

Restoring Sanity to the Israel Discourse

Red Lines against Delegitimization; Blue-&-White Lines for Fair Play

We, the undersigned, representing a wide range of opinion and speaking as individuals, not for our respective institutions, denounce the growing attempts to delegitimize Israel. We share a commitment to a two-state solution with a Jewish, democratic Israel living peacefully besides a democratic Palestine. We do not see how anyone who claims to support the two-state solution to bring peace can delegitimize one nationalist movement or another.

Averse to censorship, coercion or any limitation on the freedom of speech or expression, we urge supporters and critics of Israeli policy to keep their discussions within the following “blue and white lines”:

- Zionism, meaning Jewish nationalism, is the Jewish people’s national liberation movement, the collective force that has helped Jews achieve self-determination as a people in their homeland.
- The State of Israel fulfills the Jewish people’s national aspirations in their ancestral homeland. This affirmation acknowledges the Jews as a people, united by a common past, culture and language, rooted in their homeland, the land of Israel. The modern state of Israel is a natural outgrowth of Jews’ three-thousand-year-old relationship with the land of Israel.
- Israel is a democratic state striving to offer all its citizens, including Palestinian Israelis, “full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its provisional and permanent institutions,” as Israel’s Declaration of Independence guarantees.
- Affirming Israel’s and Zionism’s legitimacy and acknowledging Jews’ historic claim to their land does not negate Palestinian claims to that same geographical space. History is complex. A peaceful solution requires compromise from both sides regarding what they consider their legitimate national and territorial rights.

Keeping passionate, critical, even hard-hitting discussion within these “blue and white” lines requires not crossing these “red lines” in discussing Israel, Zionism, and the Middle East:

- **Denying Israel’s Right to Exist as well as Delegitimizing the Zionist movement and Jewish State:** Assaulting Jews’ legitimacy as a people, Jews’ valid claims to the land, or Jews’ right to national self-determination in Israel, crosses the line from legitimate criticism to an aggressive a-historical negationism. Labeling the founding of Israel a “colonial enterprise” distorts the meaning of colonialism, negating the Jewish people’s ongoing relationship with the land of Israel.

- **Demonization:** Equating Israel and Zionism with the twentieth century's worst racist ideologies such as Nazism and South African Apartheid, or treating Israel as uniquely cruel in order to deny it moral legitimacy, is not only demonstrably untrue but inflammatory, and incompatible with aspirations for peace and mutual respect.
- **Double Standards:** Calling Zionism – but no other nationalism – racism, holding Israel and its army to artificially high standards by which no other nation or military is judged, or subjecting Israel to the kind of disproportionate criticism it endures in the United Nations, are all acts of bad faith.
- **Essentialism:** Jumping from vigorously denouncing particular policies to repudiating Israel or Zionism raises the stakes destructively, and has a long infamous pedigree rooted in anti-Semitism.
- **Promoting the One State Solution** – Trying to resolve the Mideast conflict by advocating one bi-national state in former Mandatory Palestine entails dissolving Israel as the expression of the Jewish people's right for self-determination and is an unrealistic and destructive solution, likely to cause more bloodshed.
- **Trying to Undo the Establishment of Israel, Implicitly or Explicitly** - Emphasizing the “right of return,” or displaying maps of Mandatory Palestine without Israel, shifts the conversation from debating borders to attacking Israel's right to exist. Those still seeking a victory in the 1948 war seek to keep Israel's very existence a matter of international debate, no matter how destructive and distracting that might be.

We regret to note that, among others, activists in the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement repeatedly cross these red lines. Their tactics are rooted in the “Durban Strategy” to ostracize and delegitimize Israel adopted by the NGO Forum at the 2001 UN Conference Against Racism. We condemn those who reject Israel entirely rather than debating one policy or even a group of policies, instead suggesting that Israel is fundamentally illegitimate.

We urge honest critics of Israeli policy to distance themselves from the stains of the past and the poisons of the present, keeping the debate focused on the actions and policies of all the participants in the conflict, rather than Israel's essence, or Israel's existential right to exist.