish an Islamic caliphate (i.e. kingdom) across the globe. They also want to dismantle all non-Islamic governments and enforce Sharia law everywhere on earth. Their purpose can be boiled down to this one statement used in their militant doctrine: “God is our objective, the Koran is our Constitution, the Prophet is our leader, jihad is our way, and death for the sake of God is the highest of our aspirations” (“The Muslim

Brotherhood”). Several countries have listed the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization (e.g., Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Russia, etc.), but the United States, Israel’s closest ally, has not yet acknowledged the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization. Congresswoman Michele Bachmann introduced a bill this past July called the “Muslim Brotherhood Terrorist Designation Act of 2014.” The purpose of this bill is to not only label the MB as a terrorist organization, but to also “impose sanctions against persons who knowingly provide material support or resources to the Muslim Brotherhood or its affiliates, associated groups, or agents, and for other purposes” (“H.R. 5194”). This bill has not been passed by Congress, but it may be reintroduced in the near future in light of the recent 2014 election gaining Republican control of the House and of the Senate.

Today, offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood include terrorist groups such as Hamas and al Qaeda. Hamas has been publicized the most this past year with the war they had with Israel in Gaza in the summer of 2014. The Hamas Charter describes who they are and what their goals are. One of the quotes directly from the Hamas Charter in the Introduction paragraph states: “For our struggle against the Jews is extremely wide-ranging and grave, so much so that it will need all the loyal efforts we can wield, to be followed by further steps and reinforced by successive battalions from the multifarious Arab and Islamic world, until the enemies are defeated and Allah’s victory prevails” (“Hamas Charter”). Essentially, Hamas wants as many Muslims as possible to come and fight with them until all of the Jews are killed. This notion was quite clear to the public eye this past summer when Hamas was constantly launching rockets into Israel and when their dozens of underground tunnels were discovered leading into Israel. There are many different terrorist groups such as Hamas, al Qaeda, Hezbollah, and now ISIS, but they all lead back in one way or another to the Muslim Brotherhood. Terrorism in the Middle East

has been rampant for decades, and it's now at its peak. It's a giant, interconnected, and convoluted web that intelligent agencies are still trying to figure out, but there is some hope in the Middle East for true democracy and peace. That light in the darkness is the state of Israel.

IDF Code of Ethics

The IDF's (Israel Defense Forces) mission statement is "to defend the existence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state of Israel, to protect the inhabitants of Israel, and to combat all forms of terrorism which threaten the daily life" ("IDF Code of Ethics").

Something that is mentioned in this mission statement that is often overlooked by the majority is the fact that Israel is threatened by terrorism daily. Israel, unlike most countries in the world, has to defend its borders and people from Islamic extremists every day. Some days may be less threatening than others, but the threat is always there. Other than defending Israel's existence and people, the IDF stated that its other basic value is defending human dignity: "The IDF and its soldiers are obligated to protect human dignity. Every human being is of value regardless of his or her origin, religion, nationality, gender, status or position" ("IDF Code of Ethics"). Under the subheading of "The Values," the IDF states their Purity of Arms:

The IDF servicemen and women will use their weapons and force only for the purpose of their mission, only to the necessary extent and will maintain their humanity even during combat. IDF soldiers will not use their weapons and force to harm human beings who are not combatants or prisoners of war, and will do all in their power to avoid causing harm to their lives, bodies, dignity and property ("IDF Code of Ethics").

Notice that they don't just protect Israeli human dignity, but every human being's dignity. This means that their intentions are to protect Israeli citizens just as much as Palestinian citizens.

However, since Israel is constantly accused of killing Palestinian civilians intentionally, this

argument will be discussed further later on under the heading of: “The 2014 Israeli-Gaza War: Criticisms & Defenses of the IDF.”

Is Israel an Apartheid State?

Perhaps the most talked-about issue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the question of whether Israel is an apartheid state. In its context, apartheid was a system of racial segregation in South Africa enforced through legislation by the National Party governments (Bard). Here are some of the characteristics of apartheid South Africa: Whites and non-whites lived in separate regions of the country; non-whites were prohibited from running businesses or professional practices in white areas without permits; non-whites had separate facilities such as beaches, buses, schools, benches, drinking fountains, restrooms; non-whites received inferior education, medical care and other public services; and, non-whites could not vote or become citizens (Bard). In Israel, none of these policies are being enforced. In fact, every citizen of Israel has voting rights and representation in the Israel Knesset. For example, Salim Joubran, an Arab, currently serves as a justice on Israel’s Supreme Court (Bard). Israel’s Declaration of Independence even specifically calls upon the Arab inhabitants of Israel to “participate in the up-building of the State on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its provisional and permanent institutions” (Bard). Israel receives much criticism for trying to “keep Arabs and/or Muslims out” but this is not the goal of the state of Israel. However, since Israel is the only Jewish state in the world, Israel needs to have a Jewish majority in order to maintain its title as a Jewish state. This is true for any nation claiming to be an Islamic state, Roman Catholic state, Protestant state, etc. It may be a surprise to many, but the Arab minority comprises about 20% of Israel's population (Bard).

