Western government support for Zionism: Implications for strategy

By Les Levidow

Based on talk from 2nd July 2006 conference,
'Against Zionism: Jewish Perspectives', www.ihrc.org.uk

The Zionist project has gained systematic support from Western governments. Consider the $5bn/year from the USA, military supplies (even nuclear weapons components) from the UK, quasi-honorary membership of the EU through access to research funds, UK government denunciations of Palestinian 'terrorism' as a cause of the conflict, and the EU's collective punishment of Palestinians for electing the wrong government. How to explain this support for the Zionist project? The reasons have expanded in recent years.

Here I will draw analogies between strategies of Zionist occupation and the wider 'war on terror'. The analogies bear upon strategies for Palestine solidarity and for resistance to imperialist plunder in general.

As a racist colonialist project, Zionism guaranteed Arab hostility. Zionism has always attributed the persecution of the Jews to an innate anti-Semitism of non-Jews. This was later projected onto the Palestinian population to explain its hostility to being colonised. In parallel, the Zionist project sought to eliminate the indigenous Arab-Sephardic Jews as a cultural category. Likewise Zionism adopted Western anti-Semitic stereotypes of Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe.[1] They were all pressed to become 'new Jews' according to the Zionist model of European colonialism, or else become enemies of the state.

Israel has remained dependent upon Western imperialism for material and political support. Perversely, it has earned this support by suppressing anti-imperialist forces throughout the Middle East.[2] Zionism has always meant occupation, colonisation and war – directed against the indigenous Arab population and neighbouring states. Early on, Zionism demonised any resistance as 'Arab terrorism', thus projecting its own barbarism onto its victims, in ways analogous to European colonialism.

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[1] Les Levidow, 'Zionist Anti-Semitism', originally published in Return magazine no.1 (London), December 1990, available at http://www.aldeilis.net/zion/zionrac12.html, or http://www.vancouver.indymedia.org/news/2003/05/48327.php

[2] The USA has had a debate about the role and importance of the Zionist lobby, sometimes mis-named 'the Jewish lobby', perhaps because some organisations claims to represent US Jews. In reality, the Zionist lobby includes anti-Semitic Christian fundamentalists as well as Jews. Overall this political-economic force plays a crucial role in suppressing debate within mainstream politics and the mass media. Perversely, the recent debate has mainly asked whether the Zionist lobby forces the US government to act contrary to 'US interests'; this question blurs any distinction between the interests of US imperialism and of its population. Such a distinction is crucial, lest we get diverted into a futile debate about elusive 'US interests'. Instead we should debate the interests of class and justice.

Eventually the Zionist project faced legitimacy problems from the rise of the PLO, especially the mass uprising of the intifada starting in 1987. A politicised, mobilised Palestinian civil society posed an existential threat to the 'security' of the racist Zionist state. To contain the revolt, Israel used physical repression, collective punishment, economic theft, etc – as well as new political strategies which had a wider resonances in the Middle East.

With backing from the USA and UK, other governments there were promoting political Islam – i.e. groups which politicise religion, while Islamising politics – as a weapon against secular nationalist movements. Israel developed its own version of this strategy. Palestinian organisations could not legally receive funds from abroad without permission; the government gave permission to only one such organisation, Hamas, which attacked projects of the PLO and intimidated women activists in particular.

As a parallel strategy, Israel aimed to create an alternative Palestinian leadership which could be incorporated into the occupation, by analogy to the strategies of indirect rule under 19th century British colonialism. Eventually the Palestine National Authority (PNA) was created along these lines under the Oslo Accord. This was designed to delegitimise resistance as 'terrorism', while normalising the Occupation. Under imperialist pressure, and enticed by an illusory legitimacy, the PLO 'recognised Israel' – an inherently expansionist state which has never defined its borders.

Since the mid-1990s, more and more Palestinians rightly saw the PNA as policing the occupation for Israel. Its collaborationist role discredited secular Palestinian politics in the eyes of many. Meanwhile Hamas had been providing basic welfare services, in lieu of the PNA fulfilling its responsibilities to the people. Partly by default, Hamas remained a more credible basis for resistance to the occupation and gained more popular support, even if its Islamist agenda created divisions among Palestinians.

Since the mid-1990s, especially with the rise of the Likud government, the Zionist project has extended its colonisation through more settlements, fragmentation of the West Bank and the 'separation wall'. It has systematically attacked Palestinian civil society as a 'terrorist infrastructure', in the name of protecting Israeli 'security' and 'democracy'. With the rise of Hamas, the Zionist storyline could blame 'Islamic terrorism', as if the systemic violence of the occupation arose from religious extremism. In all these ways, the Zionist project offered a prototype for the neoconservative Project for a New American Century, which sought permanent war in the name of defending or even spreading 'democracy', i.e. a state which imposes market relations.

Likewise the Western 'war on terror' justifies its global plunder, illegal wars and systematic brutality along similar lines: as a defence against terrorism, amidst a 'clash of civilisations'. This 'war' draws upon colonialist counter-insurgency strategies, which conflated all types of anti-colonial resistance as 'terrorism'. But the 'war on terror' has new elements, especially a 'blowback' effect: Western societies now find

themselves being attacked by Islamic terrorist networks descended from (or related to) those which their own governments had sponsored for their foreign intrigues.[3]

This feature provided an opportunity for greater convergence between the Zionist project and Western imperialism. Former Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu happened to be in New York during the 11th Sept 2001 attacks, so journalists asked him what this meant for Israel. He replied: 'It is very good. It will strengthen the bonds between the two peoples. Israelis have suffered from terrorism for years, and now so does the US population.'

