

“Wiped off the Map”: Iranian President Ahmadinejad’s statement regarding Israel has caused a political storm

By [The Democrats Diary](#)

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Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has caused a [political storm](#) by calling for Israel to be “wiped off the map”. The [hardline authoritarian](#) President was speaking in front of 3,000 students at a conference in Tehran entitled “The World without Zionism”.

The west reacted angrily to Ahmadinejad’s statement. The British Foreign Office described it as “sickening”. The White House said that it “underscores the concerns we have about Iran’s nuclear operations”. Israel’s Vice-Prime Minister Shimon Peres called for Iran’s expulsion from the UN, saying that the remark “contravenes the United Nations charter and is tantamount to a crime against humanity”.

Whilst this reaction might sound like moral outrage, it can hardly be described as such. The term ‘moral outrage’ describes anger provoked by the violation of some ethical principle. To allow ourselves to be morally offended by one nation’s president calling for another country to be “wiped off the map” we must first have ensured that our own actions do not contravene the same operative ethical principles. In this respect, every citizen of the UK, the US and Israel has a very long road to travel.

[In 1947](#), the UN decreed that historic Palestine should be partitioned, with 56 percent of the land going to the 600,000 strong Jewish population and the remaining 44 percent going to the 1.2 million strong Arab population. Earlier, in 1938, the Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion, later the first Prime Minister of Israel, wrote, “[I am] satisfied with part of the country, but on the basis of the assumption that after we build up a strong force following the establishment of the state — we will abolish the partition of the country, and we will expand to the whole Land of Israel”. In the 1947-49 Arab-Israeli war, around [800,000 Palestinians](#) were ethnically cleansed from their historic homeland by Israeli forces subjecting them to assassinations, rapes and massacres. Israel seized about 78 percent of the British ‘Mandate’ Palestine by force of arms, with Egypt and Jordan taking the remainder. The Palestinian state decreed by the international community had been forcibly ‘wiped off the map’, to use Ahmadinejad’s phrase. Successive Israeli governments ensured that it was never to emerge.

Does calling for the elimination of a state constitute “a crime against humanity”, as Shimon Peres contends? If so, then Ahmadinejad would be joined in the dock by every Israeli official who has not only advocated but effected the policy of expansionism that continues to prevent a Palestinian nation state from emerging. The list would be long and illustrious. [In 1936, Ben Gurion](#) said that “the boundaries of Zionist aspirations are the concern of the Jewish people and no external factor will be able to limit them”. [Moshe Dayan](#), famed

military commander and later an Israeli government minister told the youth of Israel that expansionism was a continuous enterprise. "You have not started it, and you will not finish it!". [Elsewhere](#), he said that "[Israel] must see the sword as the main, if not the only, instrument with which to keep its morale high and to retain its moral tension. Toward this end it may, no – it must – invent dangers, and to do this it must adopt the method of provocation-and-revenge...And above all – let us hope for a new war with the Arab countries, so that we may finally get rid of our troubles and acquire our space".

Since 1967 Israel has held further occupied territory in open defiance of international law. It has built vast settlements on that land and [repressed the occupied population](#) with a ferocity that has been [savage in the extreme](#) (more of which in a moment). In spite of this Shimon Peres has, with considerable self-restraint, never described Israel's actions as crimes against humanity, or conceded its right to be a part of the United Nations, whose laws it treats with utter contempt.

The outrage displayed by western politicians at Ahmadinejad's denial of Israel's right to exist was nowhere to be seen when Dov Weisglass, one of the principal advisers to Israeli premier Ariel Sharon, set out his government's strategy to prevent the creation of a Palestinian state [in an interview last year](#). Weisglass was describing the policy aims behind the fraudulent Gaza withdrawal plan. Recounting the interview, [Le Monde Diplomatique](#) noted that "according to Weisglass, Sharon decided to give up Gaza, which he had never considered as a national interest, to save the settlements in the West Bank and, more important, to prevent any negotiated agreement with the Palestinians".

In the interview, Weisglass left very little to the imagination: "There was a very difficult package of commitments that Israel was expected to accept. That package is called a political process. You know, the term 'political process' ... is the establishment of a Palestinian state [its] the evacuation of settlements, it's the return of refugees, it's the partition of Jerusalem...we succeeded in taking that .. and sending it beyond the hills. Effectively, this whole package that is called the Palestinian state, with all that it entails, has been removed from our agenda indefinitely".

Did the stated intention of keeping Palestine off the map "indefinitely" cause the White House any of the "concern" it expressed this week at the remarks of the Iranian President? Hardly. Weisglass boasted that he had achieved "all this with authority and permission. All with a presidential blessing and the ratification of both houses of Congress."

