

Taking Back our Sovereignty

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The Zionist Congresses, the Balfour Declaration of 100 years ago, and the Declaration of Independence on May 15, 1948 all had one goal — to restore the sovereignty of the Jewish nation in our ancient homeland.

Sovereignty comes with a military, and the IDF provides the security that Jews in the Diaspora did not have, as well as the dignity and respect among the nations. Every year at this time, we are reminded of the continuing cost borne by the IDF – a citizens’ army – in deterring and defeating the attempts to erase us from the map.

But Israeli sovereign equality has been under attack from the beginning, in part by Arab and Muslim states that have rejected any form of Jewish self-determination, and in part by ideologues and Christian groups that cling to “replacement” theology. Together, they have used the United Nations and other institutions to wage a political war against Israel, employing double standards and singling out the Jewish state for special treatment.

The use of labels such as “apartheid” to soil Israel’s image, linked to the BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions) and lawfare campaigns, are central to this form of political warfare. The tools and weapons are those that were used in the war against the South African apartheid regime, often framed as opposition to post-1967 “occupation”. In the words and actions of the leaders of these campaigns, however, the core goal continues to be the erosion of Israeli sovereignty and the legitimacy of Jewish self-determination.

In recent years, these anti-Israel campaigns have also developed some Israeli and Jewish Diaspora allies, in the form of small non-government organizations (NGOs) with large budgets to travel the world, promoting this cause. In December, the head of one such group – B’Tselem – was given a platform by Malaysia and Venezuela in the UN

Security Council to call on the “international community” to impose a “peace agreement” on Israel. A handful of activists from a sister organization calling themselves “Breaking the Silence” tours the world promoting the image of IDF soldiers as war criminals.

The angry rejection of these campaigns, and the role of a few Israelis, funded generously by European governments, has become central to the Israeli political debate. A few months ago, Prime Minister Netanyahu asked UK Prime Minister Theresa May to stop her government’s role in this process which undermines Israeli sovereign equality. When Belgian PM Charles Michel came to Israel, Netanyahu made the same request, and then Michel held a very public visit with the leaders of these organizations. There is no other democracy in the world where political NGOs, funded by foreign governments and lacking any form of accountability, are used to undermine sovereignty.

The latest clash with German Foreign Minister Gabriel also involves sovereignty, and the right of the Jewish people to guide our own destiny, after 2000 years in which this was denied to us. If any country should be sensitive to this issue, it should be Germany, but like other Europeans, that sensitivity is absent. Gabriel, whose government is among the top funders and enablers of the Breaking the Silence activists (NIS 5.5 million in four years), as well as the *New York Times* editorial board, which attacked Netanyahu on this issue, were entirely tone deaf.

As Israel’s Prime Minister, and therefore a main symbol of Jewish sovereignty and democracy, Netanyahu articulated the views of the broader public. The IDF is the primary embodiment of national self-determination, and the embrace by foreign (German) officials of fringe groups that “slander IDF soldiers as war criminals” and “call for the criminalization of Israeli soldiers” are red flags. Far from being voices of civil society that promote human rights, or promote peace, as they claim, for many citizens, such groups are seen as fig leaves for ongoing delegitimization campaigns.

In celebrating the anniversary of the 1948 Declaration of Independence, Israelis across the spectrum take pride in all of our accomplishments, and in restoring Jewish sovereignty. During the rest of the year, we argue over policies, including how to resolve the 50-year “temporary” results of the 1967 war, but these decisions are ours to make, through elections, the Knesset and open debate. That is the real meaning of sovereignty.