

Cheering Netanyahu's Intransigence

Exclusive: Republicans and Democrats in Congress leapt to their feet again and again to applaud Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu even as he was challenging the policies of President Barack Obama. Yet, this pro-Israeli solidarity could have harmful consequences for Israel, the Palestinians and the United States, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

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Congress, with repeated standing ovations, showed its love for Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, but the valentine may have unintended consequences by stirring dangerous passions of Likud's rejectionist wing, which is now weighing the risks of transforming Israel into an overtly apartheid state.

These hardliners might well interpret the congressional obsequiousness as signaling that Israel still has a free hand to do whatever it wants, even if that means defying President Barack Obama's mild pressure for movement toward peace with the Palestinians.

As Democrats and Republicans competed to see who could jump to their feet the fastest and most often, Netanyahu mixed a rhetorical commitment to peace with preconditions that he knows are unacceptable to the Palestinians, including his insistence that they not only recognize Israel's right to exist but hail it as a Jewish state.

Palestinian negotiators have balked at accepting Israel's Jewish identity because about 20 percent of Israel's population is Arab. They also have said it is up to Israel to define itself as it wishes, not the Palestinians or any other outside group. But Netanyahu has made this declaration a prerequisite for peace talks.

In addition, this notion of a religious identity applying to any government runs counter to a core American principle, that governments should not show favoritism toward one religion over another and that all people are created equal.

So, there was something craven, arguably un-American, about the U.S. Congress cheering a foreign leader who insists on a religious state and even requires its acceptance by a group of people living under his military domination.

Republican commentator Pat Buchanan once got into a lot of trouble for saying that "Capitol Hill is Israeli-occupied territory." But Congress on Tuesday

behaved as if it was determined to vindicate Buchanan's point.

Annexing the West Bank

Netanyahu also got cheers when he alluded to the religious nationalism that cites Biblical authority for Israel's right to possess the West Bank where millions of Palestinians now live. Calling the area by its Biblical names, Netanyahu declared, "in Judea and Samaria, the Jewish people are not foreign occupiers."

Though Netanyahu insisted that he was prepared to make painful concessions for peace, including surrendering some of this "ancestral Jewish homeland," his belligerent tone suggested that he was moving more down the route of annexation that Likud's deputy speaker Danny Danon outlined last week in a New York Times op-ed.

Danon warned that if the Palestinians go ahead as planned and seek United Nations recognition for their own state on the West Bank, Israel should annex the territory. "We could then extend full Israeli jurisdiction to the Jewish communities [i.e. the settlements] and uninhabited lands of the West Bank," Danon wrote.

As for Palestinian towns, they would become mini-Gazas under Danon's plan, cut off from the world and isolated as enclaves with no legal status.

"Moreover, we would be well within our rights to assert, as we did in Gaza after our disengagement in 2005, that we are no longer responsible for the Palestinian residents of the West Bank, who would continue to live in their own, unannexed, towns," Danon wrote.

By excluding these Palestinian ghettos, Jews would still maintain a majority in this Greater Israel under Danon's plan. "These Palestinians would not have the option to become Israeli citizens, therefore averting the threat to the Jewish and democratic status of Israel by a growing Palestinian population," he wrote.

In other words, the Israeli Right appears headed toward a *de facto* apartheid, if not a form of ethnic cleansing by willfully making life so crushing for the Palestinians that they have no choice but to leave.

Congress has made this option more likely, with its enthusiastic applause for Netanyahu and with its bipartisan criticism of President Obama for urging peace talks that use the 1967 borders as a starting point.

After watching members of Congress behave more like trained seals than as representatives of a sovereign nation, hardliners in Netanyahu's Likud might

well believe that there are no outrages against the Palestinians that the U.S. government won't tolerate.

Abhorrent Actions

Many true friends of Israel find the racism that's implicit in these Likud strategies abhorrent, both politically for Israel and as a violation of the honorable Jewish tradition of seeking justice for all, especially for the oppressed.

However, for more than three decades now, especially since the Likud rose to power in the late 1970s, Israel has been shifting away from its egalitarian founding ideals and toward a discriminatory society based on religious claims of special entitlement.

This intolerance has now spilled over from discrimination against Arabs to official separation between secular and ultra-Orthodox Jews.

