

THE ANGRY ARAB: Why Ilhan Omar is a Dangerous Woman for the US

Washington doesn't like its Muslims or Arabs to take pride in their heritage or oppose the Israeli occupation, writes As'ad AbuKhalil.

By **As'ad AbuKhalil**

Special to Consortium News



Washington was not expecting the arrival of Reps. Ilhan Omar or Rashida Tlaib. The nation's capital has seen Arabs and Muslims before but they were not like these two new assertive and defiant members of Congress.

The White House, under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, hosted Iftar dinners for Ramadan and invited a variety of Muslims (including of course the Israeli ambassador because he is wildly popular among the world's Muslims), but they were of a different brand. The Bush administration even employed Muslim Arabs or Muslim-born Americans who preached Bush's doctrine to anyone who would listen in the Middle East.

But those were different Arabs. They were the "non-threatening" Arabs who made Westerners feel comfortable in their racism and bigotry. The Arabs who are welcomed in the halls of Congress are usually mimics of the late president of Egypt, Anwar Sadat, and the current king of Jordan. They are the type of Arabs who praise Western wars and downplay Arab anger at the long record of Israeli occupation and aggression.

Some of those Arabs in D.C. are employed as correspondents for Gulf-regime media. Some had even received their training at the research arm of the Israeli lobby, while others work for racist Congress people. They are the kind of Arabs who are paraded before Western audiences to show them that there are Muslim Arabs who are exceptions: the ones who are willing to insult other Arabs and Muslims, and who tell tales about how they were saved from the terrorism of the religion or the culture of the region.

But Minnesota's Ilhan Omar and Michigan's Rashida Tlaib are different. The Muslims whom Washington has been used to receiving from Lebanon or from Gulf embassies are Muslims who are embarrassed about their religion and about their culture. They are the Muslims who apologize day and night for the terrorism of Muslims, as if all Muslims are responsible for the crimes of the few. (The blaming of all Jews for the crimes of Israel is certainly anti-Semitic—just as the blaming of all Muslims for the crimes of the few Muslims is Islamophobic.)

Ilhan Omar, from the second she entered Congress, has made her audience feel uncomfortable, and the press has had a hard time dealing with her.

Acceptable Extremism

Acceptable and subservient Muslims or Arabs are allowed to hold extremist views and to express hatred and hostility to Jewish people as long as they don't offend Israel or Western governments. Anwar Sadat's background as an anti-Semitic Nazi was never an issue for Israel or Western Zionists. In fact, Stuart Eizenstat, Jimmy Carter's domestic policy

advisor, downplays the Nazi sympathy of Sadat and attributes it dismissively to anti-British sentiments, in his recent book, "President Carter."

And when Mahmoud Abbas, the president of Palestine, agreed after the assassination of Yasser Arafat to serve Israeli occupation interests, his anti-Semitic past (his PhD dissertation in Moscow contained Holocaust denial) was also forgiven. The Saudi regime, the largest-by far-purveyor of anti-Semitic propaganda among Muslims in the last century is also forgiven.

It is not about anti-Semitism, as evidenced by Israeli alliances with evangelical Christians and European far-right groups. Zionists object to anti-Semitism—real or concocted as is the case with Omar—when there is criticism of Israel and calls for boycott, divestment and sanctions on Israel, or BDS.

Ilhan Omar also doesn't look the part. Westerners prefer whiskey-drinking Muslims who are willing to mock fellow Muslims, and who are willing to denigrate Palestinian political aspirations for the amusement of the Zionist think-tank crowd in D.C.

And what is rarely mentioned about Ilhan Omar is that she wears the veil. At least in France, where Islamophobia has become the national secular religion of the republic, the hostility to the veil has become unmasked at all points of the political spectrum, left, right and center.

Hostility to the veil has been less vocally expressed in D.C. (veiled Muslim women have numerous stories of harassment and abuse to tell). But Congress had to change

its rules to allow Omar to wear the veil under its roof, even though exceptions to the longstanding hat ban had reportedly been made for the wearing of yarmulkes.

It would have been less irksome for Omar's haters if she did not wear the veil. Westerners prefer Muslims to be atheists or non-practicing Muslims. (In the second teaching position I held at Tufts University, the most senior member of the department of political science once rushed to my office and asked me hurriedly: "You are not Muslim, are you?" I said: "Well, I am from a Muslim family but I am personally an atheist." He said: "Oh, that is good," and left.)

Unacceptable Candor

And Omar speaks in a refreshingly candid language that does not stick to the rhetorical clichés of D.C. politicians.

By contrast, New York's Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has learned to censor herself. Ever since she was attacked for previous remarks she had made about Palestinians, Ocasio-Cortez has resorted to speaking in the vague generalities that U.S. diplomats also use to avoid the wrath of Israel and its supporters. She no longer seems to even utter the word Palestine. She has become too aware of the price to be paid.

Omar and Rashida Tlaib have also supported BDS, which is the biggest sin, as far as Israel and AIPAC are concerned. The U.S. has made it very clear that BDS has emerged as the second danger to Israel after the threat of military resistance to Israeli occupation and aggression.

The endorsement of BDS by two members of Congress bestows

official legitimacy on a movement that Israel has been desperately trying to paint as an anti-Semitic reincarnation of Nazism. But this has been the history of Israeli propaganda: all enemies of Israel, communists, Arab nationalists, Palestinian nationalists, rightists, leftists, have been labeled as anti-Semitic. Even the secular Arab nationalist leader, the late Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, was accused of anti-Semitism by Israel when none of his speeches ever contained an anti-Semitic word.

And now, the U.S. Congress, which sat silent about the wave of Islamophobia unleashed during and after the Trump campaign, suddenly sees the need to issue a proclamation against religious bigotry and racism.

It is a bitter irony that the U.S. Congress has, for the first time, condemned Islamophobia in a statement widely understood to be an attempt to discipline the first Muslim American female member of Congress. The resolution had nothing to do with ostensible congressional outrage against Islamophobia. (Since Sept. 11, many members of Congress have become vocal anti-Islam bigots, as is U.S. President Donald Trump, who advocated a ban on all Muslim visitors to the country). The reference to Islamophobia was added to appease those new progressive members of Congress and the African American members who protested against a very selective standard of outrage.

Weeks after Omar's election to Congress, the Zionist lobby succeeded in turning her into a caricature. They inserted the word "Jewish" every time she spoke against support for Israel (she did not once refer to Jews in her discourse about Israel and its supporters).

The word “trope” is now a convenient tool to turn someone’s criticisms of Israel into grotesque anti-Semitic hatred. Even the progressive Michele Goldberg, one of the few refreshingly courageous columnists in *The New York Times*, insisted that Omar resorted to anti-Semitic “tropes.”

The Israeli lobby and the government want to send a clear message through the mistreatment and abuse of Ilhan Omar: that progressive members of Congress, especially if they are Muslim Arab women of color, won’t be allowed to express their views on Israel without mobilizing the entire AIPAC machinery in Congress against them.

Ilhan Omar is indeed dangerous. She has broken taboos, along with her colleague Rashida Tlaib. She is dangerous to the hegemony imposed on the nation’s capital by the supporters of Israel (and evangelical Christian, not Jews, are now the most fanatical Zionists in U.S. politics). Because Omar is seen as dangerous, the abuse won’t end. It has just started.

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Is War With Iran on the Horizon?

Despite growing Trump administration tensions with Venezuela and even with North Korea, Iran is the likeliest spot for Washington's next shooting war, says Bob Dreyfuss for TomDispatch.

The Trump Administration is Reckless Enough to Turn the Cold War With Iran Into a Hot One

By **Bob Dreyfuss**

TomDispatch.com



Here's the foreign policy question of questions in 2019: Are President Donald Trump, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, all severely weakened at home and with few allies abroad, reckless enough to set off a war with Iran?

Could military actions designed to be limited – say, a heightening of the Israeli bombing of Iranian forces inside Syria, or possible U.S. cross-border attacks from Iraq, or a clash between American and Iranian naval ships in the Persian Gulf – trigger a wider war?

Worryingly, the answers are: yes and yes. Even though Western Europe has lined up in opposition to any future conflict with Iran, even though Russia and China would rail against it, even though

most Washington foreign policy experts would be horrified by the outbreak of such a war, it could happen.

Despite growing Trump administration tensions with Venezuela and even with North Korea, Iran is the likeliest spot for Washington's next shooting war. Years of politically charged anti-Iranian vituperation might blow up in the faces of President Trump and his two most hawkish aides, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Advisor John Bolton, setting off a conflict with potentially catastrophic implications.

Such a war could quickly spread across much of the Middle East, not just to Saudi Arabia and Israel, the region's two major anti-Iranian powers, but Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and the various Persian Gulf states. It might indeed be, as Iranian President Hassan Rouhani suggested last year (unconsciously echoing Iran's former enemy, Iraqi ruler Saddam Hussein) the "mother of all wars."

With Bolton and Pompeo, both well-known Iranophobes, in the driver's seat, few restraints remain on President Trump when it comes to that country. White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster, and Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, President Trump's former favorite generals who had urged caution, are no longer around. And though the Democratic National Committee passed a resolution last month calling for the United States to return to the nuclear agreement that President Obama signed, there are still a significant number of congressional Democrats who believe that Iran is a major threat to U.S. interests in the region.

During the Obama years, it was *de rigueur* for Democrats to support the president's conclusion that Iran was a prime state sponsor of terrorism and should be treated accordingly. And the congressional Democrats now leading the party on foreign policy – Eliot Engel, who currently chairs the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and Bob Menendez and Ben Cardin, the two ranking Democrats on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee – were opponents of the 2015 nuclear

accord (though all three now claim to have changed their minds).

Deadly Flashpoints for a Future War

On the roller coaster ride that is Donald Trump's foreign policy, it's hard to discern what's real and what isn't, what's rhetoric and what's not. When it comes to Iran, it's reasonable to assume that Trump, Bolton, and Pompeo aren't planning an updated version of the unilateral invasion of Iraq that President George W. Bush launched in the spring of 2003.

Yet by openly calling for the toppling of the government in Tehran, by withdrawing from the Iran nuclear agreement and reimposing onerous sanctions to cripple that country's economy, by encouraging Iranians to rise up in revolt, by overtly supporting various exile groups (and perhaps covertly even terrorists), and by joining with Israel and Saudi Arabia in an informal anti-Iranian alliance, the three of them are clearly attempting to force the collapse of the Iranian regime, which just celebrated the 40th anniversary of the 1979 Islamic revolution.

