

Israel has no right to exist.....

By Paul Hendler.

“I am a Jewish South African against the demonisation of the Palestinian people and for an objective account of the facts of their circumstances”.

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Introduction

The Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement has established itself as part of the Palestinian struggle for freedom from Israeli [apartheid](#) and [colonialism](#). BDS's [three cardinal demands](#) are an end to the occupation (including dismantling the *apartheid* wall), full equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the right of Palestinian Refugees to return to their homes (as stipulated by [United Nations Resolution 194](#)).

The State of Israel regularly responds to its BDS critics and opponents by claiming that they deny its Right to Exist, and are therefore anti-semites (racists). However, none of the 193 sovereign states that are members of the United Nations has a Right to Exist.

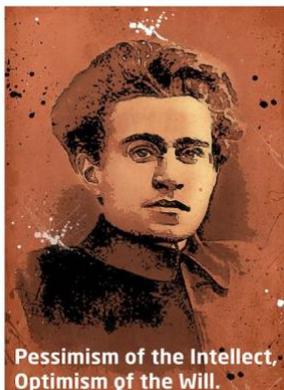
This article attempts to answer three questions. What is meant by 'Right to Exist'? What is our critique of it? And why should Israel claim this right? In doing this it places the development of these concepts within a framework of ideological struggle. Closely linked to the Right to Exist are other concepts, which will form the substance of a second and third article.

The core of political Zionism is a Nation State for the Jewish People with a Jewish demographic majority. Raising critical awareness of key elements of Zionist and anti-Zionist ideologies can contribute to the struggle for Palestinian freedom and self-determination in a state (or states) where all have equal civil and national rights. Getting to this will require international solidarity with other struggles, like the current Black Lives Matter (BLM) uprisings in the United States (US), in support of BDS.

The first section of this article describes a framework for making sense of the ideological struggles between Zionism and its opponents. The second section unpacks the meaning of the terms Right to Exist and Right to Exist as a Jewish State. The third section develops our critique of these two concepts. The fourth section identifies some historical events as examples of the ideological struggle over Jewish and Palestinian rights to historic Palestine. The Conclusion sums up the important issues and introduces the topic for the second article.

1. Ideology and Ideological Struggle.

It is useful to see Zionist ideology as an objective, logical framework of ideas; and, following [Antonio Gramsci](#), that political and civil organisations, driven by conflicting class interests, struggle to get their



SOURCE - Alexander White on flickr

definitions of the State and of the Nation (that they claim to represent the interests of) legitimised, i.e. accepted as the popular view. These struggles take the form of class alliances, and in key historical moments there is the formation of blocs of class interests. Ideologies have elements, core concepts that logically reinforce each other to give a worldview (*weltanschauung*). When historical blocs succeed in getting a particular interpretation as the dominant view of society, the ideology is hegemonic. When no bloc has the upper hand, long periods can persist without hegemony.



For most of the first half of the 20th Century neither Zionism nor Palestinian nationalism was hegemonic. [Israeli historian Avi Shlaim](#) argues that the [20th Zionist Congress in 1937](#) marked the emergence of a historical bloc that identified *partition* as a step towards a Jewish Nation State, with a Jewish majority. Since the late-1960s Zionism has become a globally hegemonic ideology. Currently its key elements are accepted and internalised by the major global political and economic elites. Nevertheless in recent years Zionist ideology has lost legitimacy in key constituencies. This has occurred concurrently with the counter hegemonic narrative of BDS.

The BDS narrative explicitly challenges the notion that Israel has the right to exist as an *apartheid* regime, i.e. as a Jewish ethno-state, based on original and ongoing dispossession and subjugation of an indigenous people.

2. Meaning of the Rights

2.1 A Natural and Legal Right.

The founding document of the State of Israel, its [Declaration of Independence](#), claims that its Right to Exist arises from the [Balfour Declaration](#), the [mandate of the League of Nations](#) as well as the 1947 United Nations General Assembly (UN GA) Resolution 181, [which called for the establishment of a Jewish State](#). (UN GA R181 also called for the establishment of a Palestinian Arab State, and it is invoked as the basis in international law for what has become known as the Two State solution). The key argument here is that UN GA R181 conferred the Right of the State to exist [by approving the partition plan of the earlier appointed United Nations Special Committee on Palestine \(UNSCOP\)](#). In Zionist ideology the Right to Exist concept is linked to another key concept, Israel's Right to Exist as a Jewish State.