Israeli society is not perfect - discrimination and unfairness exist there as it does in every other country. These differences, however, are nothing like the horrors of the apartheid system. Even when inequalities are identified, minorities in Israel have the right to seek compensation through the government and the courts, and progress toward equality has been made over the years. Unlike South Africa, where restrictions were totally racially motivated, Israel's restrictions in the territories - such as checkpoints and the security fence - was forced by incessant Palestinian terrorism. The decision to build the first part of the security fence was made in June 2002, following a horribly bloody March, when 139 Israeli citizens were murdered in terror attacks (Tirza). Ever since the security fence has been built, terrorist attacks on the ground have been reduced by 99%. Many people only see the huge "apartheid wall" in the news but what they don't know is that less than 5% of the security barrier is a concrete wall. The other 95% of the security barrier is a high-tech chain-link fence (Tirza). Furthermore, Israel has consistently demonstrated a willingness to ease restrictions when violence subsides. Meanwhile, Palestinians from the territories are allowed to work in Israel and receive similar pay and benefits to their Jewish counterparts, and they are allowed to attend schools and universities. Palestinians have even been given opportunities to run many of their own affairs, but none of this was true for South African blacks. Even still, 98% of the Palestinians in the territories are governed by the rules of the Palestinian Authority (PA), which amazingly do not permit their own residents with freedoms of speech, religion, assembly or other rights taken for granted by Westerners and guaranteed in Israel (Bard). The clearest contradiction of the defamation against Israel comes from the Palestinians themselves - when asked what governments they admire most, more than 80% of Palestinians consistently choose Israel because they can see up close the thriving democracy in Israel and the rights the Arab citizens enjoy there (Bard).

One may ask, “How are there Israeli-Arab citizens and Palestinian-Arabs? How did they get separated?” The reason why there are Arabs in Israel goes back to the establishment of the nation in 1948. After Israel was attacked by five Arab armies the day of its establishment and then won the war, Israel told the Arabs living in Israel that they could stay and become citizens of Israel, enjoying full rights, or they could leave Israel. The Jewish mayor of Haifa even begged Arab residents to stay. ““Ethnic cleansing” was never a motive of the Zionist movement, even among its more extreme elements,’ Jewish historian Benny Morris observes (Margolick). The first Arabs who left their homes did so on their own, expecting to return once the Jews lost or the fighting stopped. Golda Meir, then head of the Jewish Agency Political Department, called the exodus “dreadful” and even compared it to when the Jews had to leave their homes in Nazi-occupied Europe. However, Arab broadcasts depicted those as traitors who chose to stay behind (Margolick). Looking at all of the evidence, it is clear that Israel is not an apartheid state. In fact, they are quite the opposite in every aspect; politically, religiously, culturally, and academically.

The 2014 Israeli-Gaza War: Criticisms & Defenses of the IDF

Compared to any other war Israel has fought in, the 2014 Gaza War has probably been under the most scrutiny in the public eye due to the vast amount of Palestinian civilian deaths. However, it’s important to not only look at the numbers, but also how those numbers came to be. Many critics say that Israel intentionally targeted civilians so that is why over 2,000 Palestinian civilians were killed (“Operation Protective Edge”). However, many forget that Hamas puts their own people in danger by hiding their rockets in civilian areas such as schools, hospitals, and homes. Hamas knows that Israel won’t destroy a building if there are civilians in there, so Hamas tells the Palestinian people to stay in their homes and to stay in these dangerous areas so

that Israel won't destroy their rockets. It was even reported that members of Hamas would beat Palestinians who tried to leave a targeted area to get to safety (Kemp). Hamas is infamous for using "human shields" to protect their rockets. Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, summed up Hamas' tactics compared to Israel's tactics to this simple sentence: "Here's the difference between us. We're using missile defense to protect our civilians, and they're using their civilians to protect their missiles" (Hausam). Sometimes, Hamas even tells them to go on top of the roof so the IDF will see them and not destroy the building they know has rockets inside of it. When the IDF knows of a location where Hamas has hid their rockets, the IDF will let the Palestinian civilians know when and where they will strike in advance so they can get to safety. The IDF will drop pamphlets and they will actually call and text all of the Palestinians in close proximity to the targeted area so they can get to a secure location (Kemp).