There are three potential flashpoints where limited skirmishes, were they to break out, could quickly escalate into a major shooting war.

The first is in Syria and Lebanon. Iran is deeply involved in defending Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (who only recently returned from a visit to Tehran) and closely allied with Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shiite political party with a potent paramilitary arm. Weeks ago, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu openly boasted that his country's air force had successfully taken out Iranian targets in Syria. In fact, little noticed here, dozens of such strikes have taken place for more than a year, with mounting Iranian casualties.

Until now, the Iranian leadership has avoided a direct response that would heighten the confrontation with Israel, just as it has avoided unleashing Hezbollah, a well-armed, battle-tested proxy force. That could, however, change if the hardliners in Iran

decided to retaliate. Should this simmering conflict explode, does anyone doubt that President Trump would soon join the fray on Israel's side or that congressional Democrats would quickly succumb to the administration's calls to back the Jewish state?

Next, consider Iraq as a possible flashpoint for conflict. In February, a blustery Trump told CBS's *Face the Nation* that he intends to keep U.S. forces in Iraq "because I want to be looking a little bit at Iran because Iran is the real problem." His comments did not exactly go over well with the Iraqi political class, since many of that country's parties and militias are backed by Iran.

Trump's declaration followed a *Wall Street Journal* report late last year that Bolton had asked the Pentagon – over the opposition of various generals and then-Secretary of Defense Mattis – to prepare options for "retaliatory strikes" against Iran. This roughly coincided with a couple of small rocket attacks against Baghdad's fortified Green Zone and the airport in Basra, Iraq's Persian Gulf port city, neither of which caused any casualties.

Writing in Foreign Affairs, however, Pompeo blamed Iran for the attacks, which he called "life-threatening," adding, "Iran did not stop these attacks, which were carried out by proxies it has supported with funding, training, and weapons." No "retaliatory strikes" were launched, but plans do undoubtedly now exist for them and it's not hard to imagine Bolton and Pompeo persuading Trump to go ahead and use them – with incalculable consequences.

Finally, there's the Persian Gulf itself. Ever since the George W. Bush years, the U.S. Navy has worried about possible clashes with Iran's naval forces in those waters and there have been a number of high-profile incidents. The Obama administration tried (but failed) to establish a hotline of sorts that would have linked U.S. and Iranian naval commanders and so make it easier to defuse any such incident, an initiative championed by then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Mike Mullen, a longtime opponent of war with Iran.

Under Trump, however, all bets are off. Last year, he requested that Mattis prepare plans to blow up Iran's "fast boats," small gunboats in the Gulf, reportedly asking, "Why don't we sink them?" He's already reinforced the U.S. naval presence there, getting Iran's attention. Not surprisingly, the Iranian leadership has responded in kind. Earlier this year, President Hassan Rouhani announced that his country had developed submarines capable of launching cruise missiles against naval targets. The Iranians also began a series of Persian Gulf war games and, in late February, test fired one of those sub-launched missiles.

Add in one more thing: in an eerie replay of a key argument George Bush and Dick Cheney used for going to war with Iraq in 2003, in mid-February the right-wing media outlet *Washington Times* ran an "exclusive" report with this headline: "Iran-Al Qaeda Alliance may provide legal rationale for U.S. military strikes."

Back in 2002, the Office of Special Plans at Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's Pentagon, under the supervision of neoconservatives Paul Wolfowitz and Douglas Feith, spent months trying to prove that al-Qaeda and Iraq were in league. *The Washington Times* piece, citing Trump administration sources, made a similar claim – that Iran is now aiding and abetting al-Qaeda with a "clandestine sanctuary to funnel fighters, money, and weapons across the Middle East."

It added that the administration is seeking to use this information to establish "a potential legal justification for military strikes against Iran or its proxies." Needless to say, few are the terrorism experts or Iran specialists who would agree that Iran has anything like an active relationship with al-Qaeda.

Will the Hardliners Triumph in Iran as in Washington?

The Trump administration is, in fact, experiencing increasing difficulty finding allies ready to join a new Coalition of the Willing to confront Iran. The only two charter members so far,

Israel and Saudi Arabia, are, however, enthusiastic indeed. Last month, Prime Minister Netanyahu was heard remarking that Israel and its Arab allies want war with Iran.

At a less-than-successful mid-February summit meeting Washington organized in Warsaw, Poland, to recruit world leaders for a future crusade against Iran, Netanyahu was heard to say in Hebrew: "This is an open meeting with representatives of leading Arab countries that are sitting down together with Israel in order to advance the common interest of war with Iran." (He later insisted that the correct translation should have been "combating Iran," but the damage had already been done.)

That Warsaw summit was explicitly designed to build an anti-Iranian coalition, but many of America's allies, staunchly opposing Trump's decision to pull out of the Iran nuclear accord, would have nothing to do with it. In an effort to mollify the Europeans in particular, the United States and Poland awkwardly renamed it: "The Ministerial to Promote a Future of Peace and Security in the Middle East."

The name change, however, fooled no one. As a result, Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Pompeo were embarrassed by a series of no-shows: the French, the Germans, and the European Union, among others, flatly declined to send ministerial-level representatives, letting their ambassadors in Warsaw stand in for them. The many Arab nations not in thrall to Saudi Arabia similarly sent only low-level delegations. Turkey and Russia boycotted altogether, convening a summit of their own in which Presidents Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan met with Iran's Rouhani.

Never the smoothest diplomat, Pence condemned, insulted, and vilified the Europeans for refusing to go along with Washington's wrecking-ball approach. He began his speech to the conference by saying: "The time has come for our European partners to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal." He then launched a direct attack on Europe's efforts to preserve that accord by seeking a way around

the sanctions Washington had re-imposed: “Sadly, some of our leading European partners... have led the effort to create mechanisms to break up our sanctions. We call it an effort to break American sanctions against Iran’s murderous revolutionary regime.”

That blast at the European allies should certainly have brought to mind Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld’s disparaging comments in early 2003 about Germany and France, in particular, being leaders of the “old Europe.” Few allies then backed Washington’s invasion plans, which, of course, didn’t prevent war. Europe’s reluctance now isn’t likely to prove much of a deterrent either.

But Pence is right that the Europeans have taken steps to salvage the Iran nuclear deal, otherwise known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In particular, they’ve created a “special purpose vehicle” known as INSTEX (Instrument for Supporting Trade Exchanges) designed “to support legitimate trade with Iran,” according to a statement from the foreign ministers of Germany, France, and Great Britain. It’s potentially a big deal and, as Pence noted, explicitly designed to circumvent the sanctions Washington imposed on Iran after Trump’s break with the JCPOA.

INSTEX has a political purpose, too. The American withdrawal from the JCPOA was a body blow to President Rouhani, Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, and other centrists in Tehran who had taken credit for, and pride in, the deal between Iran and the six world powers (the United States, France, Germany, Britain, Russia, and China) that signed the agreement. That deal had been welcomed in Iran in part because it seemed to ensure that country’s ability to expand its trade to the rest of the world, including its oil exports, free of sanctions.

Even before Trump abandoned the deal, however, Iran was already finding U.S. pressure overwhelming and, for the average Iranian, things hadn’t improved in any significant way. Worse yet, in the past year the economy had taken a nosedive, the currency had plunged, inflation was running rampant, and strikes and street

demonstrations had broken out, challenging the government and its clerical leadership. Chants of “Death to the Dictator!” – not heard since the Green Movement’s revolt against President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s reelection in 2009 – once again resounded in street demonstrations.

At the end of February, it seemed as if Trump, Bolton, and Pompeo had scored a dangerous victory when Zarif, Iran’s well-known, Western-oriented foreign minister, announced his resignation. Moderates who supported the JCPOA, including Rouhani and Zarif, have been under attack from the country’s hardliners since Trump’s pullout. As a result, Zarif’s decision was widely assumed to be a worrisome sign that those hardliners had claimed their first victim.

There was even unfounded speculation that, without Zarif, who had worked tirelessly with the Europeans to preserve what was left of the nuclear pact, Iran itself might abandon the accord and resume its nuclear program. And there’s no question that the actions and statements of Bolton, Pompeo, and crew have undermined Iran’s moderates, while emboldening its hardliners, who are making I-told-you-so arguments to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the country’s supreme leader.

Despite the internal pressure on Zarif, however, his resignation proved short-lived indeed: Rouhani rejected it, and there was an upsurge of support for him in Iran’s parliament. Even General Qassem Soleimani, a major figure in that country’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the commander of the Quds Force, backed him.

As it happens, the Quds Force, an arm of the IRGC, is responsible for Iran’s paramilitary and foreign intelligence operations throughout the region, but especially in Iraq and Syria. That role has allowed Soleimani to assume responsibility for much of Iran’s foreign policy in the region, making him a formidable rival to Zarif – a tension that undoubtedly contributed to his brief

resignation and it isn't likely to dissipate anytime soon.

According to [analysts](#) and [commentators](#), it appears to have been a ploy by Zarif (and perhaps Rouhani, too) to win a vote of political confidence and it appears to have strengthened their hand for the time being.

Still, the Zarif resignation crisis threw into stark relief the deep tensions within Iranian politics and raised a key question: As the Trump administration accelerates its efforts to seek a confrontation, will they find an echo among Iranian hardliners who'd like nothing more than a face-off with the United States?

Maybe that's exactly what Bolton and Pompeo want. If so, prepare yourself: another American war unlikely to work out the way anyone in Washington dreams is on the horizon.

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Labour's Fight Over Israel Long Time in Coming

The party is being dragged into the modern world by Corbyn's anti-racist leadership towards Palestinians, writes Jonathan Cook.

By [JonathanCook](#)

[Jonathan-Cook.net](#)



An announcement this week by the Jewish Labour Movement that it is considering splitting from the British Labour Party could not have come at a worse moment for Jeremy Corbyn. The Labour leader is already besieged by claims that he is presiding over a party that has become “institutionally anti-Semitic.”

The threats by the JLM should be seen as part of concerted efforts to oust Corbyn from the leadership. They follow on the heels of a decision by a handful of Labour MPs last month to set up a new faction called the Independent Group. They, too, cited anti-Semitism as a major reason for leaving.

On the defensive, Corbyn was prompted to write to the JLM [expressing](#) his and the shadow cabinet’s “very strong desire for you to remain a part of our movement”. More than 100 Labour MPs, including members of the front bench, similarly pleaded with the JLM not to disaffiliate. They apologized for “toxic racism” in the party and for “letting our Jewish supporters and members down.”

