

Mr Geoffrey Zygiel

Executive Director

Executive Council of Australian Jewry

Dear Mr Zygiel,

I refer to your recent letter in The Australian in response to that of Brian Hail 'Silence of religious leaders'. Rather than attempt to respond to you through The Australian I made a decision to write direct. However being unable to locate a street address - no doubt a security measure, I apologise for sending this as an email.

I too ask the same question about the silence of religious leaders PLUS the silence of many world leaders including George Bush and John Howard to name just two. George Bush's reasons I can understand, he has too many Jewish votes that he needs, to risk speaking out. As a practising Christian I believed I had a close bond with the people of Israel because of each of our faiths early beginnings in the Holy Land and the origins of our scriptures. I have been saddened over many years, to the point of despair of Israel's ruthless occupation of Palestine, held in violation of two UN resolutions that I have 'lost' that bond.

Why does the world stand by and allow your powerful military to run rough shod over the subjugated Palestinians, crushing what little life there is left in the civilians men, women and little kids? Yes, I am aware that rockets are fired into Israel, none of which I believe have killed anyone, and yes the occasional Palestinian terrorist bomber manages to explode his or her lethal package in a cafe or a bus. Let's be realistic, you have been a military occupier of Palestinian lands for over 60 years continually crushing the Palestinian people, grinding them further and further into poverty. Your actions can also label you as terrorists. My Oxford dictionary defines a terrorist as 'one who favours or uses terror-inspiring methods of coercing government or community'.

You have a huge military machine - which receives approximately \$3 billion each year in U.S. aid, with sophisticated weaponry, tanks, attack helicopters, drones and jet fighters plus a great range of bulldozers all at your disposal to do what you will with the Palestinians you hold under occupation. How are they supposed to react to the gross excesses of the occupation forces who practice collective punishment, who assassinate 'suspected' militants with no thought for the safety of any civilians who may be near by, who destroy wantonly Palestinian buildings by use of explosives, shell fire or bulldozer and as well destroy farmland and orchards of poor farmers. The Palestinians have no other way of fighting the occupying force other than basic weapons and sadly for both sides, the explosive belt. After all you are the occupying power and in the eyes of many in the world the Palestinian bomber is simply a freedom fighter trying to rid his county of the oppressor.

In your letter you criticise the Palestinian people and try to place blame on them for electing a Hamas led government. Can you blame them for voting for Hamas considering the way you treat them like dirt. Have you watched TV and seen the horrific conditions that the people live under? Can you blame the likes of me who probably will be criticised as being anti-Semitic? As for terrorists - Remember it is not that many years ago that you also had Jewish terrorists. Some of these terrorists ultimately became part of the Israeli government.

You probably will deny the use of excessive force by Israeli Defence forces yet looking through figures of killed and injured over the years it is the Palestinians who are the greater victims of your war machine. For example Sept 2000 to May 2002 - killed, Israelis 319, injured 2,707 (Israeli Defence force figures) Palestinians killed 1,538 injured 19,189 (Red Crescent sources). Israel's excessive use of force has been condemned by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. On October 19, 2000, the United Nations Human

Rights Commission adopted a resolution condemning Israel's "disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force" against Palestinian civilians, and accused Israel of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Now we have the horror of Israel's response to the abduction of Gilad Shalit. Considering the number of Palestinians kidnapped by Israel over the years your response with overwhelming force I believe was unnecessary. As for your unwillingness to talk, all that has been achieved is further loss of Israeli lives. Israel has also prevented families from visiting 9,000 security prisoners since Israel Defence Forces soldier Gilad Shalit was abducted.

As for General Yoav Gallant, who is quoted as saying "If there are dozens or hundreds of militants killed and infrastructure destroyed and government ministries collapsed, maybe they will think again before making another kidnapping or resuming the rocketing". Not too dissimilar to the actions of German forces during WWII!!

I firmly believe that there will never be peace between Israelis and Palestinians, until there is a truly just resolution, until Israel completely evacuates its settlements in Palestinian territories, ends its military occupation, and returns to its pre-1967 borders. Should you feel that the Palestinians have not been treated unjustly over the years, compare the lists of killed and injured, look at the list of Palestinian prisoners - men, women and children, and finally look at a map of what was Palestine in 1946 and compare it with the 2006.