In recent years, Ariel Atias, an ultra-Orthodox Jew from the religious Shas Party and Netanyahu's housing minister, has pushed for segregation in the housing choices of Israel's Arab population and of secular Jews.

"I see [it] as a national duty to prevent the spread of a population [Arabs] that, to say the least, does not love the state of Israel," Atias told a conference of the Israel Bar Association. "If we go on like we have until now, we will lose the Galilee. Populations that should not mix are spreading there. I don't think that it is appropriate [for them] to live together."

Atias also spoke favorably of aggressive ultra-Orthodox Jews, known as Haredis, who rough up Arabs who get out of line and harass secular Jews, like those who use machinery on the Sabbath or women who dress in ways considered immodest.

In Atias's vision, Israel would be segregated along inter- and intra-religious lines. "I, as an ultra-Orthodox Jew, don't think that religious Jews should have to live in the same neighborhood as secular couples, so as to avoid unnecessary friction," Atias explained.

Diaspora Myth

On Tuesday, with the repeated standing ovations, the U.S. Congress also embraced Netanyahu's presentation of the semi-mythical Zionist claim that European Jews had a right to reclaim the Holy Land because they were expelled by the Romans two millennia ago.

Academic studies have questioned the historical foundation of the so-called Diaspora, challenging the notion of a mass expulsion of Jews and instead tracing

the large Jewish communities of Europe to conversion to Judaism, which in the early centuries of the First Millennium A.D. represented a competing proselytizing religion to Christianity.

For instance, in *When and How Was the Jewish People Invented?*. Israeli scholar Shlomo Sand challenges the Diaspora narrative as largely a myth, denying that the Jews were exiled *en masse* from the Holy Land and asserting that many European Jewish populations converted to the faith centuries later.

Dr. Sand, an expert on European history at the University of Tel Aviv, argues that many of today's Israelis who emigrated from Europe to Israel after World War II have little or no genealogical connection to the land.

According to Sand's historical analysis, they are descendents of European converts, principally from the Kingdom of the Khazars in eastern Russia, who embraced Judaism in the Eighth Century, A.D.

The descendants of the Khazars then were driven from their native lands by invasion and conquest and through migration created the Jewish populations of Eastern Europe, Sand writes. Similarly, he argues that the Jews of Spain came from the conversion of Berber tribes from northern Africa that later migrated into Europe.

Sand, himself a European Jew born in 1946 to Holocaust survivors in Austria, argues that until little more than a century ago, Jews thought of themselves as Jews because they shared a common religion, not because they possessed a direct lineage to the ancient tribes of Israel.

However, at the turn of the 20th Century, Sand asserts, Zionist Jews began assembling a narrative to justify creation of a Jewish state by inventing the idea that Jews existed as a people separate from their religion and that they had primogeniture over the territory that had become known as Palestine.

The Zionists also invented the idea that Jews living in exile were obligated to return to the Promised Land, a concept that had been foreign to Judaism, Sand states.

If Sand's thesis is correct, it would suggest that many of the Palestinian Arabs have a far more substantial claim to the lands of Israel than do many European Jews who arrived there asserting a God-given claim.

Sand theorizes that many Jews, who remained in Judea after Roman legions crushed the last uprising in 136 A.D., eventually converted to Christianity or Islam, meaning that the Palestinians who have been crowded into Gaza or concentrated in the West Bank might be direct descendants of Jews from the Roman era.

Disputing Sand's Thesis

Contrary to what might be expected, leading Israeli academics don't dispute the core point of Sand's argument, that the Diaspora was a myth. Rather, they have focused on disparaging Sand as a scholar whose expertise is primarily in European history.

Israel Bartal, dean of humanities at the Hebrew University, agreed that the Diaspora was a myth, but lashed out at Sand's claim that Zionists intentionally created it.

"Although the myth of an exile from the Jewish homeland (Palestine) does exist in popular Israeli culture, it is negligible in serious Jewish historical discussions," Bartal wrote in the newspaper Haaretz. "Important groups in the Jewish national movement expressed reservations regarding this myth or denied it completely.

"The kind of political intervention Sand is talking about, namely, a deliberate program designed to make Israelis forget the true biological origins of the Jews of Poland and Russia or a directive for the promotion of the story of the Jews' exile from their homeland is pure fantasy."