Their letter noted that the JLM is “the legitimate and long-standing representative of Jews in the Labour party” and added that the MPs recognized the importance of “calling out those who seek to make solidarity with our Jewish comrades a test of foreign policy.”

That appeared to be a swipe at Corbyn himself, who is the first leader of a British political party to prioritize Palestinian rights over the U.K.’s ties to an Israeli state that has been oppressing Palestinians for decades.

Just this week the Labour leader renewed his call for Britain to halt arms sales to Israel following a UN report that said the Israeli army's shooting of Palestinian protesters in Gaza's Great March of Return could amount to war crimes.

Evidence Ignored

Despite the media attention, all the evidence suggests that Labour does not have a problem of "institutional anti-Semitism," or even a problem of anti-Semitism above the marginal racism towards Jews found in the wider British population. Figures show only 0.08 percent of Labour members have been disciplined for anti-Semitism.

Also largely ignored by the British media, and Corbyn's opponents, is the fact that a growing number of Jews are publicly coming out in support for him and discounting the claims of an "endemic" anti-Semitism problem.

Some 200 prominent Jews signed a letter to *The Guardian* newspaper calling Corbyn "a crucial ally in the fight against bigotry and reaction. His lifetime record of campaigning for equality and human rights, including consistent support for initiatives against antisemitism, is formidable."

At the same time, a new organization, Jewish Voice for Labour, has been established to underscore that there are progressive Jews who welcome Corbyn's leadership.

In the current hysterical climate, however, no one seems interested in the evidence or these dissenting voices. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that Corbyn and his

supporters are on the back foot as they face losing from Labour an affiliate group of 2,000 members who represent a section of the UK's Jewish community.

But paradoxically, the loss of the JLM may be inevitable if Labour is serious about becoming a party that opposes racism in all its forms, because the JLM has proved it is incapable of meeting that simple standard.

While the Labour Party has been dragged into an increasingly fractious debate about whether anti-Zionism – opposition to Israel as a Jewish state – equates to anti-Semitism, everyone has been distracted from the elephant in the room. In fact, it is political Zionism, at least in the hardline form adopted by groups such as the JLM, that is racism – towards Palestinians.

Zionism, we should recall, required the ethnic cleansing of 750,000 Palestinians to engineer a “Jewish state” on the ruins of Palestinians’ homeland. It fueled Israel’s hunger for an enlarged territory that led to it occupying the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, and further dispossessing the Palestinians through illegal settlement building.

Zionism has made it impossible for any Israeli government to offer meaningful concessions to Palestinians on statehood to create the conditions necessary for peace. It has justified policies that view “mixing between the races” – between Jews and Palestinians – as dangerous “miscegenation” and “assimilation.”

Furthermore, Zionism has kept Israel’s Palestinian citizens a segregated minority, hemmed up in their own ghettoized communities, denied rights to almost all land in Israel, and

corralled into their own separate and massively inferior school system.

Efforts to Oust Corbyn

All of these policies were instituted by Israel's Labor Party, the sister organization of the JLM in Britain. The JLM not only refuses to oppose these policies, but effectively shields Israel from criticism about them from within Britain's Labour Party.

The JLM has remained mute on the structural violence of Israel's occupying army, and the systematic racism – encoded in Israel's laws – towards the fifth of its population who are Palestinian citizens.

Meanwhile, the JLM's mother body, the World Zionist Organization, has a division that – to this day – finances the establishment and expansion of settlements in the West Bank, in violation of international law.

Added to this, an *Al Jazeera* undercover documentary broadcast in 2017 showed that the JLM was covertly working with an Israeli government official, Shai Masot, to damage Corbyn because of his pro-Palestinian positions.

Israel, remember, has for the last decade equated to the ultra-nationalist government of Benjamin Netanyahu. His coalition allies seek not a two-state solution, but the takeover of most of the occupied territories and ultimately their annexation, again in violation of international law.

Ella Rose was appointed director of the JLM in 2016, straight from a post at the Israeli embassy.

Relic of Old Politics

Times – and politics – move on. The JLM is a relic of a period when it was possible to claim to be anti-racist while turning a blind eye to the oppression of the Palestinian people. Social media and Palestinians armed with camera phones – not just Corbyn – have made that evasion no longer possible.

Labour giving pride of place to groups such as the JLM or Labour Friends of Israel – to which 80 of its MPs proudly belong – is, in the current circumstances, as obscene as it would have been 40 years ago for British parties to host their own Friends of South Africa groups.

The Labour Party bureaucracy is being dragged, kicking and screaming, into the modern world by its members, who have felt liberated by Corbyn's leadership and his history of supporting all kinds of anti-racism struggles, including the Palestinian one.

While Britain has major and pressing issues to tackle, from dealing with its exit from Europe to imminent climate collapse, Labour's energies have been sidetracked into a civil war about Israel, of all things.

The old guard want to be allowed to support Israel, even as it heads towards full-blown fascism, while much of the membership want to dissociate from what looks increasingly like another apartheid state – and one whose leaders are seeking to stoke conflict across a volatile region.

Redefining anti-Semitism

Israel's most ardent supporters, and Corbyn's enemies, in Labour will play dirty to protect Israel and their own role from scrutiny, as they have been doing all along.

The JLM led moves last year intended to divide the party by insisting that Labour redefine anti-Semitism to include criticism of Israel.

Rumblings of dissatisfaction from the JLM will be cited as further evidence of the membership's anti-Semitism, because that is the most powerful weapon they have to silence criticism of Israel and deflect attention away from their role in shielding Israel from proper scrutiny within Labour.

Politics is about choices and values. Labour has for many decades sided exclusively with Israel and ignored the rights of Palestinians.

In 1944 – four years before Israel's creation – Labour's annual conference recommended that the natives of Palestine, a large majority population, be ethnically cleansed to advance the goals of European Zionists colonizing their land. The resolution declared: "Let the Arabs be encouraged to move out, as the Jews move in."

That is exactly what Israel did by expelling 750,000 Palestinians, more than 80 percent of the Palestinian population, in events we now call the Nakba (Catastrophe).

For decades after Israel's creation, Labour Party members happily travelled to Israel to toil in agricultural communes, such as the kibbutz, that were built on stolen Palestinian land and which, to this day, refuse to allow any

of the country's 1.7 million Palestinian citizens to live in them.

In a speech in 1972, after Israel seized yet more Palestinian lands, including East Jerusalem, Labour leader Harold Wilson urged Israel to hold on to these conquered territories: "Israel's reaction is natural and proper in refusing to accept the Palestinians as a nation."

This is the dark, dishonorable underbelly of Labour racism, and the party's decades-long support for colonialism in the Middle East.

Labour created a hierarchy of racisms, in which concern about hatred towards Jews enjoyed star billing while racism towards some other groups, most especially Palestinians, barely registered.

Under Corbyn and a much-expanded membership, these prejudices are being challenged in public for the first time – and that is justifiably making the party an "unsafe" space for groups such as the JLM and Labour Friends of Israel, which hang on to outdated, hardline Zionist positions.

The JLM's claim to speak for all Jews in Labour has been challenged by anti-racist Jews like those of the Jewish Voice for Labour. Their efforts to defend Corbyn and Labour's record have been widely ignored by the media or, encouraged by JLM, dismissed as "downplaying" anti-Semitism.

The JLM's discomfort may be unfortunate, but it cannot be avoided. It is the price to be paid for the continuing battle by progressives to advance universal rights and defeat racism. This battle has been waged since the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights was published in 1948 – paradoxically, the year Israel was established by violating the core principles of that declaration.

Israel's racism towards Palestinians has been indulged by Labour for too long. Now history is catching up with Israel, and with groups such as the JLM.

Labour MPs have a choice. They can stand on the wrong side of history or they can recognize that it is time to fully enter the modern era – and that means embracing a program of anti-racism that encompasses everyone, including Jews and Palestinians.

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Anti-Semitism vs. Anti-Zionism in France

Lawrence Davidson dismantles Macron's equation of apples and oranges.

By [Lawrence Davidson](#)

TothePointAnalysis.com



We are at a new stage of the fight to realize Palestinian rights and free both Palestinians and Jews from the consequences of Zionist racism.

There was a time when very few in the West understood the racist nature of the Israeli state. For a long time, the Zionists controlled the public relations message and most people took as fact the fictional account

of Israel's founding—such as the one given in Leon Uris's book "Exodus."

After the 1967 war, and Israel's decision to keep even more conquered Palestinian territory, things began to change. Of course, Israel had always been a racist place designed for one group alone. But now the contradictions created by post-war occupation made, and continue to make, that fact harder to hide, and the mythical picture of Israel as a grand democratic experiment has eroded. Increasingly the real, illiberal Israel has become apparent to Western audiences, and particularly to an increasing number of Jews. As a result, Israel has largely lost the public relations battle at the popular level of Western society.

However, the winning of this battle is not to be equated with the winning of the fight mentioned above. The Zionists are still able to maintain Western financial and military support of Israel at obscene levels despite Israel's revealed apartheid nature.

Tactical Shift

To combat the popular criticism to which Israel is now subject, the Zionists have shifted tactics. They have abandoned popular debate and now use their influence with the West's ruling elites to simply criminalize any rhetoric that points out the real discriminatory nature of the Zionist state. The gambit here is to have such criticism legally equated with anti-Semitism.

Last month, on Feb. 20, Emmanuel Macron, the president of the French Republic, addressed the Conseil Représentatif des Institutions Juives de France (CRIF)—the Representative

Council of French Jewish Institutions. Macron's topic was the country's "resurgence of anti-Semitism."

Indeed, there has been a rise in anti-Semitic incidents in France over the last couple of decades. Significantly, Macron did not attempt to analyze why this was happening. For instance, while asserting that anti-Semites "are not worthy of the Republic," he did not take note of the historical fact that anti-Semitism has been a major force in France for hundreds of years and through multiple French forms of government. Historically it has ebbed and flowed.

We can trace this trend back to medieval France and the absolutist Catholic culture of that time. While ultimately revolutionary 18th century France (a markedly anti-clerical period) was the first European country to emancipate Jews, anti-Semitism never disappeared. It again became particularly virulent in France during the Dreyfus Affair in the 1890s and under the Nazi-allied Vichy regime in the 1940s. Thus, the presence in today's France of traditional anti-Semites, those who are prejudiced against Jews qua Jews, should come as no surprise.