Some might argue that the Palestinians hardly have anywhere to go, but the IDF has pinpoint accuracy. The IDF will tell the civilians how many yards they need to be away so they know for sure that the Palestinian civilians won't be in harm's way. Unfortunately because of Hamas' orders to the Palestinian civilians to stay where they are no matter what the IDF tells them, the IDF can't avoid all civilian casualties if they are wanting to ultimately stop Hamas from terrorizing Israel. When putting Israel's difficult situation in perspective, it's important to look at the vast difference between conventional war and terrorism. Professor Linn of Washington, D.C. writes that "terrorists blur the combatant-non-combatant distinction by saying that 'WAR IS WAR and that any attempt to define ethical limits to war is futile'" (Linn, 141). This is what separates the IDF from any other military in the world. Israel goes to such great lengths to defend non-combatants that they will endanger their own lives for the sake of saving those who may even want them dead as well.

Another misconception many people have concerning this war is that Israel was the one who started it all. What these people do not realize however is that Hamas had fired 450 rockets into Israel since the beginning of 2014 (“Operation Protective Edge”). The tipping point for the Israelis was the murder of the three Jewish boys on their way home from school by members of Hamas. In addition to this, many outsiders get caught up with comparing the ratio of civilians who died in Israel compared to the number of civilians who died in Gaza. This is a dangerous way to determine who was in the “right” because firstly, Israel has a life-saving system called the Iron Dome that the Palestinians do not have. This mainly U.S. sponsored technology is able to calculate where a rocket is being fired, if it is going to hit a civilian area, and then destroy the rocket if it is aimed at a populated area. During the Gaza War, Hamas fired over 4,382 rockets at Israel and the Iron Dome intercepted 692 of these rockets that would have hit populated areas (“Operation Protective Edge”). It is also unethical for people to feel more sympathetic towards Israel if they had lost more civilian lives. If Israel’s goal is to save civilian lives, it is not fair to criticize them for having fewer casualties if they have the resources to save as many Israeli lives as possible. Hamas’ rockets are not technically advanced, so they are sometimes unpredictable in where they will land. Of the thousands of rockets launched by terrorists at Israel since July 8th, more than 280 have landed inside the Gaza Strip. This doesn’t include a rocket fired on July 13th that hit an electricity infrastructure inside Israel, knocking out power for 70,000 Gaza residents (“Hamas Launches Rockets on Civilians in Gaza”).

When the overhead strikes became too risky for the IDF to pinpoint where Hamas was hiding without hurting civilians, the IDF then launched its ground phase in Gaza on the tenth day of Operation Protective Edge. One of the main objectives of Operation Protective Edge was destroying Hamas’ terror tunnels. During this operation, the IDF destroyed thirty-two of these

tunnels; fourteen of which had openings in Israeli territory (Friedson). The Hamas tunnels are usually 20 meters deep — which puts them out of range of the current technology even if the searchers have a rough idea of their location. Instead, Israel must rely on its intelligence and information gathered in house-to-house searches. Many of Hamas' tunnels are lined with concrete and equipped with an array of cables, pipes, finished ceilings, communication lines, and pulley systems. It's estimated that Hamas used about \$7 billion to build these tunnels mostly by hand, using a jackhammer and shovels (Friedson). And where did all of this money come from you may ask? Well, all of the aid that the Palestinian government received from the UN, the U.S., and even Israel was used not to build new buildings and therefore create new jobs and opportunities for the Palestinian people, but instead was used to build these long, concrete tunnels for terrorizing Israel.

Although the Palestinian civilians were victims in this Gaza War along with the Israelis, it's hard to fully blame Hamas for using this money and resources for terror when the Palestinian people were the ones who elected Hamas into their government back in 2006 (Zweiri, 675). Professor Zweiri of Durham University wrote an article on Hamas' political victory shortly after the election in 2006 with the warning of what this could mean for the Middle East and especially for Israel in the future. Although many Westerners were concerned about this election, there was maybe some hope that Hamas would work as a government to represent the whole of Palestinian society. However, Zweiri writes that “there are voices from within Hamas still repeating the same discourse, extremist ideas about the nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict, destroying Israel, refusing to negotiate with Israel and insisting that military resistance is the only way to solve the Palestinian dilemma” (680). As the entire world has witnessed, Hamas has not used their power for good. Instead, they chose to use the resources given to them to terrorize the nation and

people of Israel while inadvertently making their own people suffer without the proper resources needed to survive.

Future Implications

The future of the Middle East may look bleak after looking back at 2014, but even after everything that has happened between Israel and Hamas, there is still hope for peace in the Middle East. Israel has always been willing to negotiate land for peace, and they will continue to do so with any means necessary. However, the ultimate problem is the Palestinians unwillingness to recognize Israel's right to exist. How can Israel negotiate with a people who want to wipe them completely off of the map? Once the Palestinian leadership recognizes Israel's right to exist and stops trying to eradicate the state and people of Israel, then, and only then, will there be hope for peace in the Middle East.

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