2.2 Ethno-nationalism: Internationally Acceptable.

During the 1990's 'Peace Process' (Oslo Accords) Israel required the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) to acknowledge not simply Israel's Right to Exist, but its [Right to Exist as a Jewish State](#). Following the PLO's conceding in writing to both these points the demands kept appearing, i.e. in President George Bush's 'Roadmap' peace plan as well as President Obama's endorsement of this 'right' in his speech to the lobby group American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in 2011.

Local Zionist organisations, the SA Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBoD) and SA Zionist Federation argue that Israel is the only Jewish State in the world, *vis-à-vis several* Muslim theocratic states, and *many* states where the majority are Christians, that cover far larger territory and population. The Right to Exist as a Jewish State is seen as embodying fair and equal treatment.

The following is a critique of these two claims.

3. Critique of Rights Claims

3.1 International Law and Ontological “Right to Exist”.

Ernest Marshall Brown (in the Yale Law Journal, 1916) argues that states have [no ontological Right to Exist](#) – in response to then communities’ (in Latin America and Europe) demand for nation states, during World War One. Jeff Handmaker and Gentian Zyberi point out that there is [no esoteric Right for states to Exist](#) (internationally recognised boundaries imply a ‘Right of Existence’, not a ‘Right to Exist’). State formation happens through social processes. The legal basis, territorial integrity and juridical form of a state reflects broader political and economic processes, and not the other way around. The State of Israel emerged through ethnic cleansing of more than 700 000 Palestinians between November 1947 and the end of 1948: [over 400 towns and villages](#), where they and their forebears had lived for centuries, were destroyed.

Jeremy Hammond argues that UN GA R188 was no legal basis for partitioning historic Palestine, but *recommended* UNSCOP’s partition plan be implemented, requested the Security Council to take up the matter and called on Palestinian inhabitants ([under no legal obligation to do so](#)) to accept. The Arab Higher Committee regarded as outside the United Nations’ jurisdiction, and contrary to the letter and spirit of its charter, to order or recommend the partition of Palestine. Arab Delegations’ proposals to refer the legal issue to the International Court of Justice were never put to vote by the president of the Assembly.

Under international law recognition of a state’s Existence refers to a clearly defined territory. (This forms the basis for territorial integrity of a state and it’s right not to be attacked across its borders, unless such attack is in self-defence). [Handmaker and Zyberi](#) note that the borders of Israel remain undefined. Palestinian rights activist and scholar (and vocal critic of Israel) [Norman Finkelstein](#), disagrees arguing that the [International Court of Justice](#) has defined the borders of Israel as the 1949 armistice lines.

3.2 Western Democracies are not Ethnocracies.

Liberal western democracies are not juridical ethnocracies. Their jurisprudence makes all citizens equal and assigns to them not only civil rights but also the right to constitute the *nation* that these states represent. A further critique of Israel’s Right to Exist as a Jewish state is that in practice it requires violation of the rights of others (i.e. Palestinians).

Activist publisher Ali Abunimah [notes](#) that for a person (or state entity) to bear a right, there must be an enforcement venue, legal relief (e.g. a penalty imposed on the violator) but that remedies must be lawful and equitable. A Right to Exist as a Jewish state is not recognised in international law - there is no venue to enforce the right. Potential violators of this right are three groups of Palestinians. First, returning refugees (from 1948). Second, Palestinians living in occupied territories (through birth and population growth rate). Third, Palestinian refugees in exile exercising their right of return. In addition, gentile African refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants, would potentially violate the right by living in the country and reproducing. Remedies to these threats range from denying the right to return, expelling Palestinians in territories under Israel’s control, limiting numbers of children permitted, stripping Palestinian Israelis of their right to vote, or retaining a separate governance

regime that excludes them from exercising political power in the State. Abunimah observes that all these ideas have at some point been advocated and that some are even already in place. He notes that the ideologies and practices that give expression to this right are racist and inherently unjust and inequitable. He concludes that this right therefore cannot pass muster of the principles of justiciable rights.

