

Why the European Union's Moral Compass Is Broken

The European Union recently sent out a directive barring its 28 members from cooperating with Israeli entities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The boycott includes “all funding, cooperation, and the granting of scholarships, research grants and prizes” to Israeli entities in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

If this is how the EU chooses to spend its limited diplomatic and political resources to “help” the Middle East, then its moral compass is badly broken. The EU still hasn't even mustered the clarity or courage to join the U.S., Canada and six Gulf states (led by Bahrain) in designating Hezbollah a terrorist organization, even though Hezbollah has committed terrorist acts on EU soil that killed an EU citizen and has supported Bashar Assad's butchery in Syria.

The EU has also failed to take any decisive action to address the urgent crises in Lebanon, Syria and Iran (which marches ever closer to nukes and imports ore—for armor and missile production—from Germany and France). And where is the EU's boycott of Mideast governments that persecute women, execute homosexuals and condone the slaughter of Christians?

If the EU wants to wield its economic clout to impose peace on disputing parties, why not boycott China for its brutal occupation of Tibet? Clearly that occupation doesn't matter because the EU is China's largest trading partner. And why isn't the EU boycotting Northern Cyprus, which is under foreign military occupation by Turkey (against the wishes of the EU)?

The hypocrisy is even more flagrant because some EU states are themselves occupying disputed territories on various

continents. One of the most notorious examples is the Falkland Islands. What exactly is the U.K.'s burning security interest in occupying a Latin American island nearly 8,000 miles away? Maybe the EU should boycott the U.K. as well.

In the end, an EU boycott of Israel is just a cheap way to score political points with the oil-producing Arab states and the growing Muslim population on European soil. Indeed, the EU's anti-Israel directive resembles Stephen Hawking's ill-fated attempt to inject himself into the Israeli-Palestinian controversy.

Just as Hawking absurdly chose to boycott the country largely responsible for the technology that enables him to communicate, the EU shamelessly targets the only country in the Middle East that actually shares the EU's democratic values, respect for human rights, pluralism and the rule of law (not to mention shared interests like curbing Iranian nukes, developing natural gas resources in the Mediterranean Sea and seeing moderates prevail in the volatile Middle East).

Putting aside the EU's abundant hypocrisy, trying to strong-arm Israel into unilateral concessions has already proven to be an abysmal failure when it comes to promoting peace. Just ask President Obama, who in 2009 pressured Israel into a 10-month settlement freeze in the West Bank without requiring any reciprocal gestures from the Palestinians. They quickly realized they need not negotiate with Israel because Obama was doing that for them.

One can hardly blame Palestinians for trying to maximize their negotiating posture, even if it lacks good faith. Thus, peace talks have remain stalled for Obama's entire presidency, even though Secretary of State John Kerry is now making his sixth peace-pushing trip (in as many months) to the region.

It's also worth noting that the real obstacle to peace—Palestinian rejectionism and terrorism—existed before

any of Israel's settlement building. Palestinian terrorism and rejectionism from Gaza also continued despite the removal of Israeli settlements from Gaza in 2005. So Israeli settlements did not create Palestinian extremism, and their removal doesn't necessarily end it.

History has also demonstrated that Israeli settlement building has not prevented Israel from making painful territorial compromises for peace. Menachem Begin evacuated the Sinai, Ehud Barak ended Israel's presence in Southern Lebanon, Ariel Sharon left Gaza and Benjamin Netanyahu handed over West Bank territories under the Wye Accords.

Moreover, the EU seems to have forgotten that Jews have a historical and legal right to be in the West Bank. The Mandate for Palestine confirmed by the League of Nations recognized the "historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine" and "the grounds for reconstituting their National Home in that country." Under Article 6, the mandate encouraged "close settlement by Jews, on the land, including State lands and waste lands not required for public purposes."

The EU's boycott falsely implies that Jews have no right to live in the West Bank and is thus disturbingly reminiscent of the "Judenrein" policies of Nazi Germany, which banned Jews from certain spheres of life only because they were Jews.

Lastly, the EU (and U.S.) position on Israeli West Bank construction lacks balance because Palestinian construction is never limited. As Eli Hertz notes, "The Oslo Accords do not forbid Israeli or Arab settlement activity. Charging that further Jewish settlement activity preempts final negotiations by establishing realities requires reciprocity. If Jews were forcibly expelled from the West Bank in 1948 during a war of aggression aimed at them [but then recaptured the West Bank in the defensive war of 1967], then these Territories must be considered disputed Territories, at the least." According to David Bar-Ilan, a former policy planning official, the tempo

of Arab construction is “more than 10 times the number of buildings under construction [in the Territory] than those approved [by the Israeli government] for the [Jewish] settlers.”

If the EU wants to ignore international law and history, the many more pressing Mideast issues and its own hypocrisy, all for the sake of promoting Israeli-Palestinian peace, then it should at least recognize that unilateral pressure on Israel has only reinforced Palestinian inflexibility. Indeed, it is only the Palestinians who have refused to negotiate peace without preconditions. The EU has pressured the wrong party because its Mideast compass is badly broken.

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