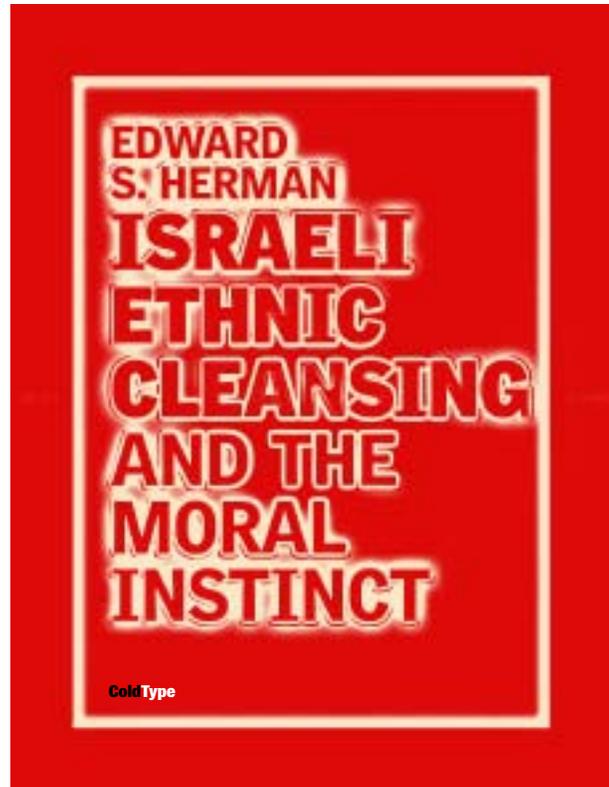


EDWARD  
S. HERMAN  
ISRAELI  
ETHNIC  
CLEANSING  
AND THE  
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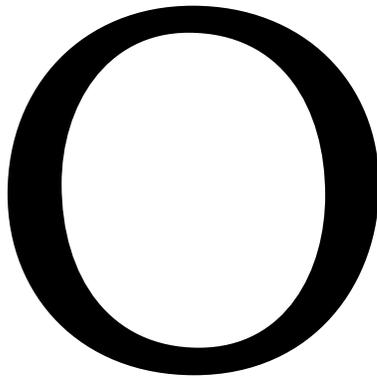


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ne of the most dubious clichés of the humanitarian intervention intellectuals and media editors and pundits is that human rights have become more important to the United States and other NATO powers and a major influence on their foreign policy in recent decades. David Rieff writes that human rights “has taken hold not just as a rhetorical but as an operating principle in all the major Western capitals, “and his comrade in righteous arms Michael Ignatieff claims that our enhanced “moral instincts” have strengthened “the presumption of intervention when massacre and deportation become state policy.” [1] This perspective was built in good part on the basis of the experience – and misreading – of developments during the dismantlement of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, where the propaganda line was that NATO had reluctantly and belatedly entered that conflict to stop ethnic cleansing and genocide perpetrated by the Serbs, and had done so successfully. This was allegedly an intervention rooted in Blair-Clinton-Kohl-Schroeder humanism, supported and pressed on these leaders by journalists and human rights protagonists.

There were many things wrong with this explanation and analysis of recent Balkans history, one of the most important of which was that NATO intervention was not late – it came quite early and was a primary cause of the ethnic cleansing that followed as it encouraged a breakup of Yugoslavia in a manner that left large unprotected minorities in the newly formed republics, thereby assuring ethnic conflict; it sabotaged peace agreements within these new states in the years 1992-1994; and it encouraged non-Serb minorities to hope for NATO military aid in arriving at final settlements-which they finally did get. The NATO powers even actively or passively supported the most complete ethnic cleansings of the Balkan wars-which was of Serbs in Croatia’s Krajina area and Serbs in NATO-occupied

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Kosovo from June 1999. [2]

There were other problems with the notion that the NATO intervention in the Balkans had a humanitarian basis and effect, but it is equally important to recognize the selectivity in this focus and the political root of that selectivity. The humanitarian interventionists were almost completely silent during the 1990s massacres and deportations by Indonesia in East Timor, the Turkish slaughters and village burnings in their Kurdish areas, the killings and huge refugee exodus in Colombia, and the large-scale massacres in the Congo carried out in good part by invaders from Rwanda and Uganda. For some reason the “moral instinct” of the humanitarian politicians didn’t reach these cases, where the killers were allies of these politicians-and obtained arms and military aid and training from them. Equally interesting, the moral instinct of the humanitarian interventionist intellectuals and journalists failed to over-ride the biased focus of their political leaders but instead worked in parallel with those biases. This helped their political leaders go after the targeted villains with greater violence, partly by diverting attention from the approved villains and the damage they were inflicting on their (implicitly unworthy) victims.