One should add that with respect to contemporary Muslim theocratic states (like Iran and Saudi Arabia), they too do not have a Right to Exist as theocratic states.

4. Development of Ideas in Conflict

4.1 From Subaltern Zionism to Hegemonic Zionism.

The Zionist movement succeeded in building a historical bloc of powerful supporters for the narrative based on the two cardinal concepts of the Right to Exist and the Right to Exist as a Jewish State. These concepts are crucial when considering and understanding the case for One State or Two States, in historic Palestine, as a liberatory reality for the Palestinian people and also for Jewish Israelis. In 1948 the application of these concepts entailed changing the demographics of already-settled Palestinians in the territory of what would soon become the new state of Israel. The core concepts have persisted over time as Israel expanded the territory under its control (in 1967) to cover all of historic Palestine

This was despite the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), the umbrella of Palestine resistance groups led by *Fatah* and formed in 1964, adopting the goal of a single secular democratic state over the whole of historic Palestine. The PLO's strategies, which included armed struggle, came asunder under the might of massive Israeli military response (including the 1967 Six Day War), contradictory interests (to Palestinian liberation) from the neighbouring states of Egypt and Jordan, and finally the PLO's expulsion from Jordan during Black September (1971) and during the 1982 Israeli occupation of Lebanon, from Beirut to Tripoli (Libya). Right to Exist and the Right to be a Jewish State are critical concepts in Israel's Zionist ideology that legitimates its original conquest of the land (1948) as well as its ongoing expansion and concomitant relocations of the Palestinian population and their concentration in ever-smaller conurbations (i.e. within the West Bank and in Gaza).

4.2 Counter-Hegemonic Ideological Struggle.

The documentary [The Occupation of the American Mind](#) makes the point that until the 1982 invasion by Israel of Lebanon and the massacres at the Sabra and Chatila Palestinian refugee camps, the hegemonic view of Israel's Right to Exist as a state and also as a Jewish state, [held sway in the Anglo-American media](#). The justice of defending these rights resonated powerfully given the history of the holocaust. But this hegemony did not happen spontaneously – Israeli historian [Ilan Pappé](#) explains that it was organised starting with the pivotal role of then Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban in the

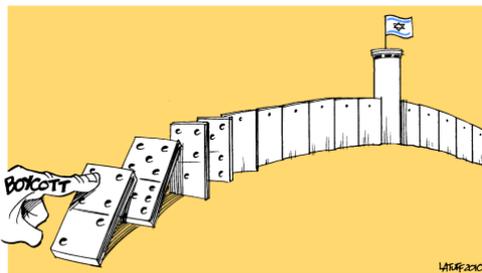
establishment of AIPAC in the 1950s. The popular view was of Israel as a beleaguered state defending its rights against backward, irrational people. But events in Lebanon changed all that. Investigative journalist [Robert](#)



SOURCE: [nebraskaenergyobserver.wordpress.com](#)

[Fisk](#) (and others) reported the Israeli occupation of Lebanon and the Israeli Defence Force's (IDF's) complicity in the [refugee camp massacres](#), which was televised around the world, undermining the hegemonic ideology of Israel being a state denied its rights. Instead Israel was increasingly seen as a state aggressively attacking other states (and undermining their right to existence by violating their borders).

Palestinian rights activist and scholar [Suraya Dadoo points out](#) that simultaneous to a beleaguered PLO under Fatah shifting from the idea of a single state towards ultimately recognising not only Israel's Right to Exist as a State, but also its Right to Exist as a Jewish State there was the development of other counter-hegemonic narratives. With the ideological fragmentation within the Palestinian national movement came the emergence of other forces. One was the Islamic Resistance Movement (also known as Hamas), which has recognised neither Israel's Right to Exist nor its Right to Exist as a Jewish State – since 2006 Hamas has held administrative control over Gaza. But it was the emergence of a third strand of resistance at the grassroots that has led to a significant *global* challenge of the



SOURCE: latuffcartoons.wordpress.com

concept Right to Exist as a Jewish State. Two popular uprisings – the first *intifada* (1987) and second *intifada* (2002) reflected growing grassroots disenchantment with *Fatah* and the Oslo accords. It was these intifadas that prompted the emergence in 2005 of the BDS movement, supported by [over 170 Palestinian civil society organisations](#).