The latest outbreak of hostility involving Jews in France is the product of modern historical factors that more than one Paris government has failed to confront. This failure has increased resentment against some French Jews—particularly those who are Zionists. Yet it is important to note that much of this sort of emotion is not a function of anti-Semitism.

For instance, the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* has noted that "anti-Semitism" is now "often surfacing among radicalized

Muslims” in France. While we can take issue with the notion of “radicalized” Muslims and the description of their sentiments as “anti-Semitism,” we will address the assertion of hostility and ask why should this be so.

It may be because France has treated its citizens of Arab origin very poorly while simultaneously and publicly supporting Israel, which, of course, treats its own Arab population even worse.

France has a long imperial and colonial history in the Arab world and fought a bitter, relatively recent war to hold onto Algeria. When, in 1962, it finally abandoned that effort, there were 150,000 Algerian Arabs who had fought with the French. They were disarmed and then abandoned to their fate—prevented from emigrating to France by the government of that day. However, “through the kindness of individual French commanders ... several thousand were illegally smuggled to France where on arrival they were confined to primitive rural camps.”

When they were finally let out of the camps, they continued to be segregated and discriminated against. This prevailing prejudice was maintained in the treatment of other African and Middle Eastern immigrants who subsequently made their way to France. One ongoing sign of this can be found in the culture war against Muslims living in the country. Muslim dress, and even halal food, have been deemed dangerous to traditional French culture. The anger of the French Arab population stems from this continuous discrimination, but why would some of it be directed against a portion of France’s Jewish citizens?

The Israeli Connection

It may well be because more and more French Arabs, angry over their discriminatory treatment by French society, increasingly identify with Palestinians, who are also discriminated against by Israeli society. And, they are encouraged in this identification by the fact that, except for a brief period under the leadership of Charles De Gaulle, France has been a strong supporter of Israel.

This is a tradition that Macron accentuated in his address to the CRIF. He told his audience that he will make anti-Zionism the equivalent of anti-Semitism under French law. Macron justifies this move by claiming that “anti-Zionism is one of the modern forms of anti-Semitism.”

What Macron is saying is that in France you cannot speak out against the ideological basis for Israeli racism. If you do so, you yourself will be judged a racist and a criminal. Just how unreasonable this is is elegantly explained in an “open letter” to Macron by the Israeli historian Shlomo Sand, posted on Feb. 8 in the publication *Jacobin*.

In his letter Sand points out that Zionist Israel is not a republic on the Western model, and certainly not a democracy. It is a “Jewish communalist state.” That is why Sand cannot be a Zionist, because “I am a citizen who desires that the state he lives in should be an Israeli republic, and not a Jewish-communalist state. ... I do not want to live in a state that, according to its own self-definition, makes me a privileged class of citizen.”

Sand goes on to explain that “the Israeli Interior Ministry counts 75 percent of the country’s citizens as Jewish, 21

percent as Arab Muslims and Christians, and 4 percent as 'others' (sic). Yet according to the spirit of its laws, Israel does not belong to Israelis as a whole, whereas it does belong even to all those Jews worldwide who have no intention of coming to live there."

Under these circumstances, one cannot be someone who takes republican and democratic principles seriously and still be a Zionist. So Sand has made his choice: he wants to replace Zionist Israel with "an Israeli republic." Then he asks,

"Mr. President, do you think that that makes me an antisemite?"

Apparently Macron is oblivious to the logic of Shlomo Sand. Perhaps this is because, at this moment, illogic serves his political purposes much better. And so, in Macron's France apples become oranges. That is, anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism become the same.

Why is this illogical? It is so because anti-Semitism is directed against Jewish people no matter where they are found and based on nothing other than their religion/ethnicity. On the other hand, anti-Zionism is opposition to a specific political doctrine based on its racist nature and practice in the state of Israel. It is not just many French Arabs who understand this. Many French Jews themselves are anti-Zionist. At the same time, French anti-Semites, who probably dream of an exclusive French "communalist state," want to see all French Jews pack up and move to Israel. This puts these anti-Semites on the same team as avid Zionists.

And what about the French Jews who are anti-Zionist? Macron

is putting these Jewish citizens in a position where they can be legally accused of anti-Semitism. As French journalist Dominique Vidal described the situation to FRANCE 24: “if we consider opposition to Theodore Herzl’s theory as anti-Semitic, then we’re saying that the millions of Jews who do not wish to live in Palestine and the occupied territories are anti-Semites. ... It’s historical illiteracy, or worse, stupidity.”

No Shlomo Sand

Macron is not stupid, but neither is he a principled democratic republican like Shlomo Sand. He knows that if, as his party spokesman now puts it, “denying the existence of Israel [that is, Israel as a Jewish state] ... has to be made a criminal offense,” you are making it illegal to stand with the Palestinians and against the racist nature inherent in a religious and ethnically exclusive state. Macron is using the law to silence popular opposition to Israel. Also, in this way the hostility of French Arabs to Zionist French Jews becomes criminal.

This is exactly the current Israeli strategy in response to having lost the public debate over the true nature of the Zionist project in Palestine—criminalize the arguments of your critics.

No French national leader would support such an anti-democratic strategy unless he or she is a political opportunist who is currying the favor of a politically powerful lobby. In the case of Emmanuel Macron, this is also a maneuver to label his opponents (perhaps France’s Muslims

as well as all those protesting “yellow vests”) as anti-Semites.

No French leader would ally with the Zionists in this effort unless they have no problem with corrupting the logic of the law by demanding that apples legally become oranges. And, no French leader would act in this way unless they have little or no interest in dealing with France’s real racial problems by seeking real answers.

It is this last fact that, in the long run, is most dangerous for French culture and politics. As we have seen, anti-Semitism is nothing new in France. It is embedded in a certain French self-image that is, in the end, reluctant to allow entry to anyone not deemed truly French, be they Muslims or Jews. Unless French leaders are willing to challenge this cultural puritanism, they will find anti-Semitism, and other forms of xenophobic passions, poisoning their national life for the indefinite future.

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‘Rule of the Rabbis’ Fuels Holy War in Israel

Palestinians, the secular and women all face a harsher environment as theocratic tendencies are entrenched, writes

Jonathan Cook.

By **JonathanCook**

Jonathan-Cook.net



In which country did a senior, state-salaried cleric urge his followers last month to become "warriors," emulating a group of young men who had murdered a woman of another faith?

The cleric did so with impunity. In fact, he was only echoing other highly placed colleagues who have endorsed a book – again without penalty – urging their disciples to murder babies belonging to other religions.

Where can the head of the clergy call black people "monkeys" and urge the expulsion of other religious communities?

Where does a clerical elite wield so much power that they alone decide who can marry or get divorced – and are backed by a law that can jail someone who tries to wed without their approval? They can even shut down the national railway system without notice.

Where are these holy men so feared that women are scrubbed from billboards, college campuses introduce gender segregation to appease them, and women find themselves literally pushed to the back of the bus?

Is the country Saudi Arabia? Or Myanmar? Or perhaps, Iran?

No. It is Israel, the world's only self-declared Jewish state.

'Shared Values'

There is barely a politician in Washington seeking election who has not at some point declared an "unbreakable bond" between the United States and Israel, or claimed the two uphold "shared values." Few, it seems, have any idea what values Israel really represents.

There are many grounds for criticizing Israel, including its brutal oppression of Palestinians under occupation and its system of institutionalized segregation and discrimination against the fifth of its population who are not Jewish – its Palestinian minority.

But largely ignored by critics have been Israel's increasing theocratic tendencies.

This hasn't simply proved regressive for Israel's Jewish population, especially women, as the rabbis exert ever greater control over the lives of religious and secular Jews alike.

It also has alarming implications for Palestinians, both under occupation and those living in Israel, as a national conflict with familiar colonial origins is gradually transformed into a holy war, fuelled by extremist rabbis with the state's implicit blessing.

Control of Personal Status

Despite Israel's founding fathers being avowedly secular, the separation between church and state in Israel has always been flimsy at best – and it is now breaking down at an ever-accelerating rate.

After Israel's establishment, David Ben Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, decided to subordinate important areas of life for Israeli Jews to the jurisdiction of an Orthodox rabbinate, representing the strictest, most traditional and conservative stream of Judaism. Other, more liberal streams have no official standing in Israel to this day.

Ben Gurion's decision in part reflected a desire to ensure his new state embraced two differing conceptions of Jewishness: both those who identified as Jews in a secular ethnic or cultural sense, and those who maintained the religious traditions of Judaism. He hoped to fuse the two into a new notion of a Jewish "nationality".

For that reason, the Orthodox rabbis were given exclusive control over important parts of the public sphere – personal status matters, such as conversions, births, deaths and marriages.

Biblical Justifications

Bolstering the rabbis' power was the urgent need of Israel's secular leaders to obscure the state's settler-colonial origins. This could be achieved by using education to emphasize Biblical justifications for the usurpation by Jews of the lands of the native Palestinian population.

As the late peace activist Uri Avnery observed, the Zionist claim was "based on the Biblical history of the Exodus, the conquest of Canaan, the kingdoms of Saul, David and Solomon ... Israeli schools teach the Bible as real history."

Such indoctrination, combined with a much higher birth rate among religious Jews, has contributed to an explosion in the

numbers identifying as religious. They now comprise half the population.

Today, about a quarter of Israeli Jews belong to the Orthodox stream, which reads the Torah literally, and one in seven belong to the ultra-Orthodox, or Haredim, the most fundamentalist of the Jewish religious streams. Forecasts suggest that in 40 years the latter will comprise a third of the country's Jewish population.

'Conquer the Government'

Both the growing power and extremism of the Orthodox in Israel was highlighted in the last week of January when one of their most influential rabbis, Shmuel Eliyahu, publicly came to the defense of five students accused of murdering Aisha Rabi, a Palestinian mother of eight. Back in October they stoned her car near Nablus, in the occupied West Bank, forcing her off the road.

Eliyahu is the son of a former chief rabbi of Israel, Mordechai Eliyahu, and himself sits on the Chief Rabbinical Council, which controls many areas of life for Israelis. He is also the municipal rabbi of Safed, a city that in Judaism has the equivalent status of Medina in Islam or Bethlehem in Christianity, so his words carry a great deal of weight with Orthodox Jews.

Last month, a video came to light of a talk he gave at the seminary where the five accused studied, in the illegal settlement of Rehelim, south of Nablus.

