

# COMMENTARY

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## **It's Still the Occupation.....**

**Paul Scham**

**Partners for Progressive Peace**

I'm sure many of my readers enjoy the eclectic and erudite essays of Michael Koplow, disseminated as "Ottomans and Zionists" and also by the Israel Policy Forum, of which he is the policy director. I generally agree with his point of view, though I'm often convinced that he doesn't take his own logic sufficiently far. This feeling was so strong with regard to his current column that I had to write this rejoinder.

As you just read, he strongly critiques the unique standard Israel is not infrequently held to in international forums. In this case, an Egyptian judoka refused to shake hands with an Israeli competitor after a match and was sent home. I should emphasize that I absolutely agree with Dr. Koplow that this is outrageous and the reactions to it should have included some of the further societal critiques he suggests.

But there is one crucial aspect of the context missing from his critique; namely, the word "Occupation." In my view, that is the primary (though by no means sole) reason for this phenomenon of singling out Israel and Israelis for this treatment. This is the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the Israeli Occupation of the West Bank, and no one sees any likelihood of it ending any time soon.

Now, the Occupation in no way justifies this behaviour, nor is it one of the major atrocities in the world today. I know that Dr. Koplow does not support it, and the IPF is engaged in a new campaign to try to end it. But the fact that this salient aspect of the situation that gives rise to the all-too-common treatment of Israel goes unmentioned is itself curious. In fact, it plays into the hands of the current Israeli government in ways that I am sure Dr. Koplow doesn't at all support, but his article nevertheless gives aid and comfort to a pernicious worldview.

That worldview is the updated version of the “lachrymose” view of Jewish history; namely, that they (i.e., the whole world) hates us (the Jews), and will always hate us, and that there is nothing Israel (or the Jewish people) can do about it. We have to simply keep our own counsel, do what we feel is necessary, and recognize that we will always be attacked whatever we do.

That is clearly the message that is put out overtly, in increasing measure, by Prime Minister Netanyahu and many of his coalition partners. They have no doubt that Israel will always be “a nation that dwells alone,” so why not expand settlements, spit in the world’s eye, and increase the pressure on foreign support of NGO’s, since “they” will always hate us.

In fact, it is the Occupation that is now the overwhelming source of anger against Israel – and ending it would liberate Israel from its psychological, human, military, and financial costs, as well as ending most (certainly not all) support for BDS and other anti-Israel measures.

Now, I do not want to overstate the case. There is undoubtedly a core of genuinely anti-Israel sentiment that would reject the end of the Occupation and see it just as a step on the way to Israel’s eventual demise. Israel would remain under threat; ending the Occupation would not really affect that hard core.

But the vast majority of those whose resentment against Israel has grown considerably in the last 15 years would turn their attention elsewhere. Europe, for example, is labelling and boycotting products from the settlements. It has no other major dispute with Israel. The Sunni states, which are now Israel’s de facto regional allies, cannot make their relationship overt and public because there first must be a Palestinian state. As they have repeatedly made clear; after that, all options are open.

Then why is Israel, whose transgressions are far less violent than, to make a random and far from complete list of vicious states, singled out? (Any such list would of course include North Korea’s treatment of its own people, China’s treatment of Tibet and dissidents, Saudi Arabia’s war in Yemen and support for terror, the regime of Syria’s Bashar al-Assad, Russia’s aggression, Erdogan’s wholesale oppression in the wake of the failed coup, etc., etc.) For many the only acceptable answer is anti-Semitism.

But that is the wrong answer, or at least constitutes only a tiny part of it. It is that Israel holds itself out as – and in many ways is – a modern, progressive, westernized nation recognizing the rule of law and rejecting discrimination. That is partly true. But Israel’s Occupation and repression of Palestinians flies in the face of that. No other country on the (admittedly incomplete) list above is in that position. Yes, there is a double standard, and Israel benefits tremendously from it.

But there are costs to the double standard – and one of them is that ruling over another nation without rights to vote or control its own destiny, is unacceptable today. Israel has transgressed that rule for 50 years. That is at the root of Israel’s isolation. End that and most (not all) of the anti-Israel rhetoric and activities would dry up – as well as benefiting Israel itself in a variety of ways.

There are at least two points I am making that will likely be distorted, so I will reemphasize them:

- 1) There is no justification for the behaviour that Dr. Koplow rightly criticizes.
- 2) All opposition to Israel will not cease the moment the Occupation ends. But the mass support will fairly quickly fade away. The Palestinians in the Occupied Territories are the poster child for Israel’s repressive policies. Once there is a credible, viable Palestinian state, Israel will not be perfect, but its issues will not stand out as they do now.

It is **still** the Occupation, and ending it must be the chief goal of anyone who cares about Israel.

**Note:** This article was originally published in *Partners for Progressive Peace* and has been reproduced under arrangement. Web Link: <http://progressiveisrael.org/its-still-the-occupation-2/>

**Professor Paul Scham is the Executive Director of the Gildenhorn Institute for Israel Studies at the University of Maryland and he blogs Partners for Progressive Peace. Email: paulscham@gmail.com**

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