

The Moral Deformation of Israeli Society 2

I addressed the question of how a whole society becomes sunk in a moral mire in an earlier Letter (see [here](#)). I had not intended it to become a series. I hope it does not, because if it does, it would mean the evidence of the moral corrosion of Israel just accumulates. However recent events in Israel, combined with one wrenching long-term issue I did not address before, impels me to revisit the depressing topic of the degraded state of Israeli society.

The immediate impetus is the horrific (though unfortunately well-attested) story of a father in Gaza carrying a baby who got stopped by the Israeli military (commonly known by the Orwellian name, the Israeli 'Defence' Force). The two of them got hauled off for questioning, the object of which turned out to be to get the father to confess to something. He refused, so the 'soldiers' turned to more 'persuasive' methods. I put 'soldiers' in scare quotes because the Geneva Conventions do not permit the actions that these barbarians embarked upon.

Let's note first that while Israel signed on to the Conventions of 1949, it did not ratify some additions of 1997, notably because these would have required them to acknowledge the inhabitants of Gaza as civilians. While that means they are not violating provisions they agreed to, it makes matters worse: effectively, everyone they have rounded up into a crowded concentration camp is classified as a combatant and can be treated as such. So that's an in-principle, pre-depravity depravity.

What the barbarians did in this case was to ask the father to confess to crimes while they burned his baby with lighted cigarettes. The burns have been confirmed as those of cigarettes by medical professionals. The father is no longer around to describe what happened. The barbarians had the decency to return the baby—maybe they just didn't want to be lumbered with an infant, or maybe their formation in barbarism was not yet so complete that they could just kill a baby by shooting it like a tin can. The father, presumably, 'confessed' and is now either dead or suffering further torment at the hands of either the Israeli military or its 'justice' system.

I won't comment further on this story. All that matters is that it shows Israel has no army, by any modern standard. What it has is a multi-tasking-trained cadre of torturers.

The longer-term issue is the Israeli prison system's treatment of adolescents. The prison systems of civilised countries distinguish between children and adolescents on the one hand and adults on the other. Israel puts adolescents into adult prisons. The teenagers in question get convicted by military courts with high conviction rates (99%) for crimes such as throwing rocks. No doubt one can do considerable harm with a rock—but nowhere near the harm one can do with guns, tanks and rockets. Effectively, teenagers are arrested, tried and almost inevitably incarcerated for responding to brutal occupation and repression with what they find lying by the side of the road. Then they are hauled off to adult prisons.

The cruellest twist, however, is that kids are then put into solitary confinement. Not solitary confinement for a day, but for months on end. Solitary confinement has been recognised by human rights organisations as a form of torture. It distorts the psyche of creatures designed to be social beings slowly and cruelly. It can break down adults with strong characters and convictions. Its effect on adolescents has been sharply condemned. The torture of a baby and the baby's father forced to watch his baby's torture is just the step beyond what Israeli society has already come to accept: the torture of untold numbers of adolescents in Israel's prisons.

Finally, this past week, the Israeli parliament passed a bill allowing for capital punishment for Palestinians—though not Jewish Israelis. Only three industrialised democracies still use the death penalty: Japan, Singapore and the United States. Countries that until recently still had it on the books have outlawed it. The Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea explained, when his country abolished it, that it was because of the country's 'Christian values'.

While there are other countries who still execute criminals, I know of none that reserves its use of capital punishment exclusively for one ethnic group. I assume those in the Israeli national assembly who cheered when this bill passed will be glad to know they are now members of a highly-exclusive category of nations: the class of one solitary nation, defined by its barbarism of three quarters of a century, a barbarism that, like a malignant cancer, lives, grows and becomes more ugly with every passing year.