Israel and Imperialism

August 9, 2014

I would like to thank Bennett for his kind and appreciative comments on my artcile and use the opportunity presented by his letter to answer some essential points of contention.

Bennett correctly notes that I defend a two-state solution. A two-state transition might be a more accurate summary. But what he omits is equally critical. The Israel that I advocate — the Israel that can breakdown the island – ghetto walls that separate it from the Arab world — cannot be based on its present Jewish chauvinist structures. It requires a revolutionary struggle to de-Zionize Israel and replace the existing foundations with one that balances and democratizes the relationship between the Jewish and Palestinian communities that constitute it. It requires, in other words, repudiating the colonial project of Zionism and re-building Israel on an equal, bi-national footing. These are the preconditions for resolving the larger Palestinian issue and bisymmetrically allying Israel with the broader democratic aspirations in the Arab world.

But the larger difference I have with Bennett is that he recognizes only two out of three central aspects of the Zionist state – the ongoing colonial settler aspect and the creation of a new national community that arose from it, later to acquire an independent existence. What he fails to appreciate, what he in fact vehemently denies, is the imperialist-agent aspect of the Israeli state. Payments for services rendered to American imperialism underwrite and sustain Israel's ongoing colonizing project. And it is this partnership, and the revenues that flow from it as military aid and tax-exempt charitable contributions, that keep a lid on Israeli social conflicts by allowing Israeli capitalism to confer special material privileges to Jewish workers. And this closes the loop. For these subsidies create a mass reciprocal social base within Israel that identifies with the aims and interests of the US. As long as this nexus is not disrupted, there is little prospect that internal social conflicts will acquire an anti-Zionist let alone a revolutionary character. Imperialist aid is the glue that causes the Zionist structure to adhere.

Is it "flying off the rails" to describe Israel as a bulwark against the Arab democratic upsurge?

Israel has always assumed a watchdog role as defender of American and British interests, not only in the Middle East but in Africa and Central America as well. I will refrain from reiterating the broader litany of charges against Israel in this regard and confine my remarks to the Middle East. Every challenge there to American regional interests — whether from radical nationalists of the Nasserite or Baathist stripe, Shi'ite and Iranian empowerment or mass democratic upheavals — are an equal call to concern and action for Israel. All feed a well-justified fear for the health of the status quo that benefits elite American interests. The fear of Arab democracy compounds these concerns not only in its own right, but also for fear that it creates a wedge for jihadist populism.

Israel has permitted the US to stockpile arms, fuel, munitions and other supplies on its soil to be accessed whenever America needs them in the region. Israel is a port of call for troops, ships, aircraft and intelligence services. It is a testing ground for missile defense systems and counter-insurgency weapons and tactics. Representative Steve Rothman has even argued that "without the American partnership with the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces), the Unites States might need to have 100,000 or more additional troops stationed permanently in that part of the world to make up for the protection of US interests and vital intelligence provided by Israel to the United States."(*The Hill*, June 3, 2008).

Pertinent to the immediate context is the well-publicized convergence of interests in regional

stability between Israeli ruling circles and the Arab regimes, in particular those targeted by revolution in the wake of the Arab Spring. The Egyptian coup had no greater ally than Israel, who lobbied relentlessly on its behalf with Washington. And Israel had no better regional allies than Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia during its current war on Gaza. Those regimes now threatened, with the exception of Syria, are all long-term American regional assets. And a declawed Syria, freed of its chemical weapons, is valued as a reliable enforcer of Israel's northern borders.

The *NY Times* (July 30, 2014) reported with some insight, that

> "(t)he dynamic has inverted all expectation of the Arab Spring uprisings. As recently as 18 months ago, most analysts in Israel, Washington and the Palestinian territories expected the popular uprisings to make the Arab governments more responsive to their citizens, and therefore more sympathetic to the Palestinians and more hostile to Israel."

But instead of becoming more isolated, Tel Aviv has emerged as the "unexpected beneficiary" of a resurgent conservative order.

This de facto Israeli-Jordanian-Saudi Arabian-Egyptian- Emirates alliance is the Maginot Line of American imperialism. And it is this line that would have to be broken when the revolutionary Arab Spring reorganizes.

Those who seek a de-Zionized Israel and its integration into the region have a vital stake in the success of a revived mass revolutionary Arab breakthrough. A victory for Arab democracy would change the regional balance of power by decisively transferring control of the regions resources to the Arab masses. In so doing it would render Israel's watchdog role – and its further usefulness to an American imperialism in retreat — obsolete.

How long thereafter until Israeli society mutinied at the prospects of directly shouldering the dead weight of Zionism's colonization projects in the Occupied Territories? And with that chapter closed, Israeli capitalism, no longer able to sustain the caste privileges of Jewish workers from without, would revert to normality.

Zionism would then be on the road to anachronistic irrelevancy as, incidentally, it was before the Six Day War revived it.