
Charles Krauthammer

A hundred years after Basel, fifty years after the founding of the state, no self-respecting Jew should have to defend Zionism. The argument from history was made a hundred years ago: Israel was our sovereign land from which we were exiled and the claim to which we never renounced; unlike the colonizers of, say, Australia, South Africa and North America, we were returning to—not creating—our patrimony. And the argument from necessity—that a people savagely persecuted and denied refuge in every corner of the globe needs at least one place of its own—was made fifty years ago, tragically and definitively, in the wake of the Holocaust. Moreover, the

last fifty years of rebuilding the land with Jewish labor and genius, and of defending it with Jewish blood, have made denials of the Jewish claim unworthy even of reply. No one asks Australia to justify its right to breathe. The time for justifying Israel's is long past.

This is not to say that the deniers are not there. Entire nations deny. Entire leagues of nations deny. Why, the United Nations, speaking for the mass of mankind, would still be denying the legitimacy of the Jewish state were it not so beholden to the United States. The war against Zion is, of course, the leitmotif of Arab international life. And not just of the Iraqs and Syrias. It infuses the discourse of post-Camp David Egypt and of the post-Oslo Palestinians. "We know only one word: Jihad, jihad, jihad.... We are in a conflict with the Zionist movement and the Balfour Declaration and all imperialist activities." That was Yasser Arafat in Bethlehem, three years after Oslo. (Balfour, no less.)

Arguing with anti-Zionists is not just pointless. It is demeaning. The intellectual battle to be fought today is not with the anti-Zionists, those who maintain that the Jewish state should never have existed, but with the post-Zionists, those who maintain that the Jewish national idea has outlived its usefulness, that it is obsolete, an impediment now both to individual self-expression and to entry into the post-sovereign world of the coming century.

Post-Zionism is the stance, the affectation of many on the Israeli and diaspora Jewish Left. It sees Israeli nationalism, with its single-minded concentration on survival and the concomitant strictures it imposes on individual and societal life, as an anachronism. It longs for the rich normality of the West—for the individual, personal liberty and the pursuit of happiness; for society, the worldliness and sophistication that comes with the transcendence of mere patriotism. And for the world it sees the triumph of geoeconomics and multiculturalism over the geopolitics and nationalism of an age that has passed. Post-Zionism finds its most utopian expression in Shimon Peres' "new Middle East," a shining vision of not a mere Jewish Zion, but an Arab-Israeli Benelux.

This is all very nice. And very crazy.

Weariness with a national idea begins with the conviction that the national idea has succeeded, indeed succeeded so well that slavish obeisance to it can only retard the higher human strivings. It rests on the conviction that Israel has made it. That it has such roots and power and weight that it is here, now and forever. That it is, in the words of one diaspora individual, “fundamentally indestructible.”

Many years ago, I had a private conversation with an Israeli who later rose to high office. At the end of a discourse on what he planned to do when he came to a position of power, he, half-smiling, added a chilling throwaway line: “If there’s still a country around by then.” Israel is surrounded by countries arming themselves with chemical, biological and nuclear weapons that could destroy Israel in an hour. Only Israeli deterrence holds them at bay. Nearer to home—indeed, at home—Israel is living within the confines of mandatory Palestine with a population of over three million Palestinians bred on a hatred of Jews that beggars the imagination. The grand mufti of Jerusalem last year—in a sermon—called Israeli settlers the “sons of monkeys and pigs.” And, thanks to the Oslo agreements, his flock is quite methodically arming itself and its 40,000-man “police,” preparing for Arafat’s jihad.

It is tempting to think that because Israel escaped with its life in 1948, in 1967 and in 1973, it is divinely ordained to escape with its life forever. But in that temptation lies ruin.

Milan Kundera once defined a small nation as “one whose very existence may be put in question at any moment; a small nation can disappear and knows it.” The United States is no small nation. Neither is Japan. Nor France. Large nations may suffer defeats, even occupation. They may even, for a time, lose their independence. But they cannot disappear. Small nations can. Israel is a small nation. That is the reason post-Zionism is so dangerous. It is dedicated to dismantling the Zionist fortress state. A noble end—but only when the mortal danger has passed. To do so when the danger is at the gate is suicide.

Israel is, of course, no longer a pioneer nation. But it is still a frontier nation. It is still an endangered nation. It is still a small nation. It can still disappear. And it is all the more likely to disappear when, with the anti-Zionists still ringing the walls, the post-Zionists counsel—in the name of all that is humane and progressive—taking them down.

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