4.3 BDS, Ideological Struggle and One State-Two States.

Gramsci emphasises ideological struggle (or what he calls the War of Position) as the main driver of social change – this has important implications for a progressive and revolutionary strategy aimed at significant, albeit incremental, social change. One of these implications is to look beyond one's own propaganda and develop analyses that reflect actual historical circumstances of the dominated classes and oppressed populations.

4.3.1 Policy and Practice of Likud

Pappe (in “The Biggest Prison on Earth”) and Israeli historian Avi Shlaim (in “The Iron Wall”) show in detail the consistent development of Zionist policies to corral Palestinians into enclaves, rather than making a serious concession to the creation of a viable Palestinian state. Israel's alleged Right to Exist and its further Right to Exist as a Jewish state, have been important elements in the ideological cement legitimising (or explaining) Israeli policies towards Palestinians. In this process Israel adopted an open-minded view about negotiations with the PLO (in the 1990s) while at the same time effectively foreclosing on there ever being a viable, sovereign Palestinian state. This is encapsulated starkly in the programme of the Likud Bloc (current Israeli Prime Minister Nethanyahu's organised power base), that says that [it will never permit a Palestinian state](#) to exist in the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. The earlier annexation of the Golan Heights (which lies within the internationally recognised borders of Syria), the annexation of East Jerusalem (which lies outside the internationally recognised borders of Israel) as well as the recent moves by Nethanyahu and Likud – supported by the Trump administration - to annex large swathes of the West Bank, are consistent with this view.

The ideological struggle around the notions of Right to Exist and Right to Exist as a Jewish State, has intensified since the 1990s and especially after the emergence of BDS. These contested rights are also related to the demands for either two states or one democratic secular state, to transform Israeli *apartheid* into a just society. Local struggles in Palestine/Israel, citizens movements globally and also Israel's response to what it identified as an 'existential threat', were indications of this. But manifestations of this are also to be observed in international relations.

4.3.2 Mandela: "*de facto* Right to Exist"

Shortly after his release from prison in the early 1990s, South African ex-President Nelson Mandela acknowledged Israel's [de facto Right to Exist](#) within its 1967 borders. Mandela made his comments supporting Israel's Right to Exist in a meeting with prominent leaders of US Jewish communities who reported that his tone was apologetic for causing offence by his public appearance with Arafat (PLO Chairman) and reiteration of ANC support for the PLO. Later, in 1997 he made his now oft-quoted comment that "[we know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians.](#)" In the first instance Mandela was referring to Israel's internationally recognised borders, i.e. its Right of Existence and not its Right to Exist. So while ostensibly conceding to a key Zionist ideological element, the inclusion of the term '*de facto*' in his statement suggests he might have been diplomatically pushing back. In the second instance he did not express himself on Israel's Right to Exist as a Jewish State. He called for Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories and a two state solution. I have no evidence of his views on Israel's Right to Exist as a Jewish State (i.e. one in which Palestinians would at best be second class citizens, and to which Palestinian refugees would have to forfeit their right to return [[according to UN GA Resolution 194](#)]). The implicit meaning of these public statements while understandable within an international diplomatic context fails to clarify the key issues for a broader audience. [The Mandela personality cult](#) persists within the ANC and the country as a whole. This helps explain the ANC's and the government's current position on Two States and its refusal to support BDS by implementing sanctions against Israel. The purpose of this – and the following two articles – is to enable an open debate to clarify the meaning of key Zionist and anti-Zionist concepts, in order to promote the anti-Zionist struggle.

