

Canada's Harper's Speech in the Israeli Knesset: "Not in My Name"

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Canada's Conservative leader, Stephen Harper, spoke in front of the Israeli Knesset. It was a short speech, beginning with homilies, platitudes, and economic references and then turned towards the righteous values he deems paramount in both Canada and Israel.

In his introduction he talked about Jewish Canadians,

[Jewish Canadians] are also immensely proud of what the people of Israel have accomplished here, of your courage in war, of your generosity in peace, and of the bloom that the desert has yielded, under your stewardship

Notice that he only referenced Jewish Canadians in his speech. There are many Canadians who would consider the statement to be hypocritical if not an outright lie. Courage in war is arguable, considering the overall propensity of Israel to use pre-emptive attacks on neighbouring countries and to use the military to control the occupied Palestinian territories. Beyond that, the Israeli use of chemical weapons (white phosphorous) and other weapons targeting from helicopters, drones, and fighter jets hardly smells of courage.

I would wish for some references for their generosity in peace, which may be true if there were a peace to behold. As for the desert blooming under their stewardship is only to buy into the mythological Israeli narrative that the land was empty desert before the Jewish immigrants arrived. The Palestinians had a healthy agricultural society working before the advent of the European settlers.

Harper continues,

the Jewish people deserve their own homeland and deserve to live safely and peacefully in that homeland.

Okay, well and good, but here is a double standard – why do not all the Palestinians, now subject to martial law in the occupied territories and apartheid laws (more on this later) in Israel 48, deserve the same?

Shortly thereafter Harper speaks another platitude from his Conservative political platform,

a Canadian tradition to stand for what is principled and just, regardless of whether it is convenient or popular.

Well, no, that is not exactly a Canadian tradition, as much as Harper would like it to be. Canada has in most cases followed the lead of the U.S. in world foreign affairs, has aligned itself with the corporate agenda of “free trade”, and is one of the leaders of mistreating indigenous populations abroad for corporate mining rights (not to mention right here in Canada). Oh, okay, yeah, that is not really popular, perhaps convenient.

Finally Harper gets to the heart of his Islamophobia, his fear of his invented word, Islamicism. Although he never says the word in his speech (too close to the killing grounds?) it is implicit in what he says,

support today for the Jewish state of Israel is more than a moral imperative it is also of strategic importance, also a matter of our own, long-term interests.

Hmm, strategic importance, undefined, but rest assured it is a reference to the Islamic menace he see threatening everyone from everywhere. Before adding more to this he provides more of his beloved homilies,

Israel is the only country in the Middle East, which has long anchored itself in the ideals of freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

They are the things that, over time and against all odds, have proven to be the only ground in which human rights, political stability, and economic prosperity, may flourish.

Anchored in human rights? Oh please.....! Israel has consistently denied the human rights of the Palestinian people. Their land has been expropriated, annexed, stolen. They are subject to martial law and apartheid law. The “wall” is condemned as a violation of human rights. They have destroyed vast areas of agricultural land, destroyed civic institutions such as hospitals, education, and power generation and not allowed their reconstitution. Israel has assassinated many of the Palestinian leaders and then complained they have no one to negotiate with. They have unilaterally broken ceasefires and then attacked the people of Gaza and Lebanon with overwhelming force (and underwhelming results).

That pretty much eliminates democracy as well, as one cannot be a violent occupier and a violent initiator of military attacks and call oneself democratic. The rule of law may be there for some people, but whose rules? Whose laws? Those arbitrarily made up by the military? And in green line Israel, why are there so many rules that prohibit the movement and freedoms of the Arab people living there?

Having extolled the virtues of the Israeli human rights record, Harper then continues with his Islamophobia,

Those who scorn modernity, who loathe the liberty of others, and who hold the differences of peoples and cultures in contempt. Those who, often begin by hating the Jews, but, history shows us, end up hating anyone who is not them. Those forces, which have threatened the state of Israel every single day of its existence, and which, today, as 9/11 graphically showed us, threaten us all.

And so, either we stand up for our values and our interests, here, in Israel, stand up for the existence of a free, democratic and distinctively Jewish state or the retreat of our values and our interests in the world will begin.

It is obvious to Canadians, if not the world, that Harper's implication here is that the Muslim world is the world of evil (as many other right wing Christian dominionists also see it), lacking modernity (whatever that is, they seem to use modern communications and weapons quite well, as well as being able to work their way around the financial parameters of our society - i.e. oil and U.S. fiat reserve currency), and obviously threatening us all. Global polls indicate that Israel and the U.S. are perceived to be the main threats to world peace.