Eliyahu not only praised the five as "warriors" but told fellow students that they needed to overthrow the

“rotten” secular court system. He told them it was vital to “conquer the government” too, but without guns or tanks. “You have to take the state’s key positions,” he urged them.

Law-Breaking Judges

In truth, that process is already well-advanced.

Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked, who should have been the first to denounce Eliyahu’s comments, is closely aligned with religious settlers. Tellingly, she and other government ministers have maintained a studious silence.

That is because the political representatives of Israel’s religious Jewish communities, including the settlers, have now become the lynchpin of Israeli coalition governments. They are the kingmakers and can extract enormous concessions from other parties.

For some time, Shaked has been using her position to bring more openly nationalistic and religious judges into the legal system, including to the highest court in the land, the Supreme Court.

Two of its current 15 judges, Noam Sohlberg and David Mintz, are law-breakers, openly living in West Bank settlements in violation of international law. Several more judges appointed to the bench by Shaked are religious and conservative.

This is a significant victory for the Orthodox religious and the settlers. The court is the last line of defence for the secular against an assault on their religious freedoms and on gender equality.

And the court offers the only recourse for Palestinians seeking to mitigate the worst excesses of the violent and discriminatory policies of the Israeli government, army and settlers.

Chosen People

Shaked's colleague, Naftali Bennett, another ideologue of the settlement movement, has been education minister in the Netanyahu government for four years. This post has long been a critical one for the Orthodox because it shapes Israel's next generation.

After decades of concessions to the rabbis, Israel's school system is already heavily skewed towards religion. A survey in 2016 showed 51 percent of Jewish pupils attended sex-segregated religious schools, which emphasise Biblical dogma – up from 33 percent only 15 years earlier.

This may explain why a recent poll found that 51 percent believe Jews have a divine right to the land of Israel, and slightly more – 56 percent – believe that Jews are a “chosen people”.

Those results are likely to get even worse in the coming years. Bennett has been placing much greater weight in the curriculum on Jewish tribal identity, Bible studies and religious claims to Greater Israel, including to the Palestinian territories – which he wants to annex.

Conversely, science and maths are increasingly downplayed in the education system, and entirely absent from schools for the ultra-Orthodox. Evolution, for example, has been mostly erased from the syllabus, even in secular schools.

'No Mercy' to Palestinians

Another key sphere of state power being taken over by the religious, and especially the settlers, are the security services. Police Commissioner Roni Alsheikh lived for years in a settlement renowned for its violent attacks on Palestinians, and the force's current chief rabbi, Rahamim Brachyahu, is also a settler.

Both have actively promoted a program, Believers in the Police, that recruits more religious Jews into the police force. Nahi Eyal, the programme's founder, has said his aim is to help the settler community "find our way into the command ranks."

The trend is even more entrenched in the Israeli military. Figures show that the national-religious community, to which settlers belong – though only 10 percent of the population – make up half of all new officer cadets. Half of Israel's military academies are now religious.

That has translated into an increasing role for extremist Orthodox rabbis in motivating soldiers on the battlefield. In Israel's 2008-09 ground invasion of Gaza, soldiers were issued with pamphlets by the army rabbinate using Biblical injunctions to persuade them to "show no mercy" to Palestinians.

Aggressive Youth Nationalism

Meanwhile, the rapidly growing ultra-Orthodox population has been encouraged by the government to move into West Bank settlements purpose-built for them, such as Modi'in Illit and Beitar Illit. That, in turn, is gradually fueling the

emergence of an aggressive nationalism among their youth.

Once the Haredim were openly hostile, or at best ambivalent, towards Israeli state institutions, believing that a Jewish state was sacrilegious until the Messiah arrived to rule over Jews.

Now, for the first time, young Haredim are serving in the Israeli army, adding to the pressure on the military command to accommodate their religious fundamentalist ideology. A new term for these hawkish Haredi soldiers has been coined: they are known as the “Hardal.”

Brachyahu and rabbis for the Hardal are among the senior rabbis who have endorsed a terrifying book, the King’s Torah, written by two settler rabbis, that urges Jews to treat non-Jews, and specifically Palestinians, mercilessly.

It offers God’s blessing for Jewish terror – not only against Palestinians who try to resist their displacement by settlers, but against all Palestinians, even babies, on the principle that “it is clear that they will grow [up] to harm us.”

Gender Segregation Expands

The dramatic rise in religiosity is creating internal problems for Israeli society too, especially for the shrinking secular population and for women. Posters for the forthcoming election – as with adverts more generally – are being “cleaned” of women’s faces in parts of the country to avoid causing offence.

Last month, the Supreme Court criticized Israel’s Council for Higher Education for allowing segregation between men

and women in college classrooms to spread to the rest of the campus, including libraries and communal areas. Female students and lecturers are facing “modesty” dress codes.

The council has even announced that it intends to expand segregation because it is proving difficult to persuade religious Jews to attend higher education.

Violence of the Mob

Israel has always been a society deeply structured to keep Israeli Jews and Palestinians apart, both physically and in terms of rights. That is equally true for Israel’s large Palestinian minority, a fifth of the population, who live almost entirely apart from Jews in segregated communities. Their children are kept away from Jewish children in separate schools.

But the greater emphasis in Israel on a religious definition of Jewishness means that Palestinians now face not only the cold structural violence designed by Israel’s secular founders, but additionally a hot-tempered, Biblically sanctioned hostility from religious extremists.

That is most keenly evident in the rapid rise of physical assaults on Palestinians and their property, as well as their holy places, in Israel and the occupied territories. Among Israelis, this violence is legitimized as “price tag” attacks, as though Palestinians have brought such harm on themselves.



YouTube is now full of videos of gun- or baton-wielding settlers attacking Palestinians, typically as they try to access their olive groves or springs, while Israeli soldiers stand passively by or assist.

Arson attacks have spread from olive groves to Palestinian homes, sometimes with horrifying results, as families are burned alive.

Rabbis such as Eliyahu have stoked this new wave of attacks with their Biblical justifications. State terrorism and mob violence have merged.

Destroying al-Aqsa

The biggest potential flashpoint is in occupied East Jerusalem, where the growing symbolic and political power of these Messianic rabbis risks exploding at the al-Aqsa Mosque compound.

Secular politicians have long played with fire at this Islamic holy site, using archaeological claims to try to convert it into a symbol of historic Jewish entitlement to the land, including the occupied territories.

But their claim that the mosque is built over two Jewish temples, the last of which was destroyed two millennia ago, has been rapidly reconfigured for incendiary, modern political purposes.

The growing influence of religious Jews in parliament, the government, the courts and the security services means that

officials grow ever bolder in staking a physical claim to sovereignty over al-Aqsa.

It also entails an ever-greater indulgence towards religious extremists who demand more than physical control over the mosque site. They want al-Aqsa destroyed and replaced with a Third Temple.

The Gathering Holy War

Slowly, Israel is transforming a settler-colonial project against the Palestinians into a battle with the wider Islamic world. It is turning a territorial conflict into a holy war.

The demographic growth of Israel's religious population, the cultivation by the school system of an ever-more extreme ideology based on the Bible, the takeover of the state's key power centers by the religious, and the emergence of a class of influential rabbis who preach genocide against Israel's neighbors has set the stage for a perfect storm in the region.

The question now is at what point will Israel's allies, in the US and Europe, finally wake up to the catastrophic direction Israel is heading in – and find the will to take the necessary action to stop it.

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PATRICK LAWRENCE: Pompeo, Pence & the

Alienation of Europe

If the objective was to further isolate the U.S., the two officials could not have done a better job last week, writes Patrick Lawrence.

By Patrick Lawrence

Special to Consortium News



What a job Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo did in Europe last week. If the objective was to worsen an already critical trans-Atlantic rift and further isolate the U.S., they could not have returned to Washington with a better result.

We might have to mark down this foray as among the clumsiest and most abject foreign policy failures since President Donald Trump took office two years ago.

Pence and Pompeo both spoke last Thursday at a U.S.-sponsored gathering in Warsaw supposedly focused on “peace and security in the Middle East.” That turned out to be a euphemism for recruiting the 60-plus nations in attendance into an anti-Iran alliance.

“You can’t achieve peace and stability in the Middle East without confronting Iran,” Pompeo said flatly. The only delegates this idea pleased were Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, and officials from Gulf Arab nations who share an obsession with subverting the Islamic Republic.

Pence went on to the annual security conference in Munich, where he elaborated further on a few of the Trump administration’s favored themes. Among them: The Europeans

should ditch the nuclear accord with Iran, the Europeans should cut off trade with Russia, the Europeans should keep components made by Huawei and other Chinese companies out of their communications networks. The Europeans, in short, should recognize America's global dominance and do as it does; as if it were still, say, 1954.

It is hard to imagine how an American administration can prove time and again so out of step with 21st century realities. How could a vice-president and a secretary of state expect to sell such messages to nations plainly opposed to them?

Pounding the Anti-Iran Theme

Pompeo, who started an "Iran Action Group" after the Trump administration withdrew last year from the 2015 nuclear accord, returned repeatedly to a single theme in his Warsaw presentations. The Iranians, he said, "are a malign influence in Lebanon, in Yemen, and Syria and Iraq. The three H's—Houthis, Hamas, and Hezbollah—these are real threats."

Pence ran a mile with this thought. "At the outset of this historic conference," he said, "leaders from across the region agreed that the greatest threat to peace and security in the Middle East is the Islamic Republic of Iran." To be noted: all the "leaders from across the region" in attendance were Sunnis, except for Netanyahu. The major European allies, still furious that Washington has withdrawn from the nuclear accord, sent low-level officials and made no speeches.

The European signatories to the Iran accord knew what was

coming, surely. While Pence insisted that Britain, France and Germany withdraw from the nuclear pact—"the time has come," he said—he also criticized the financing mechanism the three set up last month to circumvent the Trump administration's trade sanctions against Iran. "They call this scheme a 'special purpose vehicle,' " Pence said. "We call it an effort to break American sanctions against Iran's murderous revolutionary regime."

There were plenty of European leaders at the security conference last weekend in Munich, where Pence used the occasion to consolidate what is beginning to look like an irreparable escalation of trans-Atlantic alienation. After renewing his attack on the Iran agreement's European signatories, he shifted criticism to the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline.

Now under construction, this will be the second undersea pipeline connecting Gazprom, the Russian energy company, to Germany and other European markets. Last month the U.S. renewed threats to sanction German companies working on the \$11 billion project. "We cannot strengthen the West by becoming dependent on the East," Pence said at the security conference Saturday.

