

# Making Sense of Israel

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**Modern Israel** was born in a new social compact formed between and among the WWII victors, with the strong support of President Harry Truman, using the United Nations as the anointing agency<sup>1</sup>. The driving forces were the lessons of the holocaust and the forfeiture of moral standing by continental Europe and the Nazi-allied Islamists of the Middle East<sup>2</sup> who were complicit in mass murder.

Because millions of Jews had no safe haven from Hitler during that grim human harvest, a new refuge state was created on a reduced portion of the lands that formerly constituted ancient Israel<sup>3</sup> and/or Judea<sup>4</sup>. There, it was contemplated, all Jews from anywhere in the world would always have a home.



[The author is unable to locate copyright credit for this compelling picture that is circulating on the web.]

<sup>1</sup> Some web references on Israel's founding --

[http://www.palestinefacts.org/pf\\_independence\\_israel\\_date.php](http://www.palestinefacts.org/pf_independence_israel_date.php) and

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli\\_Declaration\\_of\\_Independence#United\\_Nations\\_stipulations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli_Declaration_of_Independence#United_Nations_stipulations) and

[http://www.harpercollins.com/books/9780060594633/A\\_Safe\\_Haven/index.aspx](http://www.harpercollins.com/books/9780060594633/A_Safe_Haven/index.aspx) and

[http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/israel/large/index.php](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/israel/large/index.php).

<sup>2</sup> The link between Arabs and Nazis in WW II:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collaboration\\_with\\_the\\_Axis\\_Powers\\_during\\_World\\_War\\_II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collaboration_with_the_Axis_Powers_during_World_War_II) and

<http://www.shoaheducation.com/muslimnazi.html>

<sup>3</sup> Note how modern Israel has shrunk: <http://www.bible-history.com/geography/ancient-israel/political-boundaries.html>

<sup>4</sup> Comparing ancient Judea: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08544a.htm>

## INTERNATIONAL LAW IN DARWIN'S ARENA

Condemnation of the self defense actions of the Jewish state is all too often put in terms of international law. But the arena of international relations remains a Darwinian venue where nation states vie for dominance by competing – and sometimes cooperating. All nations worthy of the name are *sovereigns*, the self-serving actions of which tend to be cloaked in a thin veneer of civilized norms.

The notion of sovereignty necessarily includes the right to corporate self defense by the sovereign nation and, when the threat is real, all the pretensions of international law ring hollow.<sup>5</sup> Even conquest has legal standing.<sup>6</sup>

When used polemically, the term “international law” often invokes a ghost regime, hovering between high expectations and a lesser reality, a set of norms asserted as “law” but honored more in the breach (usually dressed up as a legal exception). At present there is no major nation state wherein purely international norms have the compulsion of ordinary, domestic law as we normally think of that term. Imagine a neighborhood without police in which competing families, each with private security forces, occasionally, but not consistently, gang up to bring an errant family into line.

The force of international law at its best can be described as sets of overlapping networks of treaty agreements, protocols and arrangements, qualified by occasional instances of sovereign breakout. Such breakouts, major and minor, are driven by the same kind of cost-benefit analysis that brought the breakout nation into a particular treaty arrangement in the first place. Treaty breakouts by sovereign nations are normally handled with delicacy because when you call 911, no one comes. So, when a treaty abrogation or breakout is not coupled with aggressive military force by the treaty-abrogating nation, the event rarely earns a military response.

International law is at its most robust in matters of international *commerce* because the realities of global economics demand transactional predictability and regularity. International commercial membership regimes tend to be stable because the benefits of inclusion and costs of exclusion tend to trump short term advantages attempted outside those norms.

## SOVEREIGN LEGITIMACY ISSUES

No sovereign state in the world came into being without its “displacement issues”. Conquest, in one form or another, lies at the origin of every major nation state in the world. This includes China, whose cultural uniformity and homogeneity hides a vast

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<sup>5</sup> As a political science student, I was and remain strongly influenced by the realist school best expressed by Hans Morgenthau in his classic text, *Politics Among the Nations* – still in print, though posthumously, see -- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans\\_Morgenthau](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Morgenthau) -

<sup>6</sup> Conquest ripens into sovereignty, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/133118/conquest> but is limited - in principle, if not fact by the modern rejection of wars of aggression - <http://untreaty.un.org/cod/avl/ha/da/da.html> .

displacement and extermination of earlier peoples. The great Polynesian ex-migration began when the peoples who now populate the Pacific Islands from Hawaii to New Zealand were driven out of mainland China to the island of Taiwan, then via canoe into the ocean<sup>7</sup>. Hardly a trace of their earlier culture remains on mainland China.