Harper makes a short reference to the Palestinians being able to have the same kind of state as Israel,

a sincere hope that the Palestinian people and their leaders... will choose a viable, democratic, Palestinian state, committed to living peacefully alongside the Jewish state of Israel.

This of course references the idea of a two state solution, an idea that is becoming extremely doubtful as more and more settlements are built on stolen Palestinian land. It always has been doubtful as the so-called peace talks over the past thirty years have been used mainly as a cover for the Israelis to continue building more and more settlements. There is no real contiguous land left for the Palestinians to have their own sovereign state, just bits and pieces of bantustans.

A two state solution is possible, it is just that it is overwhelmingly improbable. It would take a true miracle to make the settlers give up their settlements and benefits to return to Israel 'proper'. The two main remaining solutions are quite different to each other.

One solution is a free and democratic state with equality in law for all peoples. This initiates the great demographic fear as the Palestinian population is increasing faster than the Israeli population, even after the huge Russian immigration of the 1990s. A subset of this idea is a binational state with separate institutions (education, civic laws et al) within a larger society of equal rights before the law. Another possible solution is the status quo, with the small Palestinian bantustans remaining forever as apartheid settlements while Israel develops the land around them, hoping that eventually the Palestinians will tire of their suffering and move out.

Mr. Harper finishes with what is obviously becoming a growing concern for the Israelis, that of the appellation of Israel as an apartheid state, and the growing success of the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement, both here and around the world.

People who would never say they hate and blame the Jews for their own failings or the problems of the world, instead declare their hatred of Israel and blame the only Jewish state for the problems of the Middle East.

As once Jewish businesses were boycotted, some civil-society leaders today call for a boycott of Israel.

On some campuses, intellectualized arguments against Israeli policies thinly

mask the underlying realities, such as the shunning of Israeli academics and the harassment of Jewish students.

Most disgracefully of all, some openly call Israel an apartheid state.

Think about that.

Think about the twisted logic and outright malice behind that: a state, based on freedom, democracy and the rule of law, that was founded so Jews can flourish, as Jews, and seek shelter from the shadow of the worst racist experiment in history, that is condemned, and that condemnation is masked in the language of anti-racism.

But this is the face of the new anti-Semitism.

It targets the Jewish people by targeting Israel and attempts to make the old bigotry acceptable for a new generation. Of course, criticism of Israeli government policy is not in and of itself necessarily anti-Semitic.

But what else can we call criticism that selectively condemns only the Jewish state and effectively denies its right to defend itself while systematically ignoring – or excusing – the violence and oppression all around it?

Two things are occurring here. One is the attempt to redefine anti-Semitism as being anyone speaking against the state of Israel for whatever reason. That is simply not a realistic definition.

The other is the “Why Israel?” question, referring to the critics that are “ignoring...the violence and oppression all around it.” It is a telling charge in that it implicitly accepts the charges that Israel is racist and apartheid, but why are you criticising us when so many others are doing the same or worse?

I do not selectively condemn Israel, as I am aware of all kinds of oppression and violence occurring in the region and around the world: U.S. attacks in Iraq, Afghanistan; U.S. support of al-Qaeda in Syria and of fundamentalist regimes in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Coast states; China in Tibet; U.S. covert operations in Africa and Latin America too numerous to label here.

It is interesting how often the U.S. comes up in these references, and yes, they do deserve and get as much time as Israel for criticism. Which leads into the next quotation,

If you act to defend yourselves, you will suffer widespread condemnation, over and over again.

But neither Israel’s existence nor its policies are responsible for the instability in the Middle East today.

One must look beyond Israel’s borders to find the causes of the relentless oppression, poverty and violence in much of the region, of the heartbreaking suffering of Syrian refugees, of sectarian violence and the fears of religious minorities, especially Christians, and of the current domestic turmoil in so many states.

The first statement about acting to defend oneself and then suffer widespread

condemnation over and over again – is simply the narrative Israel has written for the Palestinians. What follows next is an outright lie, as the instability in the Middle East is a direct result of British colonial efforts to settle Jewish people in Palestine, an effort supported greatly by Canada, and, after the creation of the state of Israel, supported by the U.S. as an outpost against communism and then against the terror that they instigated in the first place by their colonial resource extractive means.

Yes, anyone can look beyond Israel’s borders to see the havoc created by the interventions of the European states into the region, artificially dividing up the fallen Ottoman empire, supporting dictators and demagogues as long as they followed western guidelines; fighting wars to keep those same demagogues and dictators in line when they became a bit too “uppity” for the neo-colonial bosses, to keep the oil flowing, to keep the dollar as the reserve currency, to inflate the vote domestically.