These and other remarks in Munich were enough to get Angela Merkel out of her chair to deliver an unusually impassioned speech in defense of the nuclear accord, multilateral cooperation and Europe's extensive economic relations with Russia. "Geo-strategically," the German chancellor asserted, "Europe can't have an interest in cutting off all relations with Russia."

US Primacy V. Europe's Future

Merkel's speech goes to the core of what was most fundamentally at issue as Pompeo and Pence blundered through Europe last week. There are three questions to consider.

The most obvious of these is Washington's continued insistence on U.S. primacy in the face of full-frontal resistance even from longstanding allies. "Since day one, President Trump has restored American leadership on the world stage," Pence declared in Warsaw. And in Munich: "America is stronger than ever before and America is leading on the world stage once again."

His speeches in both cities are filled with hollow assertions such as these—each one underscoring precisely the opposite point: America is fated to continue isolating itself, a little at a time, so long as its leaders remain lost in such clouds of nostalgia.

The other two questions concern Europe and its future. Depending on how these are resolved, a more distant trans-Atlantic alliance will prove inevitable.

First, Europe must soon come to terms with its position on the western flank of the Euro-Asian landmass. Merkel was right: The European powers cannot realistically pretend that an ever-deepening interdependence with Russia is a choice. There is no choice. China's Belt and Road Initiative, as it progresses westward, will make this clearer still.

Second, Europe must develop working accommodations with its periphery, meaning the Middle East and North Africa, for the sake of long-term stability in its neighborhood. The mass

migrations from Syria, Libya and elsewhere have made this evident in the most tragic fashion possible. It is to Germany's and France's credit that they are now negotiating with Turkey and Russia to develop [reconstruction plans for Syria](#) that include a comprehensive political settlement.

As they do so, Washington shows [no sign of lifting sanctions](#) against Syria that have been in place for more than eight years. It may, indeed, [impose new sanctions](#) on companies participating in reconstruction projects. In effect, this could criminalize Syria's reconstruction—making the nation another case wherein Europe and the U.S. find themselves at cross purposes.

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The End of the Observer Mission in Hebron

It acted as a restraint on the settlers' worst excesses, writes Jonathan Cook.

By **Jonathan Cook**

Jonathan-Cook.net



You might imagine that a report by a multinational observer force documenting a 20-year reign of terror by Israeli soldiers and Jewish settlers against Palestinians, in a city under occupation, would provoke condemnation from European and U.S. politicians.

But you would be wrong. The leaking in December of the [report on conditions](#) in the city of Hebron, home to 200,000 Palestinians, barely caused a ripple.

About 40,000 separate cases of abuse had been quietly recorded since 1997 by dozens of monitors from Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, Italy and Turkey. Some incidents constituted war crimes.

Exposure of the confidential report has now provided the pretext for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to expel the international observers. He shuttered their mission in Hebron this month, in apparent violation of Israel's obligations under the 25-year-old Oslo peace accords.

Israel hopes once again to draw a veil over its violent colonization of the heart of the West Bank's largest Palestinian city. The process of clearing tens of thousands

of inhabitants from central Hebron is already well advanced.

Any chance of rousing the international community into even minimal protest was stamped out by the U.S. last week. It blocked a draft resolution at the United Nations Security Council expressing “regret” at Israel’s decision, and on Friday added that ending the mandate of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH) was an “internal matter” for Israel.

The TIPH was established in 1997 after a diplomatic protocol split the city into two zones, controlled separately by Israel and a Palestinian Authority created by the Oslo accords.

The “temporary” in its name was a reference to the expected five-year duration of the Oslo process. The need for TIPH, most assumed, would vanish when Israel ended the occupation and a Palestinian state was built in its place.

Israel Granted Free Hand in Hebron

While Oslo put the Palestinian Authority formally in charge of densely populated regions of the occupied territories, Israel was effectively given a free hand in Hebron to entrench its belligerent hold on Palestinian life.

Several hundred extremist Jewish settlers have gradually expanded their illegal enclave in the city center, backed by more than 1,000 Israeli soldiers. Many Palestinian residents have been forced out while the rest are all but imprisoned in their homes.

TIPH faced an impossible task from the outset: to “maintain normal life” for Hebron’s Palestinians in the face of

Israel's structural violence.

Until the report was leaked, its documentation of Israel's takeover of Hebron and the settlers' violent attacks had remained private, shared only among the states participating in the task force.

However, the presence of observers did curb the settlers' worst excesses, helping Palestinian children get to school unharmed and allowing their parents to venture out to work and shop. That assistance is now at an end.

Burial Plot of Abraham

Hebron has been a magnet for extremist settlers because it includes a site revered in Judaism: the reputed [burial plot of Abraham](#), father to the three main monotheistic religions.

But that same place in Hebron became central to Muslim worship centuries ago, with the Ibrahimi mosque established at the site.

Israel's policy has been gradually to prise away the Palestinians' hold on the mosque, as well the urban space around it. Half of the building has been restricted to Jewish prayer, but in practice the entire site is under Israeli military control.

As the TIPH report notes, Palestinian Muslims must now pass through several checkpoints to reach the mosque and are subjected to invasive body searches. The muezzin's call to prayer is regularly silenced to avoid disturbing Jews.

Faced with these pressures, according to TIPH, the number of Palestinians praying there has dropped by half over the past

15 years.

In Hebron, as at Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, a Muslim holy site is treated solely as an obstacle – one that must be removed so that Israel can assert exclusive sovereignty over all of the Palestinians' former homeland.

The Massacre of 1994

A forerunner of TIPH was set up in 1994, shortly after Baruch Goldstein, an Israeli army doctor, entered the Ibrahimi mosque and shot more than 150 Muslims at prayer, killing 29. Israeli soldiers aided Goldstein, inadvertently or otherwise, by barring the worshippers' escape while they were being sprayed with bullets.

The massacre should have provided the opportunity for Yitzhak Rabin, Israel's prime minister of the time, to banish Hebron's settlers and ensure the Oslo process remained on track. Instead he put the Palestinian population under prolonged curfew.

That curfew never really ended. It became the basis of an apartheid policy that has endlessly indulged Jewish settlers as they harass and abuse their Palestinian neighbors.

Israel's hope is that most will get the message and leave.

With Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in power for a decade, more settlers are moving in, driving out Palestinians. Today Hebron's old market, once the commercial hub of the southern West Bank, is a ghost town, and Palestinians are too terrified to enter large sections of their own city.

TIPH's report concluded that, far from guaranteeing "normal life," Israel had made Hebron more divided and dangerous for Palestinians than ever before.

In 2016 another army medic, Elor Azaria, used his rifle to shoot in the head a prone and badly wounded Palestinian youth. Unlike Goldstein's massacre, the incident was caught on video.

Israelis barely cared until Azaria was arrested. Then large sections of the public, joined by politicians, rallied to his cause, hailing him a hero.

Despite doing very little publicly, TIPH's presence in Hebron had served as some kind of restraint on the settlers and soldiers. Now the fear is that there will be more Azarias.

Palestinians rightly suspect that the expulsion of the observer force is the latest move in efforts by Israel and the U.S. to weaken mechanisms for protecting Palestinian human rights.

Netanyahu has incited against local and international human rights organizations constantly, accusing them of being foreign agents and making it ever harder for them to operate effectively.

And last year U.S. President Donald Trump cut all aid to UNRWA, the United Nations' refugee agency, which plays a vital role in caring for Palestinians and upholding their right to return to their former lands.

Not only are the institutions Palestinians rely on for support being dismembered but so now are the organizations

that record the crimes Israel has been committing.

That, Israel hopes, will ensure that an international observer post which has long had no teeth will soon will soon lose its sight too as Israel begins a process of annexing the most prized areas of the West Bank – with Hebron top of the list.

Jonathan Cook is a freelance journalist based in Nazareth. He blogs at <https://www.jonathan-cook.net/blog/>.

The ‘Progressive Except Palestine’ Problem

The Jewish community has a special responsibility to fight Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestinian lands, says Marjorie Cohn.

By [Marjorie Cohn](#)

[Truthout](#)



As a progressive Jew, I find that many of my family members and friends are still what we call “PEP,” progressive except Palestine. Amid ever-worsening injustices created by the Israeli system of apartheid and Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestinian lands, it is past time for this to change.

I am hopeful that the [firestorm](#) sparked by Michelle Alexander’s recent *New York Times* [column](#), “Time to Break the Silence on Palestine,” will finally generate the heat necessary to force more people and groups on the left to

overcome the fundamental hypocrisy of the “progressive except Palestine” approach.

I was deeply inspired by Alexander’s column and her decision to speak so honestly about the difficulty of overcoming the fear of backlash over taking a public stand against the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

Striking a comparison between the risk taken by prominent critics of Israel and the risk Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. took by publicly criticizing the Vietnam War, Alexander observes, “Those who speak publicly in support of the liberation of the Palestinian people still risk condemnation and backlash.”

Invoking Dr. King’s exhortation that “a time comes when silence is betrayal,” Alexander reflects on “the excuses and rationalizations that have kept me largely silent on one of the great moral challenges of our time: the crisis in Israel-Palestine.”

Alexander’s words resonated with me, a Jew who uncritically supported Israel for many years until I saw the parallels between U.S. policy in Vietnam and Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories. My activism and critical writings have followed a trajectory from Vietnam to South Africa to Israel to Iraq to Afghanistan and other countries where the United States continues its imperial military actions.

Although many of my articles are controversial as they criticize the actions of the U.S. government – under both Democratic and Republican regimes – I get the most pushback from my writings about Israel-Palestine. When I analyze

Israel's illegal occupation and crimes against the Palestinians, I am often called a "self-hating" Jew.

My Own Path

I was born in 1948, the year Israel was created out of whole Palestinian cloth. When tasked with finding a destination for Jews displaced by the Holocaust, the United Nations chose Palestine. Thus began a brutal and illegal occupation that continues to this day.

In his book, ["Injustice: The Story of the Holy Land Foundation Five,"](#) Israeli-American Miko Peled describes the 1948 "ethnic cleansing campaign that was sweeping through Palestine like wildfire, destroying everything in its path." Palestinians call it the "Nakba," Arabic for "catastrophe."

My family was not religious but we were proud of our Jewish heritage. My father fought the Nazis in World War II and relatives perished in the Holocaust. My paternal grandmother was an activist against the Tsar during the Russian pogroms. On her way to a Siberian prison, she escaped and, at the age of 18, boarded a ship bound for the United States.