In other words, Bartal, like some other critics of Sand's book, is not so much disputing Sand's historical claims about the Diaspora or the origins of Eastern European Jews, as he is contesting Sand's notion that Zionists concocted a false history for a cynical political purpose.

Still, there can be little doubt that hard-line Zionists like Netanyahu and Danon exploit the Diaspora myth when addressing American audiences, including the U.S. Congress. In his speech on Tuesday, Netanyahu declared that no one could deny the "4,000-year-old bond between the Jewish people and the Jewish land."

This emotional appeal brought further applause from both Republicans and Democrats. However, Sand's research suggests that the Palestinians, as descendants of the ancient Israelites, have their own historic bond to the land, arguably greater than that of Netanyahu, whose father was born in Poland and settled in Palestine in 1920.

However, on Tuesday, members of Congress were not interested in weighing complex legal and moral questions about who has the stronger territorial claim to the Holy Land. Nor were they thinking about what might be in Israel's or America's long-term interests from finally making the compromises needed for peace.

They were simply eager to demonstrate their unwavering support for Israel, for

personal or political reasons. On the political side, the Republicans want to drive a wedge between influential Jewish-Americans and the Democrats, while the Democrats want to prevent that from happening.

So, the two sides bounced up and down cheering a foreign leader, even as he continued down a course that could lead to disaster for Israel and the Palestinians and as he challenged the policies and prestige of the President of the United States.

[For more on these topics, see Robert Parry's *Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, now available in a two-book set for the discount price of only \$19. For details, [click here.](#)]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at neckdeepbook.com. His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* are also available there. Or go to Amazon.com.

The Gospel According to Dylan

Bob Dylan, the great poet/songwriter, turned 70 this week, prompting remembrances of how his words, music and anti-authoritarian vision helped shape generations of Americans, especially the one that came of age during the Vietnam War in the 1960s, as Gary G. Kohls notes in this guest essay.

By Gary G. Kohls

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The week of Bob Dylan's 70th birthday he was born on May 24, 1941 is being celebrated across the nation, especially in Duluth and Hibbing, Minnesota, where Bob Zimmerman was born and raised.

A four-hour radio documentary was broadcast on Minnesota public radio last weekend, and Democracy Now's "War and Peace Report" on Tuesday was entirely devoted to Dylan's tremendous impact on our culture.

Bob Dylan was the voice of conscience of my era (the 1960s and beyond). He obviously was a poet/prophet who felt an obligation to warn his listeners about the dangers he saw coming.

Just listen closely to his “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” and his calls for peace and justice in his familiar folk anthems “Blowing in the Wind” and “The Times They Are A-Changing”.

He was, as were many other 1960s-era folk-singers in and around the time of the war crimes that were being perpetrated by the U.S. military in Vietnam, an influence in the development of the political thinking of millions, including me; and I’m happy to say that his messages also influenced my children and hopefully also my grandchildren who are coming of age.

I have been trying to introduce them to Dylan’s music, including his powerful plea to always question authority.

Anybody who has studied Dylan’s songs, even from the earliest phases of his 50-year career, has noticed the amazing number of lyrics and themes that relate to the Bible. But one thing that I have noticed is that Dylan uses as many New Testament quotes and themes as he uses from the Hebrew scriptures.

Dylan was raised in the Jewish faith, of course, but I have always been impressed at his knowledge of stories and themes from the New Testament.

Dylan fans are aware of the consternation he elicited from fans concerning his short-lived “born-again Christian” period that started in 1979. He was accused of heresy almost as vociferously as when he went electric in the early 1960s.

But during those few years he wrote dozens of (mostly theologically conservative) Christian-themed songs, which he recorded in three albums, “Slow Train Coming.” “Saved” and “Shot of Love.” Judging from the lyrics in those albums, Dylan understood conservative Christian dogma quite well.

Judging from many of his songs, Dylan was most comfortable with the precepts of progressive Judaism. His deeply-embedded, open-minded concerns about peace, justice, empathy, love, forgiveness, nonviolence and his criticisms of hatred, prejudice, war, militarism, economic oppression, empire and racism were themes that pre-dated – and then post-dated – his born-again period.