4.3.3 Ideas within the US Jewish Community

Since 2005 the growth in popularity of the BDS movement in civil societies across the world, particularly among large sections of the younger US population, also manifested in critiques of basic Zionist concepts from within [a younger cohort of the US Jewish community](#). Nor has this been restricted to the younger generation of Jewish US citizens. Prominent Jewish leader Henry Siegman had been present at the meeting with Mandela referred to earlier. Siegman was reportedly a doubting Thomas even while publicly clinging to Zionist precepts. [In 2012 Siegman declared himself for a one state solution with equal civil and national rights, thereby jettisoning his support for the Right to Exist as a Jewish State.](#) Before his 2012 'conversion', and as part of his Road to Damascus experience, he had met senior Hamas leaders and heard from the horse's mouth that it would [consider a truce with Israel](#) – including accepting the Palestinian people's collective recognition of the State of Israel. Another staunch Zionist supporter of a Two State solution, South African-born Peter Beinart, also declared his [support for a one state solution](#) in July 2020.

4.3.4 BDS and Global Palestine Solidarity Positions

BDS does not articulate a demand for either a Two State or a One State solution but its three core demands are based on recognising the human rights of all who live between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea (whether through two states or through one state). Strategically this makes sense, reflecting the almost equal support amongst Palestinians for realising their freedoms either through two states or through one state (in 2020 [39 per cent](#) supported the former and [37 per cent](#) the latter option).

In 2012 Norman Finkelstein pointed out that the practical implications of BDS's three demands are the transformation of the current State of Israel ([the borders of which are defined by the 1949 armistice lines](#)) into a single state in which Jews would be a minority – thereby contradicting this claim on rights. According to Finkelstein the BDS lack of a position on the Right of Existence is [an opportunistic usage of international law](#) – claiming the authority of international law (i.e. for Palestinian rights) when it suits its political purposes but effectively denying Israel's right under international law. He argued that claiming national equality for the Palestinian minority in Israel, but not addressing the treatment of minorities in other Middle Eastern countries, or for example the status of the 'untouchables' in India, is hypocritical. To rectify this Finkelstein required BDS to drop its demand for nationality equality of Palestinian Israeli citizens and the Right of Return of Palestinian refugees, and to limit its demands to ending the occupation. His argument was strategic, namely that BDS could sell the demand for ending of the occupation – and for Two States - to a broader US public but not the demand for equality of Palestinian Israeli citizens nor the Right of Return for Palestinian refugees, which would be seen as unreasonable.

In responding to Finkelstein [Ali Abunimah](#) pointed out that it would be possible for a Two State solution to meet all the three BDS demands, implying that the agnosticism of the BDS leadership on the question of One State or Two States reflected this potential, rather than hypocrisy. He referred to the 1998 Belfast Agreement (between Protestant Northern Ireland and its Catholic minority) , which Finkelstein had also used as an example to demonstrate his point of view. Abunimah noted that this agreement did not abolish the State of Northern Ireland but it did end its status as a 'Protestant State' (an oppressive ethnocracy, as is the case with the State of Israel as a Jewish State) and enshrined national equality, the right to citizenship in either Northern Ireland or the southern republic and strong redress measures in favour of the Catholic minority, as fundamental principles. Activist scholars Virginia Tilley and Richard Falk, on page 18 of their [UN study](#) into the question of Israel having an *apartheid* regime, make a similar point: ending the apartheid regime of the Israeli state does not necessarily affect its statehood [i.e. Right of Existence as a State]). Abunimah questioned whether Zionists and Finkelstein could accept a two State Solution on these terms. If not then their priority was to preserve racial and colonial privileges for Jews at the expense of Palestinian rights. [In a further critique of Finkelstein's views](#) Abunimah noted that Finkelstein attributed most movement on anti-Zionism to Jewish groups, neglected to acknowledge Palestinians' struggles and sacrifices and attacked them outright. Abunimah argued that in doing this Finkelstein prioritised the practices of organisations like Human Rights Watch, which he argued was tied to global US power.