We revered Israel as the homeland of the Jews. At the Passover Seder, we would raise our glasses and intone, "Next year in Jerusalem!" At Sunday School, we gathered coins to plant trees in the Holy Land. It wasn't until I left home that I learned the truth about Israel and became an outspoken critic of its policies.

In 1967, during my freshman year at Stanford, I came to oppose the war in Vietnam and joined The Resistance, a group of draft resisters and their allies. The following year, I

signed up for Students for a Democratic Society, where I learned the war was not an isolated event, but rather part of a long history of U.S. imperialism. But I was still unaware that the war Israel launched in 1967 “completed its occupation of Palestine,” in the words of Peled.

The anti-Vietnam War movement at Stanford challenged my long-held assumptions about U.S. foreign policy. My commitment to ending an unjust war against a people fighting for liberation eventually opened my eyes to the plight of the Palestinian people and Israel’s role in repressing them.

After college, I went to law school and became a peoples’ lawyer. I joined the National Lawyers Guild, a progressive political-legal organization which I later served as president. The NLG’s guiding motto is, “Human rights are more sacred than property interests.” In the NLG, I met many people who criticized Israel’s illegal policies and U.S. complicity in them.

In 1977, the NLG sent a delegation to Israel and Palestine. The report they issued was the first comprehensive analysis of Israel’s practices published by a nongovernmental organization dedicated to the protection of human rights. It documented violations of the 1949 Geneva Conventions by Israel as a belligerent occupant of the West Bank and Gaza.

The allegations in the report disturbed me greatly. They described Israel’s mistreatment of the Palestinians, including house demolitions, administrative detention and torture. The report documented beatings, burning with cigarettes, forced standing while naked for long periods

exposed to heat or cold, dousing with hot or cold water, cutting the body with razor blades, biting by dogs, sensory deprivation, sodomizing with bottles or sticks, inserting wires into the penis, electric shocks to sensitive parts of the body, and suspension from the floor with hands or feet tied to a pulley device. Reading the case studies made me physically ill.

Apartheid, from South Africa to Palestine

Alexander, author of ["The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration the Age of Colorblindness,"](#) wrote that some of Israel's practices are "reminiscent of apartheid in South Africa and Jim Crow segregation in the United States."

After the Palestinians launched the second intifada, or uprising, NLG members went to the region and published a [report](#) in 2001. It documented a system of apartheid in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, as well as the United States' uncritical support of Israel.

[That report](#) describes illegal settlements and bypass roads, restricted movement of Palestinians, discriminatory land policies, differential treatment of Jews and Palestinian non-Jews, and Israeli policing of Palestinian political expression. It also analyzed indiscriminate and excessive use of lethal force against Palestinians, indiscriminate and excessive use of force against Palestinian property, delay and prevention of medical treatment, and collective punishment against the Palestinians.

South Africa's Archbishop Desmond Tutu, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, pointed to similarities between apartheid in his country and Israel's oppression of the Palestinians. "My

voice will always be raised in support of Christian-Jewish ties and against the anti-Semitism that all sensible people fear and detest. But this cannot be an excuse for doing nothing and for standing aside as successive Israeli governments colonize the West Bank and advance racist laws," Tutu wrote in a *Tampa Bay Times* [article](#). He noted "Israel's theft of Palestinian land," and "Jewish-only colonies built on Palestinian land in violation of international law."

Tutu cited a 2010 Human Rights Watch report that "describes the two-tier system of laws, rules, and services that Israel operates for the two populations in areas in the West Bank under its exclusive control, which provide preferential services, development, and benefits for Jewish settlers while imposing harsh conditions on Palestinians." Tutu wrote, "This, in my book, is apartheid. It is untenable."

On July 19, 2018, the Israeli Knesset passed [a law](#) that illegally enshrines a system of apartheid. The legislation, which has the force of a constitutional amendment, says, "The State of Israel is the national home of the Jewish people, in which it fulfills its natural, cultural, religious and historical right to self-determination." It continues, "The right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people." There is no guarantee of self-determination for the 1.8 million Arabs who make up 20 percent of Israel's population.

Tutu called on "people and organizations of conscience to divest from . . . Caterpillar, Motorola Solutions and Hewlett Packard," which profit "from the occupation and subjugation of Palestinians." He was advocating

participation in the non-violent Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS), which Alexander also mentions in her column.

When representatives of Palestinian civil society launched BDS in 2005, they called upon “international civil society organizations and people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era ... [including] embargoes and sanctions against Israel.”

Israel continues to attack Gaza, described as the world’s largest “open air prison” as Israel maintains a tight blockade, restricting all ingress and egress. Headlines in the mainstream media falsely portray an equivalence of firepower between Israelis and Palestinians in Gaza. But Israel’s use of force greatly exceeds that of the Palestinians, and the asymmetric warfare continues to escalate.

In 2014, Israel mounted an offensive called “Operation Protective Edge,” relentlessly bombing Gaza for nearly two months, killing 2,251 Palestinians, the majority of them civilians. The number of Palestinians wounded was 11,231, including 3,540 women and 3,436 children. On the Israeli side, six civilians and 67 soldiers were killed and 1,600 were injured. Tens of thousands of Palestinians lost their homes and the infrastructure was severely damaged. Israel targeted numerous schools, UN-sanctioned places of refuge, hospitals, ambulances and mosques.

As Operation Protective Edge was winding down, the NLG and

other legal organizations sent a letter to the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, urging her to investigate war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity in Gaza committed by Israel and aided and abetted by US leaders. The letter was based on an article I wrote documenting those crimes.

Criticizing Israel is Not Anti-Semitic

I have become sharply critical of Israel. An active member of the NLG's Palestine Subcommittee, I write frequent articles and do media commentary about Israel's violations of international law. I am also a member of Jewish Voice for Peace and I work in support of BDS.

Years after I first read the 1977 NLG delegation report, I visited Ellis Island, where my grandparents arrived in the United States. It is now a museum. As I walked the route they traveled, I felt very emotional about what they endured. But my deep feelings about the suffering of my ancestors during the Holocaust are not inconsistent with my criticisms of Israel for subjecting the Palestinians to a different kind of oppression.

As stories continue to emerge about Israel's killing of unarmed protesters at the Gaza border during the Great March of Return, it is increasingly difficult to ignore the facts. Yet even those who see the truth about Israel's oppression of the Palestinians worry about reprisals for speaking out.

Alexander describes the silence of many civil rights activists and groups, "not because they lack concern or sympathy for the Palestinian people, but because they fear loss of funding from foundations, and false charges of anti-

Semitism.” She mentioned the case of [Bahia Amawi](#), a U.S. citizen of Palestinian descent, who lost her Texas elementary school job last year after refusing to pledge in writing that she would not participate in the BDS movement. On Twitter, journalist Glenn Greenwald pointed out the grave danger anti-BDS laws pose to freedom of speech.

The proliferation of these laws – where US citizens are barred from work or contracts unless they vow not to boycott Israel – is the single greatest free speech threat in the US. You're allowed to boycott other US states, but not this one foreign country! <https://t.co/bLfsQbL99B> pic.twitter.com/gRBfNrut8A

– Glenn Greenwald (@ggreenwald) [December 17, 2018](#)

There is a false equivalency between criticizing Israel and being anti-Semitic. Any criticism of Israeli policy is labeled anti-Semitism, even though many Jews—including members of Jewish Voice for Peace, Jewish Center for Nonviolence and IfNotNow—oppose the occupation.

The BDS movement is not anti-Israeli, as it targets the policies, not the people, of Israel. And actions against Israel’s policies, including BDS, do not equate to anti-Semitism. Rafeef Ziadah, a spokesperson for the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee, [says](#), “As a matter of principle, the BDS movement has consistently and categorically opposed all forms of racism, including anti-semitism and Islamophobia.”

Palestinian human rights activist [Omar Barghouti wrote](#) in the *The New York Times* in 2014, “Arguing that boycotting Israel is intrinsically anti-Semitic is not only false, but it also presumes that Israel and ‘the Jews’ are one and the same. This is as absurd and bigoted as claiming that a

boycott of a self-defined Islamic state like Saudi Arabia, say, because of its horrific human rights record, would of necessity be Islamophobic.”

Even though many persist in equating condemnation of Israel with anti-Semitism, groups like Jewish Voice for Peace continue to gain traction. Jews are increasingly willing to examine the facts on the ground in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

And although Congress, dominated by the powerful Israel lobby, continues to give more money to Israel than any other country, two new members of Congress – Representatives Ilhan Omar (D-Minnesota) and Rashida Tlaib (D-Michigan) – support BDS.

Alexander is optimistic: “There seems to be increased understanding that criticism of the policies and practices of the Israeli government is not, in itself, anti-Semitic.”

We in the Jewish community have a special responsibility to fight against the Israeli system of apartheid and its illegal occupation of Palestinian lands. The BDS movement is an effective weapon in this struggle. I urge my fellow Jews to join BDS and oppose Israel’s illegal and inhumane policies in whatever way they can.

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Marjorie Cohn is professor emerita at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, former president of the National Lawyers Guild, deputy secretary general of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers and a member of Jewish Voice for Peace. Her most recent book, [“Drones and Targeted](#)

Killing: Legal, Moral, and Geopolitical Issues,” contains a chapter analyzing Israel’s targeted killing case.

Israel’s Surprise Elections Catch Palestinian ‘Joint List’ in Disarray

Divisions in the coalition could reduce turnout in April and strengthen the right-wing bloc under Netanyahu, reports Jonathan Cook.

By **JonathanCook**

Jonathan-Cook.net



A political coalition representing Israel’s Palestinian minority – currently the third biggest faction in the Israeli parliament, the Knesset – has been plunged into crisis by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s decision to call for a surprise general election for April.

Long-simmering ideological and personal tensions within the Joint List, which includes Israel’s four main Palestinian parties, have erupted into a split over who should dominate the faction.

Knesset member Ahmad Tibi announced this month that he would run on a separate ticket with his small Taal party, after polls showed he was more popular than the List’s current head, Ayman Odeh.

The move is yet another blow to the coalition, which has been beset by acrimony since its establishment four years

ago.

The latest divisions threaten to further alienate Palestinian voters in Israel, potentially weakening their representation in the Israeli parliament and strengthening the right-wing bloc under Netanyahu.

The 1.7 million Palestinian citizens of Israel are the remnants of the Palestinian population that was mostly expelled from its homeland in 1948 to create the state of Israel. Today, these Palestinians make up a fifth of the population, but face systemic discrimination.