No so for the Jews, who have a rich, well documented history to contend with. The book is open: Read the biblical accounts of their original settlements following the Egyptian captivity, rife as they were with ancient wars and struggles, then track their arrival in their true home in holy Jerusalem, their forcible repatriation in the Babylonian Captivity, their return to the home territory, their repression under the Roman dominion, followed by the Jewish Rebellion (the Jewish Wars of 64-66) leading to the first holocaust as documented by the Roman Jewish historian, Josephus<sup>8</sup>. Diaspora followed. Finally, in modern history, Jews won their UN Sanctioned return following the second holocaust.

**If international politics seems sometimes to be a game of musical chairs, surely for the Jewish people of Israel, the music (having become a lament) must now stop.**

## **THE TOXIC RELIGIOUS ANIMUS**

The nation states and non-state actors (AKA, terrorists) who are arrayed against Israel as regional enemies are followers of a single religious ideology – militant Islam. The specifically territorial arguments and claims of militant Islam are all colored by the fact that their territorial claims, too, rest on antecedent conquests.

The “we own the land” territorial arguments ring a bit false. There is as yet, and never has been, an actual nation of Palestine<sup>9</sup>. Neighboring Jordan is not one of Israel’s blood enemies. The historical territorial arguments made by Israel’s regional enemies are arguments of convenience designed to mask the real difficulty: As a Jewish state embedded in the heart of a cohort of failing, oil-supported Muslim states, Israel is an affront on a much more fundamental, religious and cultural level.

**I can well imagine that, had the Jews chosen to settle in Antarctica, its enemies would be talking about Penguin exploitation and oppression.**

It is impossible to make sense of Israel and its plight without taking *religion* into account – which exposes a deep irony when you notice that many of the original Zionist leaders were secular socialists.

I tend to look at religious issues through a universal lens. My own scholarship has persuaded me that Judaism and Christianity are essentially two versions of the same Torah-based religion. My theological reflections and scholarship have persuaded me that there is no exclusive path to grace or salvation or communion with the eternal Being (or “Beingness” as my Buddhist friends might say). All religious modalities and

<sup>7</sup> A point clearly made in *Guns, Germs and Steel* by Jared Diamond. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guns,\\_Germs,\\_and\\_Steel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guns,_Germs,_and_Steel) .

<sup>8</sup> Josephus’ History is a monumental read. A quick overview: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josephus>

<sup>9</sup> An informative and accurate Wiki discussion: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestine>

perspectives that share life affirmation and a deep respect for reason and intelligence operate as numinous windows, if you will, into the divine conscience. The test, if there is a test, is in the actual individual behaviors of the believer. As that famous first century *rabbuni*<sup>10</sup> said, “You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they?” Matthew 7:16. There is more to say, naturally, but a metaphysical exercise is outside the scope of this piece.

With that qualification, I find the following points relevant to the “Israeli question” and collectively, I find them compelling.

- The Torah is special. It emerged as a revelation to the Jewish patriarch, Moses, roughly thirty five hundred years ago. Among its most universally accessible components are the “prime directives” of the divine moral law, the commandments that we Christians sometimes call the Decalogue. Though their enumeration varies<sup>11</sup>, few civilized communities can quarrel with their injunctions against murder, theft, adultery, oath-breaking, false witness, and coveting that which is not yours, and affirmatively honoring one’s parents and the divine source of the moral law. The idea of a transcendent origin for this particular set of core moral injunctions, their durability, utility and force is one of those universal gifts on which fruitful civilized human life has been founded. This is true whether or not the divine source is acknowledged or ignored.
- The brute fact of social existence is that moral rules are essential for human survival and that to anchor them solely in “custom” is woefully insufficient, as the moral disintegration in pre-Nazi Germany so graphically demonstrated. The Torah in some form is essential to human civilization.
- The Jewish understanding of being a “chosen” people has been a burden and a paradox, poorly understood at best. I choose the simplest and most direct understanding. The Jewish people were handed a profound moral technology of divine origin in the midst of a rampantly pagan, hostile, amoral milieu, and they were charged as a people with the solemn obligation to faithfully keep this knowledge intact for the benefit of all humanity. They held the Torah for the rest of us. The resulting “clannishness”, misunderstood outside and within, has been a social irritant long endured.
- The Christian notion of “fulfilling” the Torah has been even more poorly understood and misapplied.<sup>12</sup> But Modern Judaism and Christianity have converged in a tolerant religious humanism, the roots of which trace back to both Hillel the Elder and to Jesus. More in my long footnote.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See *Jesus the Jew* and other books on the same theme by the Oxford Jewish scholar, Geza Vermes - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Géza\\_Vermes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Géza_Vermes) .