4.3.5 Zionist 'Broad Tent' and 'Red Lines'

In 2011 the State of Israel and Zionist organisations particularly in the US (but likely elsewhere) responded strategically to what they saw as the ‘delegitimation’ threat to the state. In that year, and in response to the BDS movement, the Reut Institute, an Israeli think tank that provides strategic services to the Israeli government, developed its [Broad Tent and Red Lines strategy](#). The strategy referred to what it saw as the then two most successful delegitimation events, namely the [Goldstone Report](#) (into war crimes and human rights violation during Israel’s Operation Cast Lead against Gaza in 2008) and the [Gaza Flotilla](#), a project of the Free Gaza Movement, an international Palestine solidarity organisation that sponsors sending boats to Gaza to challenge the Israeli naval blockade that commenced shortly after [Hamas’s victory in the Palestine Legislative Council 2006 election](#). In August 2008 the first flotilla breached the blockade to reach the port of Gaza. Over the next 10 years 35 more boats would challenge the blockade, of which three would succeed in reaching the shores of Gaza. In 2010 a second aid flotilla (in which the lead ship was the [Mavi Marmara](#)) was attacked by Israeli naval forces and ten participants were killed. The remaining participants were detained, imprisoned and ill-treated (including being assaulted and tortured). Clearly the sending of flotillas to challenge the siege of Gaza was seen by Israel as crossing a red line in practice.



SOURCE: The Reut Institute, www.reutgroup.org

Reut’s strategy assumed the necessity of building a broad bloc of sympathisers and supporters for Israel’s cause, as a basis of countering the delegitimation of Israel. Its aim was to broaden the base of support for Zionism and Israel by narrowing the definition of who should be kept out of the bloc, and broadening the definition of who should be allowed in. This Open Tent approach opposed the Israeli Government’s hitherto Closed Tent approach which responded with harsh consequences to anyone daring to criticise Israel’s policies towards the Palestinians. But to be included in the Open Tent critics had to accept the two key concepts, Israel’s Right to Exist and its Right to Exist as a Jewish State. In practice Reut recommended that there be a series of local grassroots activities and practices by Zionist and their sympathisers to win over potential supporters on the basis of their accepting these two rights. It was thought that this would be sufficient to marginalise the delegitimisers and reengage with groups who had been pushed away from identifying with Israel.

However, six years later (in January 2017) Reut (in conjunction with the Anti Defamation League [ADL] – a pro-Zionist organisation that operates as a watchdog patrolling the bounds of permissive criticisms of Israel) issued a second [report](#) based on extensive research. This showed that despite a twentyfold increase in investment to marginalise the delegitimation of Israel and its policies, challenges to the fundamental legitimacy of the State of Israel continued to grow across the world. The report’s response was still based on the earlier Broad Tent Red Lines approach. It emphasised that the pro-Israel network had to improve its adaptive capacity. This required improved thought leadership, a greater toleration of different opinions in the Broad Tent, and upgrading information collection (through cyberspace monitoring), strategy building capabilities (through cyberspace counter strategies), and scalable tools and platforms. The report highlighted ten critical challenges that would have to be overcome to defend the hegemony of Zionist ideology, including a backlash

against the implementation of anti-BDS legislation, the breakdown of the Two State solution and the rise of intersectionality. The last-mentioned point refers to the identification of other oppressed minorities – like black US citizens and the LGBTQ communities – with the anti-Zionist struggle, and targeted the leadership of these communities for engagement.

5. Palestine and BLM - Global and US Context.

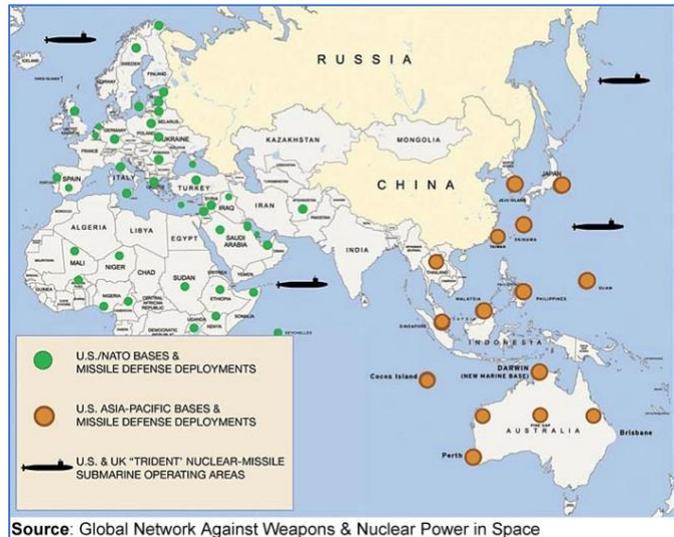
In the struggle for an anti-Zionist hegemony, based on the principles of equal civil and national rights for all inhabitants of historic Palestine, making alliances with organised formations of other dominated classes and marginalised social groupings (identified along ethnic, colour, gender, etc. lines), becomes crucial, particularly in the US. [Israel functions as US imperialism's policeman](#). BDS has a strong presence in the US, particularly on US university campuses. Concurrently there was grassroots protest against US elites.