### **THE REMARKABLE CASE OF ISRAEL**

The most interesting and perhaps most important case of an aborted “moral instinct” is that involving Israel, where the state has been engaged in a systematic policy of dispossession and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem for decades, not only without a meaningful response on the part of the Free World, but with steady support from the United States and spurts of approval and support from its democratic allies. The ability of the Western political leaders, media and humanitarian intellectuals to get enraged at approved villains like Arafat, Chavez, and Milosevic, while treating Begin, Netanyahu and Sharon kindly as statesmen deserving of economic and military aid and diplomatic support, is a small miracle of self-deception, advanced double standards, and moral turpitude.

What makes it a miracle is that the basic premises as well as performance of the

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Israeli state fly in the face of the entire range of enlightenment values that supposedly underlie Western civilization.

**First**, it is a racist state as a matter of ideology and law. It is officially a Jewish state, 90 percent of the land in the state is reserved for Jews, Palestinians have been barred from leasing or buying state-owned lands that were seized in 1948 and later, and Jews from abroad have a right to immigrate and become citizens with privileges superior to those of indigenous non-Jews. This kind of ideology and law was unacceptable as regards the apartheid state of South Africa, although it is interesting that Reagan was “constructively engaged” with that state, Margaret Thatcher found it quite tolerable, and South African “anti-terror” operations were integrated with those of the Free World. [3] The Nazis treatment of the Jews in Germany even before the organization of the death camps was and still is considered outrageous; and the Soviet mistreatment of its Jewish population even led to punitive U.S. legislation (the Jackson-Vanik bill, still on the books). But the Israeli analogue of the Nuremberg laws and its construction of a state built on racial discrimination is acceptable to the enlightened West. The “chosen people” replace the “master race,” and that is not only acceptable, Israel is held up as a model democracy and “light unto the world” (Anthony Lewis). And by implication, Israel’s creation of a body of humans who are second class citizens by law (or of a still lesser class in the occupied territories), legally and politically “*untersmenschen*,” is also acceptable. This is a unique system of “privileged racism.”

**Second**, the Israeli state has been allowed to ignore numerous Security Council resolutions and the Fourth Geneva Convention regarding its occupation of the West Bank, as well as the International Court of Justice ruling on its apartheid wall, and simply dispossess the Palestinians of a large fraction of their land and water, demolish thousands of their homes, cut down many thousands of their olive trees, destroy their infrastructure, and create a modern network of roads through the occupied West Bank for Jews only while imposing serious obstacles to Palestinian movement within the West Bank. [4] This systematic ethnic cleansing has been implemented by an extremely well trained and well equipped army working over a virtually unarmed indigenous population, to make room for

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Jewish settlers – and in violation of international law on the proper behavior of an occupying power. This is a unique system of “privileged ethnic cleansing,” “privileged law violations,” and “privileged exceptions to Security Council and International Court rulings.”

**Third**, Israel has periodically crossed its borders to make war on its neighbors—Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon—has engaged in supplementary bombing or acts of terrorism against those three countries plus Tunisia, and for many years maintained a terrorist proxy army in Lebanon while carrying out numerous terrorist raids there under its Iron Fist policy, inflicting heavy civilian casualties. [5] While the 1982 invasion of Lebanon was proclaimed to be in response to terrorist attacks, in fact it was based on the absence of terrorist attacks (despite deliberate Israeli provocations) and the fear of having to negotiate with the Palestinians rather than continue to ethnically cleanse them. [6] There was of course no punishment or sanctions against Israel for these actions, as Israel benefits from a “privileged right to aggression, state terrorism, and sponsorship of terrorism,” which is not unique but which follows from the country’s status as a U.S. ally and client state.

**Fourth**, given its right to ethnically cleanse and terrorize in violation of Security Council resolutions and international law, its victims have no right to resist. They may be pushed off their land, their homes demolished, olive trees uprooted, and their people killed by IDF and settler violence, but forcible resistance on their part is unacceptable “terrorism,” to be deeply deplored. A thousand odd Palestinians were killed by the Israelis during their first and non-violent phase of resistance in the initial intifada (1987-1992), but their passive resistance had no effects on the illegal occupation, the international community did nothing to alleviate their distress, and Israel had a tacit understanding with the United States that it would be supported in its violent response to the intifada until that resistance was broken. The ratio of Palestinians to Israelis killed in these years was 25 to 1 or higher, but given Israel’s privileged right to terrorize, it was the Palestinians still labeled the terrorists.

