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**An End to *Palestine’s* Invisibility**

Someone ought to remind Michael B. Oren, Israeli ambassador to the United States, that actions do, in fact, speak louder than words. His recent article in The New York Times illustrates how defiant and deluded the Israeli government actually is regarding its willingness to pursue peace with a potential Palestinian state. By regurgitating misleading facts and completely ignoring others, a technique used by Israel’s defendants for decades, Oren paints Israel as the peaceful and optimistic democracy in the negotiations and continues to demand concessions from a resilient –yet considerably more justified – Palestinian Authority.

Now, it would be negligent to act as if the Palestinian negotiators have been flawless in the ongoing discussions. For the same reason, it is ignorant and intentionally misleading for Oren to argue that the *sole* obstacle in the path to peace is a Palestinian refusal to recognize Israel’s Jewish identity. Even putting its illegal territorial gains aside, he fails to even acknowledge Israel’s continued military occupation of land inhabited and legally owned by Palestinians or its refusal to halt settlement construction on that land. The fact is that Israel is illegally displacing Palestinian families from their rightful homeland: *That* is the main obstacle to peace. Issues such as mutual recognition, right of return for displaced Palestinians, the status of Jerusalem, and water rights are all supplementary factors that come second to the illegal occupation.

The technique Oren employs here is reminiscent of that used by Israeli politicians and justifiers for decades. He cites Israel’s legitimate right to a national homeland in Israel and justifies it with legally binding decisions from the Balfour Declaration, the League of Nations and the United Nations. However, this reference completely ignores the equally legitimate decisions from those organizations condemning Israel’s suppression of Palestinian rights and occupation of land; specifically, he intentionally omits any reference to UN Security Council Resolution 242, which calls on Israel to withdraw from lands gained in the Six-Day War of 1967. He continues his legal argument by refusing to acknowledge anything else on the laundry list of resolutions passed by the council, most of which condemn Israel’s actions in both war and peacetime. In citing statements made by President Obama and other world leaders recognizing Israel’s Jewish identity, he also fails to cite the overwhelming international consensus demanding that Israel adhere to these resolutions and concede to the Palestinians a nation of their own: hence, the “two-state solution.”

In justifying his main point, Oren manipulates the Palestinian stance by failing to elaborate on why its government and negotiating team adhere to this position. He directly misleads the reader by concluding that their motive for this stance is strictly because “reconciling with the Jewish state means that the two-state solution is not a two-stage solution leading, as many Palestinians hope, to Israel’s dissolution.” However, PLO leader Yasser Arafat officially recognized the state of Israel as having a legitimate right to land in historic Palestine during the 1993 Oslo Accords; the disparity here comes when a leader has been asked to distinguish it as a Jewish state alone. The important point to make is that if current President Mahmoud Abbas or Chief Negotiator Saeb Erekat were to concede this point, they would effectively forfeit any right to their historic homeland now occupied by Israeli citizens – land that was stolen from them in the 1967 War. Since that time, Israel has sought to expand throughout all of Palestine, known in the Torah as Eretz Israel. In addition, this concession would condemn all Palestinians living within Israel’s current borders to either expulsion from their current home or discrimination on account of race and religion.

There are many accounts of racism and discrimination already within the state of Israel. Although many Americans perceive Israel as a so-called “bastion of democracy” in the Middle East, this perception is false. It is impossible for a state to consider itself a democracy and simultaneously deny equal rights to minority citizens who have a legal right to reside there.

While all of Israel’s official statements portray it as the more willing side in negotiations, its actions reflect the opposite. A racist and aggressive state encroaching upon the physical and cultural rights of another people is one that contradicts the disintegration of expansionist states over the last century – nothing Israel says can justify that fact.

While there are countless points of disagreement that must be resolved on the path to peace, Oren’s refusal to acknowledge factually correct information and his insistence upon directly misleading the reader highlights the enormous challenge these negotiations face. Rather than deceive the public into an inaccurate perception of this challenge, Prime Minister Netanyahu and his ambassador to the United States must end the delusion and denial to move forward. If Israel continues on this path, it’s difficult to imagine the two states ever being able to coexist in a mutual and peaceful future.

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