

# What do you want us to honor, Kevin?

by Jeremy Salt

[sent by the author]

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The decision by Kevin Rudd to 'honor' Israel in a motion to be introduced in the House of Representatives is strikingly inconsistent even at first glance. Only recently Mr Rudd did what John Howard had refused to do during the duration of his prime ministership. He said 'sorry' to the indigenous people of Australia for the theft of their land and their suffering at the hands of generations of white settlers. Now he intends to honor a state which has done exactly the same thing to another indigenous people, the Palestinians. The parliamentary session will be followed by a reception given by the Israeli embassy and the Zionist Federation of Australia in the Mural Hall which, as all your members of parliament will remember, is not far from where Australia's indigenous people pitched their tents a few years ago and refused to move until the government recognized their rights.

What exactly do you intend to honor on Australia's behalf, Mr Rudd? Israel's independence? But Mr Rudd, this was not an independence movement. Israel is an historical anomaly, a post colonial colonial settler state. Of its nature an independence movement is a struggle by an indigenous people to throw off alien control of their land. The conflict in Palestine was initiated by a settler minority determined to impose its will on the indigenous majority. The proclamation of independence by David Ben-Gurion in 1948 was intrinsically no different from the unilateral proclamation of independence in 1965 by the Prime Minister of Rhodesia's white settler minority government, Ian Smith.

What followed Ben-Gurion's proclamation - what was already happening at the hands of armed gangs - was the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homeland, ethnic cleansing as we now call it and 'cleaning' as Zionist military commanders then called it. Massacres, the destruction of hundreds of villages and the theft of what was left in the name of the acquisition of 'absentee property' was part of the process. Collectively, these actions satisfy the criteria laid down in the UN Declaration on Genocide, passed by the General Assembly in December, 1948.

Is this part of what you intend to 'honor', Mr Rudd? None of this was accidental. If you or your advisers care to study history you and they will see that the Zionists came to Palestine not to live amongst the indigenous people but to replace them. The seizure of territory in 1948 was never intended to be anything else than the first step towards the eventual conquest of the whole of Palestine. Towards this end Ben-Gurion provoked war through brutal attacks on Egypt and Jordan in the 1950s. Given the massacre of 120 Gazans only last week, you might like to refer back to the massacre of Gazans in the 1950s by Israel's 'defence forces'. Then as now, their victims included hundreds of completely defenceless men, women and children.

Does the record you intend to 'honor' include Israel's attack on Egypt in 1956, alongside its imperial backers, Britain and France? One of the first acts of this war was the massacre by Israeli border police of dozens of Palestinian men, women and children walking, cycling or riding in carts back to their village of Kafr Qasim from a day working in the fields. They were violating a curfew of which they knew nothing and therefore had to be killed. Are you going to list them amongst Israel's achievements?

What the three invaders wanted in this particular war, as distinct from all the wars that have been launched since, down to the attack on Iraq five years ago, was the destruction of the Egyptian leader, Gamal abd al Nasser, and the return of the Suez Canal to 'safe' hands. What Israel also wanted was territory, the Sinai and the Gaza Strip. Ben-Gurion was outraged at the suggestion that Israel had invaded and occupied these lands. How could it, when they belonged to Israel in the first place? That will give you some idea of the mentality at work here, Mr Rudd, a mentality evident in the everyday actions of the Israeli government, the army and settlers on the West Bank. The settlers don't see themselves as being in the wrong, and neither does the state which protects them.

Which Israel would you like us to 'honor', Mr Rudd, the one created by the partition plan passed in 1947, the one whose 'independence' was proclaimed by Ben-Gurion in 1948, the one that came into existence within the armistice lines of 1949, or the one that was established after the war launched for further territorial gain in 1967, the consequences of which included the removal of another 300,000 people from their land, 90,000 from the Golan Heights and the rest from the West Bank? Which of these Israels would you like us to honor, Mr Rudd?

You will be honoring the representative of a government whose capital is an occupied city. The United Nations does not regard Jerusalem as falling within the sovereign territory of Israel. Neither does an Australia. Half of Jerusalem was taken over in 1948, the 'international community' intervening before the armed forces of Israel had time to take the rest. This was seized in 1967. You might like to ask yourself how many Israeli government offices have been established in buildings and on land owned by someone else. Do you really support this kind of thing, Mr Rudd? The city within the municipal boundaries declared by the government of Israel includes large areas of West Bank land, but whether defined as Jerusalem or the West Bank, it is still occupied land. Within these boundaries a relentless and manifestly racist demographic war is being fought against the Palestinian people by

the municipality, the government, and settler organizations. Are you able to separate the state you will be 'honoring' from all of this?

You must know that whether in Jerusalem or elsewhere the movement of civilians into territories seized during war is a flagrant breach of the laws of war. Will you have anything to say about this? Will Israel's achievements as listed by you include the construction of a wall ruled illegal by the International Court of Justice? Will they include the construction and expansion of settlements on occupied land, in disregard of Australia's own policy position? Will they include the daily humiliation of the Palestinians at the hands of soldiers and the settlers whom they protect? Or will you somehow manage to condemn the settlers and not the state that does nothing as they vandalise, harass, bully, abuse, murder, uproot olive trees and prevent villagers from harvesting their crops? Why do you think the state does nothing, Mr Rudd, if not because the settler project and the state project are one and the same thing? As a country still struggling with its own brutal origins, should not Australia be standing by the oppressed, not those oppressing them? Don't you see the legal and moral contradictions in your own position, Mr Rudd?

And it is not just the Palestinians whose long dark night is one of Israel's most striking achievements. Have you already forgotten Israel's war on Lebanon in the summer of 2006, when its 'defence' forces killed about 1200 civilians, about one third of them children? Can't you recall the obliteration of entire families in their own homes and the pictures of the bodies of children being pulled from the debris of bombed homes in Qana? As a committed Christian, does not the name of Qana ring a bell? Can you recall, further back, that it was within the UN compound at Qana that more than 100 Lebanese civilians were killed during an Israeli artillery bombardment in 1996, during the prime ministership of Shimon Peres? Do you remember the killing of 20,000 civilians by Israel's 'defence forces' during the invasion of Lebanon in 1982 or the two thousand or so killed in the 'incursion' of 1978?

There's an awful lot to strike off the roll of honor, isn't there, Mr Rudd. But what you will see if you look long and hard is absolute consistency. Consistency from the beginning until now in the killing of civilians and the occupation and settlement of land belonging to someone else. Consistency in the wars Israel has launched, in its incursions, kidnappings and assassinations. Consistency in its refusal to comply with international laws and conventions. We have these laws and conventions for a good reason, Mr Rudd. They are there to give us, all of us, not just the Israelis and Palestinians, the best possible chance to live at peace. Israel shows no respect for them. Yet this is the Israel you want us to respect and honor. Now, it is our turn to say sorry. We cannot.