In a similar vein, said Prime Minister Ariel Sharon: 'Together we can defeat the forces of evil.' Thus he rhetorically equated the 'counter-terror' campaign of Israel and its Western allies. The equation has become more than rhetorical. As Tony Blair has said, Middle East peace would be easier to achieve if it were not for terrorism; this diagnosis blames those who resist the Zionist occupation. Western governments have adopted Israeli demands, e.g. that Palestinians 'renounce terror', as a condition for any support.

Moreover, these governments have appropriated elements of Zionist strategy for their own activities. They have learned from Israel for their occupation of Iraq, e.g. by intensifying ethnic divisions and inflicting collective punishment upon communities which resist. Also by analogy, Western governments persecute migrant and Muslim populations at home, turning them into an internal colony; this aims to deter or disorganise dissent from foreign policy.[4] Governments maintain close links with organisations of political Islam, while demanding that community representatives help to counter a vaguely defined 'extremism'[5]. These manoeuvres have several aims: shifting blame away from the government, Islamising Asian politics, marginalising progressive Muslim forces, and justifying political surveillance of entire populations.

In all these ways, the Zionist project has an affinity with strategies for global counter-insurgency, even within Western countries. To stop the constant threat of Zionist aggression, opponents will need to raise the cost to its perpetrators and imperialist allies – i.e., both there and here. At the same time, opponents will need to build unity for a different vision, so that the Zionist division of colonisers versus colonised is challenged and transformed into equal rights for all.

This analysis has implications for strategies to oppose the Zionist occupation and imperial plunder more widely. First, what not to do.
It would be misguided to make appeals to Muslim religious affinity or allegiances, because this reinforces the Zionist storyline of a religious conflict, intensifies political

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[3] See two books by Nafeez Ahmed: *The War on Freedom and The War on Truth*; and *The London Bombings – An Independent Inquiry* (Duckworth, 2006), http://www.independentinquiry.co.uk

[4] 'Embedded Experts in the War on Terror', 2005, www.campacc.org.uk

[5] Tony Blair has asked the 'moderate majority' of Muslims to challenge extremist groups: 'If we want to defeat the extremism, we have got to defeat its ideas and we have got to address the completely false sense of grievance against the West', quoted in A. Grice and B. Russell, 'Blair lays down the law to Muslims on extremists in their midst', *The Independent*, 5 July 2006

divisions among those who oppose the occupation, and diverts attention from its colonial basis.
Also it would also be futile to appeal to the humanity of Western governments, which support Zionist terror as serving Western strategic interests and imperial plunder.

Rather, we should build an alliance of all those who resist imperial plunder, and all those targeted by the 'war on terror', both here and abroad. Although this 'war' persecutes Muslims in particular, it targets anyone who resists – Palestinians, Kurds, Tamils, Colombians, etc. – regardless of their religious background. A secular basis can more effectively achieve the unity needed to oppose our common enemy.

Postscript, early August 2006

The Israeli destruction of the Lebanon has extended Zionist colonialism, terror and collective punishment – all in the familiar name of 'self-defence'. With its loyal UK ally, the US government initially opposed demands for an immediate ceasefire because Israel was carrying out useful dirty work that would be politically more difficult for those governments to do themselves. (Consider analogies to UK-French instigation of the 1956 Suez crisis, though now with somewhat different inter-imperialist alliances and rivalries.)

Destruction of the Lebanon – for what aims? According to the Israeli Prime Minister, extending the US President's demonological metaphor, Israel has been defending us from 'the axis of evil that stretches from Teheran to Damascus'. Along similar lines, the UK Prime Minister identified 'an arc of extremism right across that region, that wants to disrupt the process towards democracy and freedom…' Here 'extremism' means any effective opposition to imperial plunder, while 'democracy' means a neoliberal regime which helps the private sector to plunder public funds, to privatise services, to substitute economic competition for cooperation, etc.

According to the US Secretary of State, we must defeat terrorist threats, remake the map of the Middle East, help the Lebanon to police its southern border, etc. Or put more bluntly, according to an Israeli analyst, '[Hizbollah leader] Nasrallah makes it impossible for any pro-Western leader to stay in power in an Arab country.' Perhaps not impossible, but more difficult to stay in power, as long as an armed anti-imperialist guerrilla force sets a strong defiant example.

For those reasons, the current destruction and mass murder aim to turn the Lebanese government into imperialist police, dependent on Western governments. The Israeli aggression there highlights the permanent terrorist threat from a racist, expansionist state and its Western patrons.

Biographical note

Les Levidow has been an active supporter of the Campaign Against Criminalising Communities (CAMPACC) since it was founded in London in early 2001. In opposing all 'anti-terror' laws, CAMPACC links human rights campaigners, lawyers,

migrant groups and individuals targeted by those laws. In this work he brings a long experience of solidarity here with people demonised and targeted by state terror – in Ireland, Italy, Chiapas and Palestine. During the first intifada there, he was actively involved in the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, especially as a member of the National Executive Committee. Along with several other members, he participated in Editorial Board of *Return* magazine, which opposed the so-called 'Law of Return' for Jews and counterposed the Palestinian right of return. He is also a supporter of Jews Against Zionism, formed in 2005, www.freewebs.com/jewsagainstzionism

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