Sincerely,

Murray Smith

Friday, 14 July 2006

Dear Mr Smith

I very much dislike getting into written debates as there is too much room for misinterpretation. I will, however, respond briefly to certain of your points and if you'd like to call me on the below number, I'm very happy to speak to you at further length. Incidentally our website does have our contact details.

1) You talk about Palestine in 1946. 'Palestinians' at that time were people living in a British Mandate. Some 'Palestinians' were Muslims, others Jews, others Christians etc (and Palestine or Palestina, as you undoubtedly know, was a name bestowed by the Roman colonialists on the Jewish country they colonised). In 1946, 8.6% of the land was owned by Jews, 3.3% by resident Arabs, 16.5% by non-resident Arabs. Most of the rest was State land under British control (Survey of Palestine 1946, British Mandate Government, p257). So to talk about the size of 'Palestine' in 1946 compared to 2006 is meaningless.

2) As a Christian, you of course know that Jesus was a Jew living in what had been a Jewish country for some 1500 years interspersed with some periods of colonisation. Thus to talk about occupied Palestinian land just begs the question. For 2000 years, a Jewish country was occupied by others. Taking a historical snapshot as you do to define 'occupation' is just too glib. (And as an aside, there is very little populated land on this planet that isn't 'occupied'. I assume you're consistent in your outrage).

3) You talk about violation of two UN resolutions, of which I assume 242 is one. There are links on the Net and I refer you to <http://www.mideastweb.org/242.htm>. There are many others you can Google. Resolution 242 talks about withdrawal from occupied territory, but Mr Smith, it's a package deal, namely in return for:

Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force.

I think you'd agree that this resolution has not been complied with.

4) You mention George Bush and John Howard (and incidentally insert a nasty imputation about the former's reliance on Jewish votes. For your information, according to CAIR, the main Muslim representative body in the US, there are more Muslims than Jews there. But let's not digress) supporting Israel. Now a lot of people say that. They want them to be "even-handed". But the same people never call for Iran, Syria, Tunisia, Indonesia, Pakistan etc to be impartial. Why is that, Mr Smith?

There are a range of reasons why the US and Australia support Israel. At least one is because of the commonality of their democratic beliefs and institutions, something sadly in short supply in most of the world.

5) You say "Yes, I am aware that rockets are fired into Israel, none of which I believe have killed anyone, and yes the occasional Palestinian terrorist bomber manages to explode his or her lethal package in a cafe or a bus." To be honest Mr Smith, your blithe dismissal of Israel's losses and suffering doesn't merit discussion.

6) You mention the financial aid given to Israel. Mr Smith, do you realise how dwarfed that is by aid given to her enemies also by the US, and the EU, Muslim countries, Russia and so on? And do you also reflect that Israel may not need such assistance if the Palestinians genuinely were prepared to talk?

7) You talk about the "horror" of Israel's response to the abduction of Gilad Shalit. Two points: Firstly, yes, Israel undoubtedly cares about its kids. But its response is not about the abduction, it's about being the final straw in a series of warlike acts that have gone on for decades. Secondly, Israel presumably has the resources to inflict overwhelming damage on Gaza. Despite what you may think, Israel's military is relatively humane and does not target civilians. Beyond the emotion of your language, there is little substance.

Mr Smith I can go and on, but I'm not sure that would be a profitable exercise. I'll conclude with a few observations if I may, but as I said, please feel free to call me.

Firstly, Israel has long accepted a real two-nation solution, as would likely the vast majority of Jews elsewhere. I say "real" because the best its enemies have offered is an Israel that must allow all so-called refugees to return. And that wouldn't leave much of a Jewish state, really.

Secondly, I have no doubt that if, G-d forbid, Israel were ever to cease to exist, that would be the end of your co-religionists in that part of the world.

Thirdly Mr Smith, you should be more careful with your use of "you" - "*you have been a military occupier*", "*You have a huge military machine*" etc. It's a mistake some people make. Don't confuse Jewish Australians with Israelis. Sometimes we agree, sometimes we don't.

Finally, you are undoubtedly aware that 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' (Galatians vi). You will also recall what the great Jewish Prophet Ezekiel said: "According to their way I will do to them, and according to their own judgments I will judge them; and they shall know that I am the LORD." The Palestinians and their friends are paying the price for their refusal to accept the deal initially offered by the UN some sixty years ago. They continue to pay a higher price because at the end of the day they simply want it all.

Yours truly

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