He soon became estranged from the more intolerant, punitive and conservative form of Christianity. Dylan then returned to Judaism long enough to explore his Jewish roots and subsequently wrote a powerful affirmation of the nation of Israel with his “Neighborhood Bully.”

I understand that Dylan now belongs to no organized religious group.

But Dylan's progressive political and theological ideals didn't disappear with his "loss of Christian faith." His songs protesting against the insanity of war reflected the pacifism of the original form of Christianity 2,000 years ago and include the anti-war classics "Masters of War" (which he said he wrote as a pacifist song), "With God on Our Side," and "John Brown," all of which he still sings in concerts.

But what I always heard in Dylan's music was his frequent expression of lyrics that seemed to echo Christ-like concern for the down-trodden, the persecuted, the colonized, the impoverished, the war-torn, the hungry, the huddled masses and other victims of the ruthless institutions, tyrants, the wealthy, the war profiteers and other assorted predators of the world.

He spoke out courageously for truth, liberty and freedom, a reality that inspired multitudes of other truth-seekers, healers and selfless peacemakers.

Listen to some of the following lyrics of Dylan and note how similar they are to the gospel (which means "good news") message that Jesus taught, especially Jesus's warnings to help potential victims to defend themselves nonviolently against institutions that perpetrate violence.

The first excerpt below is from "Clean-Cut Kid" a song critical of America's wars and the psychological consequences of engaging in war which helped me, back in 1984, to better understand the American plague called combat-induced Posttraumatic Stress Disorder:

"Everybody wants to know why he couldn't adjust. Adjust to what, a dream that bust?

He was a clean-cut kid but they made a killer out of him. That's what they did.

They said what's up is down, they said what isn't is. They put ideas in his head he thought were his.

He went to church on Sunday; he was a Boy Scout. For his friends he would turn his pockets inside out.

They said, 'Listen boy, you're just a pup' and they sent him to a napalm health spa to shape up.

They gave him dope to smoke, drinks and pills, a Jeep to drive, blood to spill.

They said 'Congratulations, you got what it takes' and they sent him back into the rat race without any brakes.

He bought the American dream but it put him in debt; the only game he could play was Russian roulette.

He drank Coca-Cola, he was eating Wonder Bread, ate Burger Kings; he was well fed. He could've sold insurance, owned a restaurant or bar; could've been an accountant or a tennis star.

He was wearing boxing gloves, took a dive one day off the Golden Gate Bridge into China Bay.

His mama walks the floor, his daddy weeps and moans. They gotta sleep together in a home they don't own.

Well, everybody's asking why he couldn't adjust. All he ever wanted was somebody to trust.

He had a steady job, he joined the choir. He never did plan to walk the high wire.

They took a clean-cut kid and they made a killer out of him, that's what they did."

And Dylan is equally hard on other often hypocritical authoritarian institutions, including the judiciary, the clergy, physicians, lawmakers, racists, anti-Semites, the rich, the fascist-leaning, the militarists, the greedy corporations, the punitive police state agencies such as the Gestapo, the CIA and the FBI, as one would expect of the prophetic peacemaker Jesus.

Read these lyrics for a small sampling of the "Gospel According to Dylan":

"You're a man of the mountains, you can walk on the clouds; Manipulator of crowds, you're a dream twister.

You're going to Sodom and Gomorrah but what do you care? Ain't nobody there would want to marry your sister.

Friend to the martyr, friend to the woman of shame. You look into the fiery furnace, see the rich man without any name.

Well, the Book of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, the law of the jungle and the sea are your only teachers.

Well, the rifleman's stalking the sick and the lame. Preacherman seeks the same, who'll get there first is uncertain.

Nightsticks and water cannons, tear gas, padlocks, Molotov cocktails and rocks behind every curtain. False-hearted judges dying in the webs that they spin. Only a matter of time 'til night comes stepping in." (From "Jokerman" a song about various satanic realities that are all around us.)

"Democracy don't rule the world, you'd better get that through your head. This world is ruled by violence, but I guess that's better left unsaid.