**Fifth**, with full rights to ethnically cleanse and terrorize, and exempt from international law, the Israelis were also free to put in charge of the state a man

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responsible for a string of terrorist attacks on civilians and, at Sabra and Shatila, a massacre of somewhere between 800 and 3000 Palestinian civilians. Amusingly, the Yugoslav Tribunal argued that genocidal intent could be inferred from an action seeking to kill all the people of a given group in one area, even if not part of a plan to kill all them elsewhere, citing their own earlier decisions plus a UN Assembly resolution of 1982 that the slaughter of 800 at Sabra and Shatila was “an act of genocide.” [7] But that kind of Tribunal judgment was applied only to target Serbs-it was not only not applied by the West to Sharon, it didn’t even interfere with his becoming an honored head of state.

**Sixth**, with rights to ethnically cleanse and terrorize, such invidious words were made inapplicable to Israeli actions. They were applied with great indignation to Serb operations in Kosovo, which were features of a civil war (stoked from abroad) and were not, as in the Israeli case, designed to remove and replace an indigenous population in favor of a different ethnic group. Israel was not only exempt from charge of an extremely applicable pair of words, it has also been the beneficiary of privileged usage of the words “security” and “violence.” The Palestinians may be far more insecure than the Israelis and subject to a much higher and more sustained level of violence, but again it is the Palestinians who must reduce their resort to violence and the big issue is how Israel can be made more secure. Palestinian security is not an issue in the West, because their victimization is of no concern and because their insecurity is a result of their failure to accept the ethnic cleansing process and their resistance to that process. They are “unworthy victims,” by virtue of deep-seated political bias.

The ethnic cleansing process, which involves wholesale terrorism, and is the causal force that has elicited a responsive Palestinian retail terrorism, is actually put forward (along with the wall), not as a deliberate program to “redeem the land” for the chosen people but as necessary for “Israel’s legitimate response to terrorism.” [8] And the primary terrorists get away with this!

**Seventh**, Israel is the only Middle Eastern state that has built up a stock of nuclear weapons, and it has been aided in this not only by the United States but also by France and Norway. This has happened despite the 39 years of ethnic cleansing, steady and record-breaking violations of Security Council demands and

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international law, and periodic invasions of Israel's neighbors. This privileged right to nuclear weaponry and exemption from the jurisdiction of the International Atomic Energy Agency and Non-Proliferation Treaty flows from Israel's other privileges noted earlier, and ultimately the protection and cover of U.S. power.

**Eighth**, the Free World has been aghast at the possibility that Iran might be positioning itself to acquire nuclear weapons at some future date. Iran has of course been threatened with "regime change" and bombing and other attacks by both the United States and Israel, but Iran's actions conflict with the regime of privilege in which only Israel (and its superpower underwriter) have a security problem and right of self defense; others, like the Palestinians on the West Bank, must accept a position of inferiority, acute insecurity, and ethnic cleansing and apartheid walls and policies. Still others, like Iran, must cope with the threat of attack and sanctions for engaging in legal actions and possibly seeking nuclear means of self-defense, without help from a Free World busily appeasing the United States and its Middle Eastern client. So Israel not only has a nuclear privilege, it is able to get the Free World to help it monopolize that privilege in the Middle East, which of course gives it greater freedom to ethnically cleanse.

**Ninth**, the Free World has also been upset at the victory of Hamas in the Palestinian election of January 26, 2006. It is widely held that this may disturb the "peace process," and George Bush is not prepared to negotiate with a group that employs "violence"! Violence, however, is the Bush and U.S. specialty, with three major aggressions in the last seven years and an openly announced program of domination based on military superiority; and Israel's operations in Palestine are violent beyond anything the Palestinians have been able to muster, although in the ludicrously biased West "suicide bombing" is horrifying whereas "targeted assassinations" are not (although if the Palestinians had the capability of targeting Israeli officials who can doubt that this would horrify?). But just as "terrorism" cannot apply to the actions of the United States and its Israeli client, neither can an invidious word like "violence." These states only "retaliate" and reluctantly use force in "self-defense" and with the best of intentions in service to their "security" and humanitarian ends-and the West buys this.

Hamas has grown in popularity because Fatah and its leaders have failed to

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stop the ethnic cleansing process and have been unable to halt a steady increase in Palestinian misery, with Israel simply walking over Fatah's leaders and making their tenure a complete failure. Hamas was actually funded by Israel years ago with the objective of splintering the Palestinians and weakening the secular Fatah. It succeeded in this, but now that an Islamic group has taken on power they and their patron will be able to find another reason to avoid any final negotiated settlement with the Palestinians, who have now voted in a party that does not eschew violence as Sharon and Bush have done! Hamas also refuses to disarm and insists on a right to defend its people against a ruthless ethnic cleansing occupation, but in the West this is unreasonable as only one side has the right to arms, self-defense and a concern over "security." There is no right to resistance in this case of shriveled moral instincts.

