



Features

Israeli 'high ground' mere propaganda

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As Israel invades Gaza, **Halim Rane** surveys the Palestinians' plight

The UN has been unwilling or unable to compel Israel to comply with international law

ISRAEL certainly makes mistakes but its use of excessive force and targeting of Palestinian civilians has been well documented.

And no, its cause is not just given the context in which this force and targeting is applied. For too long, Israel has been able to maintain the so-called "moral high ground" thanks to the propaganda of policy analysts such as Bren Carlill of the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council ("Morally right to kill threats", Perspectives, June 23).

In large part, this propaganda has been based on a strategy of presenting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as too "confusing", to use Carlill's term, to be comprehended, let alone resolved. Indeed, the nightly news coverage of the conflict reinforces such a description. However, if one is to assess the basic facts of the matter, a different picture is apparent.

The central factor is that Israel illegally occupies the Palestinian territories, namely the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza (until September 2005). The illegality of Israel's occupation has been the position of the United Nations ever since Israel began this phase of occupation in 1967.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict exists, and is now the longest-running in modern history, because the UN has been unwilling or unable to compel Israel to comply with international law, specifically UN Security Council Resolutions, such as 242, which require Israel to withdraw from the Palestinian territories it has occupied since 1967.

Terrorism must be condemned irrespective of the perpetrator.

Popular attention is generally paid to Palestinian acts of terrorism, particularly suicide bombings, while acts of Israel that also meet the UN and US definitions of terrorism are not usually identified as such.

In reference to UN General Assembly Resolution 51/210, Israeli does indeed commit "criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror. . . for political purposes" which are "unjustifiable". It is in the context of the occupation that the violence perpetrated by both sides must be understood.

Carlill's article presents a spin on Israeli and Palestinian casualties that is at odds with not only the reports of the Israeli human rights group, B'Tselem, and Amnesty International, but also the findings of the UN Security Council.

Palestine's position with respect to Israel's security needs is equally clear, however. UN Resolution 1544, for instance, condemned the acts of "violence, terror and destruction" and calls on Israel to "address its security needs within the boundaries of international law".

We are also supposed to be confused about issues which are commonly regarded as the most complex in terms of achieving peace: Israeli settlements in the West Bank, the status of Jerusalem and the right of return of the Palestinian refugees (now numbering almost 4 million).

The continuity of the conflict is not due to indecision on the part of the UN as to what constitutes a just peace but, rather, Israeli non-compliance with these terms. The UN Security Council has determined the Israeli settlements on the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 are "illegal", "null and void", and should be "dismantled" as they constitute a "violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention". Israel's

occupation of Jerusalem has been addressed by the Security Council in the same terms in no less than 10 resolutions. In the war of 1948, more than half the Palestinian population were made refugees. Under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Palestinians have a right to return to their homes and land. As with the issue of the settlements and Jerusalem, the UN has been unwilling or unable to compel Israel to comply with these resolutions and, consequently, has been unable to resolve the conflict. The hard reality of the situation is that Israel will continue to refuse to comply until it too is forced to choose between international boycotts, sanctions and divestment and the terms of a just peace.

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