The [Black Lives Matter Movement](#) emerged within this context, sparked by egregious police violence against African Americans. Currently ongoing nationwide protests in the US call for curtailment or abolition of police forces, and an end to mass incarceration and redress for black US citizens. All of this takes place within a sluggish global economy which the lockdown strategy dealt a severe blow.

BLM-led revolts are important because they often go beyond purely US-based issues, focus on US imperialism and express [solidarity with the Palestinian struggle](#). Statements of solidarity from activists in Palestine with those in Ferguson USA, have their roots in an awareness that not only does Israel act on behalf of US imperialism in the Middle East, but it also offers [direct support to US police forces](#) to pacify BLM-inspired and led revolts. BLM is not only leading a revolt in the US but has chapters in the UK and elsewhere. In South Africa prominent people like springboks [Siya Kolisi](#), [Tendai Mtawarira](#) and [Brian Habana](#) have gone public in their support for BLM. However, these expressions of solidarity are often void of the connections between *post-apartheid* South Africa and *apartheid* Israel. [Jeff Halper](#), an Israeli activist, [reports](#) that Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) sells its Gabriel (sea-skimming anti-ship) missiles to, *inter alia*, South Africa. Halper also includes South Africa within the circle of states with which Israel can establish some measure of hegemony or influence through its security ties. There might already be a presence through security services provided by individual Israelis ([for instance to South African farmers](#)). The SA police massacred 34 miners at Marikana in 2012 with R5s, [a licensed replica of the Israeli Galil SAR](#), or LM5 assault rifles, designed for infantry and tactical police use. The above expressions of solidarity with BLM by prominent South Africans also ignore the anti-imperialist potential in, and congruence of the BLM struggle, with the Palestinian struggle.

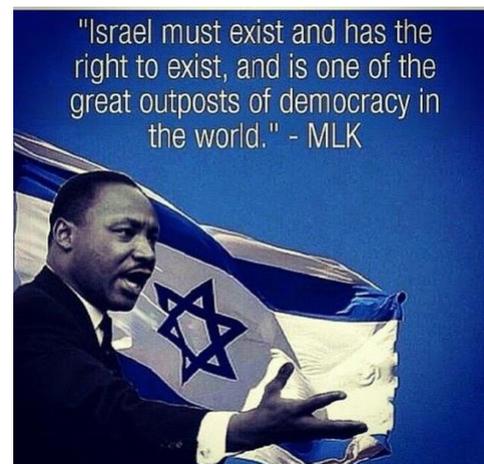
Organisations that support Israel's Right to Exist and its Right to Exist as a Jewish State – like the ADL - [have moved to influence BLM activists](#). This reflects a conscious strategy advanced by a 2019 Reut Report on navigating [Intersectional Alliances](#) – the objective is to engage movements like BLM in a way to influence them to drop their global focus on US imperialism and Israel. The method is based on the Broad Tent Red Lines approach developed earlier. An analysis of the Jewish community into “four tribes” provides a platform from which to target Jewish audiences flexibly.



The overall aim is to win over sufficient harsh and moderate Jewish and Gentile critics of Israel, and thereby to isolate and marginalise the radical anti-Zionists. Given the outreach of the BLM-led protest movement and its currency in Democratic Party politics and progressive political circles in the US, there is an urgency about this strategy.

