

# Researcher on Israeli affairs and author of the book on settler colonialism: **Israel is limited by Palestinian, regional resistance**



By Ali Amiri  
Cultural critic

## EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

*Sai Englert is a lecturer in political economy of the Middle East at Leiden University, Netherlands, and the author of 'Settler Colonialism: An Introduction'. His research focuses on the Israeli state and the consequences of neoliberalism, as well as settler colonialism. He has made numerous contributions to various publications such as the New Left Review and Jacobin. In the following interview, Englert presents the settler colonialism analysis of Israel and references the transparent ambitions of the early Zionists, who shamelessly promoted the colonial project of Israel to Europeans as a solution to the rising anti-Semitism in the continent and as a means to establish European control in the Middle East. The Zionists have long attempted to portray the Israel-Palestine conflict as something other than what it truly is: a settler colony that must address the issue of "transferring" the indigenous people whose lands have been occupied. However, as long as we remain within this framework, it is clear that true Palestinian liberation can only be achieved once the colonizers are ousted.*



British military parade in Al-Quds (Jerusalem) in 1936  
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**IRAN DAILY:** When we think about colonial powers, we usually think about great empires like the British, French, or German colonial empires. Israel, on the other hand, is a small state without apparent human resources or imperialistic ambitions, yet, it's essentially a settler colonial state. How can we explain this?

**SAI ENGLERT:** Well, I think that's a good question. It's true. The Israeli state portrays itself as being a small state surrounded by aggressive states and those enemies, depending on the

historical period – the 50s, 60s, and 70s – constructed different Arab states or now the Muslim states, and the practice of resistance and these kinds. I think that's quite a historical fallacy and we're just missing the larger picture, which is that the reason Zionism was able to establish itself in Palestine is absolutely because of its alliance with British imperialism and the British Empire. And Zionists are truly clear about this. If you read [Theodor] Herzl, he is very clear that Zionism will need the support of what he calls great powers, and it will represent

the interests of the great powers in the region. In fact, imperial politicians were very clear about this. Ronald Storrs, the British governor of Palestine, described British Zionism as support for what he calls a "little loyal Jewish Ulster in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism," and he compares it to Protestant setup in the north of Ireland. Then comes the lateral shift to the United States, which goes on until today. Israel is a very close ally of the United States, and represents what the US Secretary of State in the past has called an "unsinkable aircraft

carrier," which was used to say that it's an extension of Americans in the region. So, that would be my response to this part of your question. I think it would be a mistake to think of Zionist project and the Israel state as simply an isolated state. I think it's always been part of the reason why the Imperial nations, first Britain and then the United States, support it. Because Palestine is situated in an old strategic point in the world economy, next to the Suez Canal. In the 1920s through 1940s it was on the route of the British oil pipeline that was

constructed in Kirkuk and went all the way to Haifa. You know, it's a key strategic region that all those powers want to defend. And I think another reason why the United States and Israel unite the way they do now is that it gives them diplomatic advantages because of their military political interests. When we think in terms of colonialism, it's a particular form of colonial rule that is developed by establishing a new population in the land that is conquered. Israel has reached and played that role, as a sort of outpost of the empire in a particularly strategic region in need of control. You know that the Dutch established posts in Dutch India in order to protect the routes to India. The French started colonizing what is today's Algeria, because they were trying to control the routes in the Mediterranean; the British established settlements in what is now the Falkland in the south of Argentina, in order to control trade routes in the south of America, etc., etc. I think Israel really represents a classic case of the settler colonies, with the role that other colonies also played across the world.



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Palestinian Arabs are being led out of the Old City of Al-Quds (Jerusalem) by British soldiers of the English Coldstream Guards during the Great Revolt against the British Mandate in 1938.  
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