

Chuck Stone

3 faces of Israel

When I think of Israel these days, I recall a poetic paradox by Countee Cullen:

"Yet, do I marvel at this curious thing,
To paint a poet black and bid him sing."

I marvel at my inability as a non-Jewish American to criticize Israel without being castigated as anti-Semitic. Both Israel and its influential landmen, leaders of the American Jewish community, passionately reject any criticism of the Israeli army's barbarity in Gaza and the West Bank.

"Every critical statement of a Jewish leader does more harm than many violent demonstrations in Gaza," Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir recently told members of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. "God forbid, American Jews would permit themselves to be used in the campaign against us."

Mr. Shamir's statement seems to indict the American media for reporting the Israeli army's brutality. In turn, there seems to be a national campaign to intimidate the American media into more docile reporting on the Middle East.

But Mr. Shamir's injunction resurrects the painful question of dual loyalty. He shamelessly demands that the American Jewish community respond differently from other Americans if Israeli and American foreign policy interests oppose each other.

Ten days before Mr. Shamir's recent arrival in America, a bipartisan group of 30 respected U.S. senators sharply criticized Mr. Shamir in a letter to Secretary of State Shultz for refusing to negotiate a peace settlement for the occupied territories. Those who signed that letter included several of the senate's strongest supporters of aid to Israel — aid that subsidizes Mr. Shamir.

Which of Israel's three faces does Mr. Shamir represent?

The face of unrelenting opposition to any accommodation with Palestinian aspirations for sovereignty?

The face of the military's

'Nobody can deny that the Palestinian entifadah (uprising) in the occupied territories threatens Israel's security. Israel's only choice was to restore law and order.'

Palestinian policy of "search and destroy?"

Or the face of a nation whose people have graced Western civilization with the Judaic religion, by which Christianity and Islam measure their theologies of justice?

Nobody can deny that the Palestinian entifadah (uprising) in the occupied territories threatens Israel's security. Israel's only choice was to restore law and order.

But the violence contained an irony in its delayed genesis. Forty years ago, Palestinians could have had their own nation state. Instead, Arab nations exploited the Palestinians as pawns in a genocidal declaration of war on Israel. After Israel magnificently prevailed, the Arab nations promptly abandoned the Palestinians. Trapped in refugee camps, Palestinians are still "wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other waiting to be born."

Today, Israel perpetuates this tragedy. Like all people, Palestinians are "yearning to breathe free." Their uprising is no different from the revolutions that created America and won Israel's freedom.

Israel's response to the entifadah epitomizes another paradox — trying to reconcile the ugliness of a national repression with the moral splendor of a 5,000-year-old religion. As the Biblical Isaac lamented, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau."

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