Before the final platitudes and gratitudes, Harper mentions the Iranian threat of nuclear weapons. This is readily discounted as a double standard as Israel has an estimated 80 – 200 deliverable nuclear warheads (depending on source) while Iran has zero, and has not in the past several hundred years attacked anyone. It is another threat to create the ‘victim’ attitude that is made to raise some sympathy for their own survival and to excuse their own violence against the Palestinians and other Arabs.

Mr. Harper does not speak for the majority of Canadians. Unfortunately for the meantime, he holds power in Canada’s parliament and tends to use it absolutely, turning Canada into a petro-state essentially under corporate rule (as with all our so-called “free trade” agreements). Canada suffers its own apartheid with its indigenous population and Harper’s conservatives are doing their best to further disenfranchise them. These are the values that Canada shares with Israel: corporate control over the economy, and the extraction of resource wealth at the expense of the indigenous people. Harper does not speak for me.

ANNEX

[Complete transcript of Prime Minister Harper’s Address to the Knesset](#)

It is nothing short of sickening.

But this is the face of the new anti-Semitism.

It targets the Jewish people by targeting Israel and attempts to make the old bigotry acceptable for a new generation.

Of course, criticism of Israeli government policy is not in and of itself necessarily anti-Semitic.

But what else can we call criticism that selectively condemns only the Jewish state and effectively denies its right to defend itself while systematically ignoring – or excusing – the violence and oppression all around it?

What else can we call it when, Israel is routinely targeted at the United Nations, and when Israel remains the only country to be the subject of a permanent agenda item at the regular sessions of its human rights council?

Ladies and gentlemen, any assessment – any judgment – of Israel’s actions must start with this understanding:

In the sixty-five years that modern Israel has been a nation, Israelis have endured attacks and slanders beyond counting and have never known a day of true peace.

And we understand that Israelis live with this, impossible calculus:

If you act to defend yourselves, you will suffer widespread condemnation, over and over again.

But, should you fail to act, you alone will suffer the consequence of your inaction, and that consequence will be final, your destruction.

The truth, that Canada understands, is that many of the hostile forces Israel faces, are faced by all western nations.

And Israel faces them for many of the same reasons we face them.

You just happen to be a lot closer to them.

Of course, no nation is perfect.

But neither Israel’s existence nor its policies are responsible for the instability in the Middle East today.

“One must look beyond Israel’s borders to find the causes of the relentless oppression, poverty and violence in much of the region, of the heartbreaking suffering of Syrian refugees, of sectarian violence and the fears of religious minorities, especially Christians, and of the current domestic turmoil in so many states.

So what are we to do?

Most importantly, we must deal with the world as we find it.

The threats in this region are real, deeply rooted, and deadly and the forces of progress, often anaemically weak.

For too many nations, it is still easier to scapegoat Israel than to emulate your success. “It is easier to foster resentment and hatred of Israel’s democracy than it is to provide the same rights and freedoms to their own people.

I believe that a Palestinian state will come, and one thing that will make it come is when the regimes that bankroll terrorism realise that the path to peace is accommodation, not violence.

Which brings me to the government of Iran.

Late last year, the world announced a new approach to diplomacy with the government in Tehran.

Canada has long held the view that every diplomatic measure should be taken to ensure that regime never obtains a nuclear weapon.

We therefore appreciate the earnest efforts of the five permanent members of the security council and Germany.

Canada will evaluate the success of this approach not on the merits of its words, but on the implementation and verification of its promised actions.

We truly hope that it is possible to walk the Iranian government back from taking the irreversible step of manufacturing nuclear weapons.

But, for now, Canada's own sanctions will remain fully in place.

And should our hopes not be realized, should the present agreement prove ephemeral Canada will be a strong voice for renewed sanctions.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude with this thought.

I believe the story of Israel is a great example to the world.

It is a story, essentially, of a people whose response to suffering has been to move beyond resentment and build a most extraordinary society a vibrant democracy a freedom-loving country... with an independent and rights-affirming judiciary, an innovative, world-leading "start-up" nation.

You have taken the collective memory of death and persecution to build an optimistic, forward-looking land one that so values life, you will sometimes release a thousand criminals and terrorists, to save one of your own.

In the democratic family of nations, Israel represents values which our government takes as articles of faith, and principles to drive our national life.

And therefore, through fire and water, Canada will stand with you.

My friends, you have been generous with your time and attention.

Once more, Laureen and I and our entire delegation thank you for your generous hospitality, and look forward to continuing our visit to your country.

Thank you for having us, and may peace be upon Israel.

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