<sup>11</sup> See - <http://chaver.com/Torah-New/English/Articles/The%20Decalogue.html> .

<sup>12</sup> A better view: Jesus was “chosen” as the divine vehicle to bring Torah to the gentiles.

<sup>13</sup> **Hillel the Elder** (110 BCE to 10 CE) the revered Jewish sage who lived in Jerusalem under King Herod, is quoted in the Babylonian Talmud: Hillel was approached by a man who offered to convert to Judaism if

- My point in the footnote analysis is that modern Christian and Jewish religious forms of worship and doctrine now tend towards humanistic tolerance in the larger context of core moral principles and civil order, particularly when compared with, say, the Saudi Arabian iteration of Islam. This has become a grave threat as seen through the lens of Islamist fundamentalism.
- I must note with admiration that our friends, the Buddhists, do not engage in religiously motivated wars.
- To state the obvious: Jews do not, in contrast with Christians, rely much on conversion, and do not typically engage in proselytization. Religious freedom is intact inside Israel. That admirable condition does not hold within the Islamist realm. You can be sure that Israel's territorial issues are a matter of raw survival.
- Islam, in its present dominant form, is a throwback to the practice of forcible conversion, a medieval practice that modern Christians have thankfully rejected.

And this, sadly, is the heart of the religious animus against Israel. The Jewish refuge nation is the humanist West sited close at hand and irritatingly successful, a state inserted in the midst of Islam, organized around the “people of the book” who have not accepted Mohammed, and worse, the “chosen” people who seem to be thriving in spite of their apostasy.

## ISRAEL AS THE EXPATRIATED WEST

Israel is hated within radical Islam because of its modernity and because Israel's material and cultural progress are perceived as cultural and religious threats to Islamic stability.

**If we were to somehow situate a representative chunk of urban southern California on some empty desert in the Middle East (incorporated, say, as the Republic of Gomorrah), the hatred and envy of Islamists would be even more intense.**

I have tried in this essay to avoid entering the thicket of Israel-related policy issues. But all Americans have inherited a special national perspective about Israel's security issues. Israel's birth in 1948 took place with our blessing after we shed blood to end the Nazi horrors, the craven French collaboration and, in the bargain, uncovered the horrors of the

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Hillel could recite the entire Torah, standing on one foot. (as if asking for the Cliff Notes version of the Pentateuch). Standing on one foot, Hillel said this: “That which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary. Go now and study it.” Roughly twenty years later **Jesus of Nazareth** was challenged to identify the “greatest commandment in the law”. Jesus replied – “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” (stating the Shema). “And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (citing Leviticus). “All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Hillel and Jesus represent the same trend, capturing the essence of the Torah by identifying its core moral principles.

Nazi death camps. We cannot reasonably expect the sovereign Jewish refuge nation now to commit suicide, whether in tiny increments or all at once, just because its enemies won't leave it alone. We cannot expect Israel to passively endure bombs and missiles exploding on Israeli soil, killing their children, when we in their place would never, never do so. We cannot turn our backs if Israel needs our help to avoid a nuclear holocaust. We did not fight and win WW II with a measured and proportionate military response and by betraying our allies.

Should we stand by idly while Israel's enemies push her into the sea or acquire the terrible power to blast her and the Jewish people into fused ash?

I am a long time fan of the redoubtable Harry Truman, a man with more integrity and courage in his left arm than the entire cohort of leftists who have temporarily debased the Democratic Party. As our president demonizes Israel and distances the USA from her; as his administration seems to temporize while Iran runs its own Manhattan Project, I have a single question for the left:



[President Truman accepting his portrait from the Japanese-American artist, Fred Ochi]  
[The photo copyright status is unknown.]

## **What would Harry do?**

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