The "peace process" is an ultimate Orwellism, which I defined years ago in a Doublespeak Dictionary as "Whatever the U.S. government happens to be doing or supporting in an area of conflict at the moment. It need not result in the termination of conflict or ongoing pacification operations in the short or long term." So the "peace process" in Palestine, steadily accepted or actively supported by the U.S. government, has been characterized by intensified ethnic cleansing, the destruction of the Palestinian infrastructure, the settlement of some 450,000 Jews in the West Bank, the construction of an apartheid wall, and the Israeli takeover of much of East Jerusalem-in other words, the establishment by state terrorism of enough "facts on the ground" to make any kind of viable Palestinian state unthinkable. But for the propaganda organs of the Free World, there has been a meaningful "peace process" going on that the election of Hamas might halt! [9]

### **HOW DO WE EXPLAIN THESE ABOMINATIONS AND THIS HYPOCRISY?**

This has all come about because the Israeli leadership has wanted *lebensraum* for the chosen people, the indigenous Palestinians have stood in the way and have had to be removed, and the Israelis have been able to do this, with critical U.S. military and diplomatic support. This process has fed on itself. That is, the

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eventual Palestinian violent resistance, along with Palestinian relative weakness and vulnerability, have exacerbated the racist underpinning of the ethnic cleansing project, with a resultant increase in its savagery over the years, helped along by Israel's elevation to its recent leadership of a major war criminal. U.S. aid and protection in the project has been crucial, as that has prevented any effective international response to policies which violate basic morality as well as law, and which if carried out by a target state would result in bombing and trials for war crimes. [10]

The U.S. role, and the neutralization of any "moral instinct" in the United States itself, results in part from geopolitical considerations and the role of Israel as a U.S. proxy and enforcer, and in part from the ability of the pro-Israel lobby and its grass-roots and Christian right supporters to cow the media and political establishment into tacit or open support of the ethnic cleansing project. The lobby's tactics include aggressive exploitation of guilt, with references to the Holocaust, identification of criticism of Israeli ethnic cleansing with "anti-semitism," along with straightforward bullying and attempts to stifle criticism and debate [11]-efforts which intensify in parallel with increases in the viciousness of the ethnic cleansing process.

These efforts have been aided by 9/11 and the "war against terror," which have helped demonize Arabs and make Israeli policy a part of that supposed war. The lobby and its representatives in the Bush administration were eager supporters of the attack on Iraq, and they are now fighting energetically for war against Iran-in fact the lobby is the only sector of society calling for a confrontation with Iran and it is already engaged in a major campaign on Bush and Congress to get the United States to take action. The Iraq war provided an excellent cover for intensified ethnic cleansing in Palestine, and a further war, despite its serious risks, might help in a further phase of ethnic cleansing and possible "transfer" of a population that poses a "demographic threat."

The performance of the "international community" in the face of the ethnic cleansing project has been a disgrace. Gung-ho for a war and trials of alleged villains in the ex-Yugoslavia, where the United States was pleased to oppose ethnic cleansing, selectively, the EU, Japan, Kofi Annan, most of the NGOs, and

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the Arab states, have been gutless and their “moral instinct” paralyzed by the U.S. commitment to Israel, the strength of Israel and its diaspora, the Israeli exploitation of Holocaust guilt, and in the EU the racist bias held over from the colonial past and exacerbated by the flow of propaganda that features “suicide bombers,” not targeted assassinations and massive and illegal brutalization and land theft.

Holocaust denial is reprehensible, but in the current political context it is confined to marginal elements and has no real impact, except for possibly providing a diversion from those engaged in “ethnic cleansing denial,” which as regards Israel is real and widespread among Western elites and has serious consequences.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Palestine is a crisis area par excellence, where a virtually helpless people has been abused, humiliated, beggared, and steadily displaced by force in favor of settlers protected by a huge military machine, supplied in turn and protected by the United States, and with the tacit agreement, if not more, of the rest of the Free World. The big issue now for the Free World is, will Hamas behave and accept ethnic cleansing (still in very active process) and possible bantustan status at best, or will it threaten to resist and to commit “terrorism”? Power and racism have neutralized that “moral instinct” in the West in respect of this very important case.