There is historical precedence for the identification of the struggles of Black US citizens with the struggles of Jews against oppression, and also with Zionism seen as a movement for Jewish self-determination. Robin Kelly, Professor of US history, [refers](#) to the identification of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association with the modern Zionist movement. The basis for this and later the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) and W.E.B du Bois' championing a Jewish state lay in the view that Jews were victims of persecution and hate, like African Americans. Martin Luther King's (naive) support for Israel in 1968, shortly before his untimely death,

reflects a similar view about the meaning of being Jewish and why Jewish survival necessitates Jewish political supremacy in the State of Israel. That said, by the time of his [Beyond Vietnam speech](#), King had clearly developed a critique of US imperialism that would have challenged his earlier support for Zionism.



SOURCE: pininterest.com

The success of the move by ADL and other Zionist organisations to engage BLM depends on whether they can persuade the BLM to either remove or water down its anti-imperialist critique. These are contained in an [articulated BLM platform](#). A critique of Zionism and solidarity with Palestinians forms a strong part of the discourse. The platform of demands appeared on the BLM website. This has now been taken down, the reasons for which remain unclear. Within the current BLM movement there appears to be a struggle over these and related issues. Therefore, understanding the meaning of these concepts of Right to Exist and Right to Exist as a Jewish State, is necessary to help mitigate the risk of progressive forces (like BLM) and followers across the world being coopted into the Zionist narrative.

6. Conclusion

This article aimed to clarify the meaning of the terms 'Israel's right to exist' and 'Israel's right to exist as a Jewish State'. We approached this task within a framework of ideas developed by Gramsci. These are the notion that there exist ideological frameworks separate from our individual minds and that these are built on certain core concepts or elements. The building of ideological frameworks is contested by groups that are excluded from the identities that are being built, a process that is driven by underlying social antagonisms including – but not reducible to – class conflict and class struggles. There are a broad range of possible identities. For our purposes in this article we focused on two key identities namely the 'state' and the 'nation'. And how Zionism and its opponents have defined their preferred state, as well as the nation it purportedly represents, in the context of historic Palestine.

The first section provided a conceptual framework for understanding the significance of these terms and how they are used by groups that are struggling to get their attributed meaning established as a dominant discourse. Within this framework we identified a key turning point in the pre-State phase of Zionist ideology, i.e. the juncture (in 1937) at which a Zionist bloc was constituted, committed to partition and ethnic cleansing.

The second section unpacked the meaning that Zionist ideology attributes to the key identity, namely *the right to Jewish statehood in the territory known as Eretz Yisrael*.

The third section critiqued this identity, showing that it has *neither a legal basis* in international law nor is there *a precedence for this form of (ethnocratic) regime in western democracies*.

The fourth section mapped some key milestones in the development of Zionism from being a peripheral to becoming a globally dominant mainstream ideology. The section also identified the impact of the ideological struggle against the idea of the right to exclusive Jewish statehood in historic Palestine. The section focused on the different ideological strands within the Palestinian liberation and solidarity movements. In particular we reflected on the contradictory articulations for support for and critique of Zionist claim of right to exclusive Jewish statehood in Palestine with the Black civil rights and Black nationalist movements in the US.

The fifth section noted the current vanguard role of the BLM movement in the uprising by a broad demographic against the US imperialist state both through critique of its domestic policies (extreme privatisation, support for corporations and cutting back of welfare to working people) and its foreign policies (between 800 and 1 000 military bases world-wide and regime change against recalcitrant states).

If the article succeeds in sensitising sufficient Palestine solidarity activists here in South Africa as well as abroad to the risks of co-optation into a pro-Zionist narrative, and an avoidance of an anti-imperialist critique, it will have achieved its aim. The road to greater ideological clarity is through developing and deepening a culture of debate, and not stifling voices that speak to inconvenient truths.

Concepts underlying and justifying exclusive Jewish statehood in Palestine do not stand alone in the edifice of Zionist ideology. They are reinforced by – and in turn reinforce – concepts that proclaim

Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, define who is a Jew and what constitutes anti-semitism. The next two articles will explore the meaning of these terms, our critique and describe the historical development and function of these terms as reciprocal to the Zionist notion of exclusive Jewish statehood.

Stellenbosch, South Africa, 18 October 2020

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