

Insisting on Forever

Posted At : October 5, 2011 11:25 AM | Posted By : Seth Chalmer

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Jonathan S. Tobin is incensed in Commentary that Palestinian intellectual **Sari Nusseibeh doesn't accept** the formula of Israel as "a Jewish State." Nusseibeh feels that the term "Jewish state" implies either a theocracy (if Judaism is a religion) or apartheid (if Jewishness is racial or ethnic). He instead suggests "that Israeli leaders ask instead that Palestinians recognise Israel (proper) as a civil, democratic, and pluralistic state whose official religion is Judaism, and whose majority is Jewish."

As Tobin correctly points out, "that is what it is now and what Israelis and those who support it understand to be a Jewish state." Nusseibeh's is a classic distinction without a difference.

Still, I can't seem to bring myself to care as much as Tobin what Palestinians think about Israel being a Jewish state. "The reason for Israel's demand is simple," writes Tobin. "Unless and until the Palestinians specifically accept that the part of the country they do not control is forever Jewish, the conflict will not be over."

Forever Jewish, he wants from them? Forever is a pretty big deal. Will Israelis agree that even one inch of the West Bank will be *forever* Palestinian? (Giving up entirely the messianic visions of the Hebrew Bible.) *Forever* is an entirely unreasonable demand to make of either side. Maybe it's just me, but I say let's work on a practical peace deal for the foreseeable future and leave the question of *forever* to a higher Authority. Both parties should be willing to let the other nation live in peace in its own state, and both parties will doubtless continue to dream of the messianic utopian day in which *our side* gets all the land back. As long as everybody's stays calm and respectful in the here and now, who cares about competing dreams of forever? Let the songs and dreams embrace and contain the conflict, and let the practical reality contain only peace, tolerance, and mutual dignity and security.

Tobin is right when he says that "Jewish identity is complex, and Israelis may well spend the rest of eternity trying to define themselves." (**What a Jewish state means** is a **topic of constant debate** among **Jews**.) That's all the more reason to say it's an unnecessary waste of time and diplomatic capital insisting that Palestinians call Israel a Jewish state.