From Broadway to the Milky Way, that's a lot of territory indeed and a man's gonna do what he has to do when he's got a hungry mouth to feed." (From "Union Sundown")

"I saw thousands who could have overcome the darkness. For the love of a lousy buck, I've watched them die." (From "When the Night Comes Falling From the Sky")

"All that foreign oil controlling American soil. Look around you, it's just bound to make you embarrassed. Sheiks walking around like kings, wearing fancy jewels and nose rings. Deciding American's future from Amsterdam and to Paris.

Man's ego's inflated, his laws are outdated, they don't apply no more.

You can't rely no more to be standing around waiting. In the home of the brave, Jefferson turning over in his grave. Fools glorifying themselves, trying to manipulate Satan.

Big-time negotiators, false healers and woman haters. Masters of the bluff and masters of the proposition.

But the enemy I see wears a cloak of decency, all nonbelievers and men stealers talking in the name of religion.

People starving and thirsting, grain elevators are bursting. Oh, you know it costs more to store the food than it does to give it. They say lose your inhibitions, follow your own ambitions.

They talk about a life of brotherly love, show me someone who knows how to live it. There's a slow, slow train coming up around the bend." (From "Slow Train Comin'")

"Counterfeit philosophies have polluted all of your thoughts. Karl Marx has got you by the throat, and Henry Kissinger's got you tied up in knots.

You got innocent men in jail; your insane asylums are filled.

You got unrighteous doctors dealing drugs that'll never cure your ills.

You got men who can't hold their peace and women who can't control their tongues.

The rich seduce the poor and the old are seduced by the young.

Adulterers in churches and pornography in the schools.

You got gangsters in power and lawbreakers making the rules.

Spiritual advisors and gurus to guide you every move.

Instant inner peace and every step you take has got to be approved.

You can't take it with you and you know that it's too worthless to be sold.

They tell you, 'Time is money' as if your life was worth its weight in gold.

When you gonna wake up and strengthen the things that remain." (From "When You Gonna Wake Up?")

"Well you're on your own, you always were in a land of wolves and thieves.

Don't put your hope in ungodly man or be a slave to what somebody else believes." (From "Trust Yourself")

"Oh, ye playboys and playgirls ain't a-gonna run my world. You fallout shelter sellers can't get in my door. Your Jim Crow ground can't turn me around.

The laughter in the lynch mob ain't a-gonna do no more. You insane tongues of war talk ain't a-gonna guide my road.

You red baiters and race haters ain't a-gonna hang around here." (From "Playboys and Playgirls")

"Disillusioned words like bullets bark as human gods aim for their mark .

Made everything from toy guns that spark to flesh-colored Christs that glow in the dark. It's easy to see without looking too far that not much is really sacred.

Old lady judges watch people in pairs limited in sex, they dare to push fake morals, insult and stare while money doesn't talk, it swears. Obscenity, who really cares.

Propaganda, all is phony. (From "It's Alright, Ma, I'm Only Bleeding")

"Now, I'm liberal, but to a degree I want everybody to be free. But if you think that I'll let Barry Goldwater move in next door and marry my daughter you must think I'm crazy! I wouldn't let him do it for all the farms in Cuba." (From "I Shall Be Free No. 10")

"I'm monstrously against the House Un-American Activities Committee and also the CIA; and I beg her please not to ask me why for it would take too long to tell." (From the jacket notes to "Some Other Kinds of Songs")

"And suddenly a middle-aged druggist, up for district attorney, starts screaming at me: you're the one that's been causing all them riots over in Vietnam. Immediately turns to a bunch of people and says if elected, he'll have me electrocuted publicly on the next Fourth of July. I look around and all these people he's talking to are carrying blowtorches." (From the liner notes to "Bringing It All Back Home")

"Half-racked prejudice leaped forth. 'Rip down all hate, I screamed.' Lies that life is black and white spoke from my skull. I dreamed romantic facts of musketeers foundationed deep, somehow. Ah, but I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now. " (From "My Back Pages")

"Man thinks 'cause he rules the earth he can do with it as he please and if things don't change son, he will.

Man has invented his doom; first step was touching the moon.

Now he's hell-bent for destruction, he's afraid and confused, and his brain has been mismanaged with great skill. All he believes are his eyes and his eyes, they just tell him lies.

Now he worships at an altar of a stagnant pool and when he sees his reflection, he's fulfilled.

Oh, man is opposed to fair play; He wants it all and he wants it his way." (From "License to Kill")

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