[Israel enacted the plan](#), making a great show of leaving 19 sq miles in Gaza and evacuating 8,500 illegal settlers, whilst expropriating 23 sq miles in the West Bank Land and introducing 14,000 illegal settlers there. The land grab would also involve, [Sharon](#) and [Weisglass](#) declared, the permanent annexation of the whole of Jerusalem, including the Arab eastern segment. Far from finding this whole charade "sickening" as the UK Foreign Office described Ahmadinejad's remarks, [Tony Blair wrote to Ariel Sharon](#), saying "I greatly admire the courage with which you have developed and implemented this policy".

Despite Israel's continued expansionism, open dismissal of Palestinian self-determination, brutal treatment of civilians in the occupied territories and total rejection of international law, the Blair government expresses its "admiration" for Sharon's "courage" far more profoundly than with warm words alone. The historian Mark Curtis, formerly of Chatham House and a specialist in British foreign policy, notes that "[UK] arms exports [to Israel]

doubled from 2000 to 2001, reaching £22.5 million as Israel stepped up aggression in the occupied territories. Supplies included small arms, grenade-making kits and components for equipment such as armoured fighting vehicles, tanks and combat aircraft. [The UK] has recently supplied Israel with machine guns, rifles, ammunition, components for tanks and helicopters, leg irons, electric shock belts, tear gas and categories covering mortars, rocket launchers, anti-tank weapons and military explosives”.

The contribution of Britain’s principal ally, the United States, hardly requires any review. [By one estimate](#), US support for Israel between 1973 and 2002, military and otherwise, totalled \$1.6 trillion, over \$5,700 per head of population, more than twice the cost of the Vietnam War.

Moral outrage on the part of Britain and the US was conspicuously absent, as the weapons they had sold to Israel were put into murderous effect during the early years of the second intifada. US historian [Norman G. Finkelstein](#) describes the conduct of our Israeli ally: “To repress Palestinian resistance, a senior Israeli officer in early 2002 urged the army to “analyze and internalize the lessons of...how the German army fought in the Warsaw ghetto.” Judging by Israeli carnage in the West Bank culminating in Operation Defensive Shield – the targeting of Palestinian ambulances and medical personnel, the targeting of journalists, the killing of Palestinian children “for sport” (Chris Hedges, New York Times former Cairo bureau chief), the rounding up, handcuffing and blindfolding of all Palestinian males between the ages of 15 and 50, and affixing of numbers on their wrists, the indiscriminate torture of Palestinian detainees, the denial of food, water, electricity, and medical assistance to the Palestinian civilian population, the indiscriminate air assaults on Palestinian neighborhoods, the use of Palestinian civilians as human shields, the bulldozing of Palestinian homes with the occupants huddled inside – it appears that the Israeli army followed the officer’s advice. When the operation, supported by fully 90 percent of Israelis, was finally over, 500 Palestinians were dead and 1500 wounded.”

Finkelstein quotes a Human Rights Watch report on the Israeli assault on the Jenin refugee camp in April 2002. According to the report, a “thirty-seven-year-old paralyzed man was killed when the IDF [Israel Defense Forces] bulldozed his home on top of him, refusing to allow his relatives the time to remove him from the home”; a “fifty-seven-year-old wheelchair-bound man...was shot and run over by a tank on a major road outside the camp...even though he had a white flag attached to his wheelchair”; “IDF soldiers forced a sixty-five-year-old woman to stand on a rooftop in front of an IDF position in the middle of a helicopter battle.”

An Israeli soldier who operated a bulldozer in the assault on Jenin breathlessly described the experience: “I wanted to destroy everything. I begged the officers...to let me knock it all down, from top to bottom. To level everything.... For three days, I just destroyed and destroyed.... I found joy with every house that came down, because I knew that they didn’t mind dying, but they cared for their homes. If you knocked down a house, you buried 40 or 50 people for generations. If I am sorry for anything, it is for not tearing the whole camp down....I had plenty of satisfaction. I really enjoyed it.”

As pressure builds on Iran over its nuclear weapons programme, the remarks made by President Ahmadinejad will be seized upon as evidence of Iran’s pathological depravity, and justification for the [increasingly menacing stance](#) the US and the UK are taking towards it. Tony Blair expressed his [“revulsion”](#) at the Iranian President’s statement. Saying that he had never heard of the president of a country saying they wanted to wipe out another

country, Blair added: "Can you imagine a state like that with an attitude like that having a nuclear weapon?". The Prime Minister is of course well aware that he has no need to use his imagination. His government arms and otherwise backs just such a country: Israel.

Ahmadinejad's remarks were offensive indeed. But if our disgust is to rise anywhere above the level of mere hypocrisy we should first acknowledge, reverse, and atone for the material support we have given to those who deny a people's right to self-determination, not just in word, but in savage bloody deed.

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