It is a very important case in part because several million Palestinians are being immiserated in a tragic system of violence that could be terminated easily by the United States and international community by simply saying stop and threatening an end to aid and possibly sanctions. But in the Free World the causal force is not seen as the occupation and ethnic cleansing but rather the resistance to these abuses. This perspective is stupid, vicious, and is actually a rationalization of the racist and politically opportunistic support of the ethnic cleansing project.

The situation in Palestine is also very important because hundreds of millions

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of Arabs and a billion or more people of the Islamic faith, and billions beyond that, interpret the West's treatment of the Palestinians as a reflection of a racist and colonialist attitude toward Arabs, Islamists, and Third World people more broadly. It is a wonderful producer of anti-Western terrorism, but also and even more importantly a deep anger, hatred and distrust of the West and its motives. It is a cancer that bodes ill for the future of the human condition.

### **NOTES:**

1. David Rieff, "A New Age of Liberal Imperialism?," *World Policy Journal*, Summer 1999. Ignatieff is quoted by Rieff.
2. See Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy* (Brookings: 1995); Diana Johnstone, *Fools' Crusade* (Pluto and *Monthly Review*: 1999); David Owen, *Balkan Odyssey* (Harcourt Brace: 1995); Lenard J. Cohen, *Serpent in the Bosom: The Rise and Fall of Slobodan Milosevic* (Westview: 2001).
3. That integration of Western security services and "experts," including those of apartheid South Africa, is described in Edward Herman and Gerry O'Sullivan, *The Terrorism Industry* (Pantheon: 1990).
4. For good accounts of this dispossession, brutalization and immiseration process, see Noam Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle* (South End: 1999), Chap. 8; Kathleen Christison, *The Wound of Dispossession* (Ocean Tree Book: 2003); Norman Finkelstein, *Beyond Chutzpah* (University of California: 2005), Part 2; Michel Warschawski, *Toward An Open Tomb* (*Monthly Review*: 2004); Jeff Halper, "Despair: Israel's Ultimate Weapon," *Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine*, March 28, 2001, (<http://www.thejerusalemfund.org/carryover/pubs/20010328ib.html> ); and Jeff Halper, "The 94 Percent Solution: A Matrix of Control," *Middle East Report*, Fall, 2000 ([http://www.merip.org/mer/mer216/216\\_halper.html](http://www.merip.org/mer/mer216/216_halper.html) ).
5. Noam Chomsky, *Pirates & Emperors* (Claremont Research: 1986), chap. 2; Chomsky, *Fateful Triangle*, chap. 9.
6. Yehoshua Porath, an Israeli expert on the Palestinian national movement, wrote in *Haaretz*, June 25, 1982, that "It seems to me that the decision of the

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government [to invade Lebanon]... flowed from the very fact that the cease fire had been observed [by the Palestinians].” For more details, Chomsky, *Fateful Triangle*, pp. 198-209.

7. In the August 2, 2001 Judgment in the case of Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstic (IT-98-33-T), (<http://www.un.org/icty/krstic/TrialC1/judgement/index.htm> ), Section G, “Genocide” (<http://www.un.org/icty/krstic/TrialC1/judgement/krs-tj010802e-3.htm#IIIG> ), approx. pars. 589 - 595, and also note 1306, the Tribunal relied on a “1982 UN General Assembly Resolution that the murder of at least 800 Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps that year was ‘an act of genocide’.” The UN General Assembly Resolution was “The situation in the Middle East” (A/RES/37/123), Section D, December 16, 1982 (<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/37/a37r123.htm> ).

8. Quoting Israeli political scientist, Gerald Steinberg, in Chris McGreal, “Worlds apart,” *Guardian*, February 6, 2006:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/israel/Story/0,,1703245,00.html>. A recent article in *Haaretz* based on a report by the human rights groups B’Tselem and Bimkom claims and shows that “The main consideration behind the route for ‘numerous segments’ of the separation fence was settlement expansion”:

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/685938.html>.

9. See “Washington’s Peace Process,” chapter 10 in Chomsky’s, *The Fateful Triangle*.

10. Slobodan Milosevic was indicted by the Yugoslav Tribunal on May 22, 1999 for command responsibility for the death of 344 Kosovo Albanians, almost all of whom were killed in the aftermath of NATO’s commencement of a bombing war on March 24, 1999; Sharon, on the other hand, was found even by an Israeli commission to have been responsible for a Sabra and Shatila massacre in which more than twice as many Palestinians, almost all women, children and the elderly, were slaughtered. But as noted in the text Sharon is subject to a different system of evaluation and treatment.

11. See Joan Wallach Scott, “Middle East Studies Under Siege,” *The Link*, January-March 2006



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