Voter turnout among Palestinian citizens of Israel has been in steady decline for decades, reaching a low at the 2013 election, when just over half cast a ballot.

No Palestinian party has ever been invited to participate in any of the complex coalitions that are the basis of Israeli governments.

In addition, the Palestinian parties' use of the Knesset as a platform to call for an end to the Israeli occupation and for equal rights for Palestinian citizens regularly attracts the ire of Jewish Israeli politicians.

Israeli Minister of Public Security Gilad Erdan recently wrote a letter to the Knesset's ethics committee describing Odeh, the head of the Joint List, as "a criminal and a supporter of terrorism."

While launching his election campaign this week, former Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman accused the Joint List of "treason" and called it "total lunacy" to let its representatives participate in the Knesset.

Acrimony in the Joint List

The creation of the Joint List in time for the 2015 legislative elections briefly boosted turnout, as Palestinian voters in Israel hoped it would give a stronger voice to their interests on the national stage.

The List won 13 out of the 120 seats in the Knesset, but a recent poll showed that only 44 percent of Palestinian voters thought it represented their interests, with 52 percent disagreeing.

Tibi's departure threatens to lead to further splintering of the coalition, with the southern Islamic Movement also reportedly considering breaking away or demanding leadership of the surviving List.

Relations between the two other parties – Hadash, a block of communist and socialist groups headed by Odeh, and national-democratic party Balad – are fractious, as they compete for a similar pool of secular Palestinian voters.

According to Tibi, the fact that his party, Taal, only holds a single seat in the Knesset is “clearly unjust.”

“The composition of the List should be decided by the people, not decreed by the parties,” he said.

According to polls, a separate Tibi ticket would be likely to receive six seats, level-pegging with the remnants of the Joint List.

He said an overhaul of the List would make it more democratic and accountable, and revive flagging support from Palestinian voters in Israel.

“The competition between two big lists will actually encourage people to come out and vote,” Tibi said. “Surveys show that we can get 12 seats when we run apart, but together we will drop to 10 or 11 seats.

“The other parties don’t want change because they are afraid of the outcome.”

Tibi said he would consider returning to the List only if it introduced more democratic procedures allotting seats to the parties on the basis of their popularity – either assessed through opinion polls or primaries.

Split Could Backfire

On social media, Odeh harshly criticised Tibi for the breakup, accusing him of prioritising his “personal interests”.

“Netanyahu wants to see the Joint List break up more than anyone else. The extreme right wants to divide and conquer the Arabs,” he tweeted.

According to analysts, the split could indeed backfire, fueling disenchantment.

“Surveys show that people support the idea of the Joint List but want more, not less, unity from its parties. They want it better organized and more effective,” said Asad Ghanem, a political scientist at Haifa University.

“If that trend doesn’t continue, a significant proportion are likely to stay home – or vote for Jewish parties on the basis that at least those parties have some influence within the Israeli political system.”

Ghanem also noted that Tibi, a former adviser to late Palestinian national leader Yasser Arafat, had until now been a largely one-man outfit. In the past, he has always allied with another party at election time.

“On paper, Tibi enjoys a lot of support, but that ignores the difficulty he faces widening his party’s appeal,” he said. “He needs to create a convincing list of candidates and establish a party machine capable of bringing out his voters to the polls.”

A combination of low turnout and separate parties could mean one or more fail to pass an electoral threshold, dramatically reducing Palestinian representation in the Knesset.

That would likely delight the Israeli right, including Netanyahu, who raised the electoral threshold before the 2015 vote in an undisguised bid to prevent Palestinian parties from winning seats.

When the Palestinian parties responded by forming the Joint List, Netanyahu used scaremongering on polling day to rally his supporters. He warned Jewish voters that the Palestinian minority was “coming out to vote in droves.”

Aida Touma-Suleiman, a legislator for the Hadash party, said those who preferred the Joint List to splinter were “gambling” that they would manage to pass the threshold. “That’s a very dangerous position to adopt.”

Need for Common Platform

Ghanem criticized the Joint List for failing to make an impact on the most pressing socio-economic issues faced by

the Palestinian minority. Half of Palestinian families in Israel live under the poverty line, nearly four times the rate among Israeli Jews.

He also accused the List of failing to effectively counter recent legislative moves by the Netanyahu government that have targeted the rights of Israel's Palestinian minority.

In 2016, the government passed an Expulsion Law empowering a three-quarters majority of the parliament to ban a legislator for holding unpopular political views. It was widely seen as a measure to silence Palestinian Knesset members.

And last summer, Israel voted through the Nation-State Basic Law, which explicitly gives the Jewish people alone a right to self-determination in Israel.

Ghanem said the Joint List's failure to offer a clear position on the last law, or mobilise Palestinian opinion against it, was especially glaring.

"The problem is that the List has failed to develop a common political programme. It is not enough to have a Joint List, it must have a joint voice too."

Touma-Suleiman, however, called much of the criticism of the Joint List unfair.

"The Nation State Law showed exactly what the Netanyahu government thinks of our rights. Anything we achieve is like pulling teeth from the lion's mouth," she said. "We are operating in a very hostile political environment."

Crisis of Legitimacy

Jafar Farah, the director of Mossawa, an advocacy group for Israel's Palestinian citizens and rumoured to be a future candidate for the Hadash party, agreed with Tibi that the Joint List was suffering from a crisis of legitimacy.

"Who speaks for our community when we address the Israeli public or speak to the Palestinian Authority or attend discussions in Europe?" he asked. "That person needs to be able to say credibly that they represent the community."

Farah, however, noted that the reality of Palestinians in Israel was "more complicated" than that for most other national minorities. Israeli officials have strenuously objected to any efforts by the Palestinian minority to create its own internal parliament or seek self-determination.

Nonetheless, he said, the Palestinian parties were making themselves irrelevant by focusing on a two-state solution in an era when Netanyahu and the right had imposed on the region their agenda of permanent occupation in the context of a single state.

"We can't just accept the rules of a political game in which we operate in the margins of a Jewish democracy. It is not enough just to have a leader, we need to offer a new political vision. We have to be creative and bring a new agenda.

"The Jewish majority won't come to our aid. We have to lead the struggle and be ready to pay the price."

Ghanem said the Joint List's failures, combined with the

collapse of any peace-making efforts to end the occupation, had encouraged a move away from ideological politics among many Palestinian voters in Israel.

“People are instead increasingly focusing on their own personal concerns,” he said.

He pointed to recent local elections in Nazareth, the largest Palestinian-majority city in Israel, where the main political parties bowed out and left the mayoral race to two independent candidates.

The trend away from ideological politics was being reinforced, as elsewhere, by new media that offered people a wider set of perspectives.

“Generally, people feel more confused, and want clear, strong figures like a Netanyahu or a Trump,” Ghanem said. “Tibi can exploit that trend.”

Tibi said it was vital for the parties to find a way to make alliances with centre and centre-left Jewish parties in the current climate.

“It is not just about getting more Arab legislators into the Knesset,” he said. “It is about having more legislators who can have an influence, who can help shape the choice of the prime minister. That is imperative if we are going to bring down Netanyahu and the right.”

Tibi said he hoped that, by rebuilding the credibility of the Palestinian parties, they would be in a position to form a “blocking majority” in the Knesset, similar to the situation in the early 1990s.

Then, a newly elected center-left coalition headed by Yitzhak Rabin needed the support of the Palestinian parties to push through the Oslo Accords, against fierce opposition from the right, led by Netanyahu.

Rabin did so through an arrangement with Palestinian legislators that they would back the coalition from outside the government.

“We helped Rabin achieve his goals and in return the situation of our community improved, with more rights and higher budgets,” said Tibi. “We can be in that position again but only if we can regain the confidence of our community.”

Calls for Boycott

Tibi and others believe that, if the turnout among Palestinian citizens returns to the levels of the 1980s, the minority could elect several more legislators, potentially tipping the balance towards a center-left government.

But for that happen, the Palestinian parties will need to overturn growing apathy and frustration from their voters, warned Ghanem.

Salman Masalha, a Palestinian columnist for *Haaretz* newspaper, called the Palestinian members of the Knesset “a fig leaf” whose participation served only to “beautify the state to the world, making it look like a vibrant democracy.”

He argued for a boycott of the election, playing on Netanyahu’s 2015 election incitement: “Arab citizens must respond, ‘the Arabs are boycotting in droves’ the scam of

Israeli democracy.”

A boycott of the national elections is the official platform of two factions: the small, staunchly secular Abnaa al-Balad (Sons of the Land) party and the popular northern wing of the Islamic Movement, under Sheikh Raed Salah, which the Netanyahu government outlawed four years ago.

Ghanem observed that Netanyahu’s fate, as he faces indictment on several corruption charges in the midst of the election campaign, could play a decisive role in the turnout of Palestinian voters.

“If Netanyahu looks vulnerable, more [Palestinian voters] will come out in the hope that their parties will be able to support the centre-left in challenging the right.

“But if he looks likely to win, as seems the case at the moment, then many will conclude that the situation is hopeless and stay home.”

Jonathan Cook is a freelance journalist based in Nazareth. He blogs at <https://www.jonathan-cook.net/blog/>.

Netanyahu’s Brand of Tolerance for Anti-Semitism Goes Back 120 Years

The Israeli prime minister’s ease with neo-Nazism and revisionist Holocaust history are not as surprising as they might seem, writes Daniel Lazare.

By [Daniel Lazare](#)

Special to Consortium News



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has a soft spot for rightwing authoritarians. This is no surprise since Netanyahu is a rightwing authoritarian himself, one who sees Israel as an old-fashioned ethno-state in which Jewish national aspirations are the only ones that count – as his support for last year’s “[Nation-State Law](#)” makes clear.

But what may come as a surprise is that he also has a soft spot for rightwing authoritarians with a pronounced anti-Semitic streak. Last July, he welcomed Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban to Israel even though Urban has led a campaign to [rehabilitate](#) Miklos Horthy, the pro-Axis dictator who sent hundreds of thousands of Jews to death camps and bragged, “[I have been an anti-Semite throughout my life.](#)” Two months later, he welcomed Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, who once compared himself to Hitler, [saying](#), “There are three million drug addicts [in the Philippines]. I’d be happy to slaughter them.”

He issued a joint statement with Polish Premier Mateusz Morawiecki lauding Poland’s wartime efforts to alert the world to the Nazi death camps, a statement that Israel’s own Yad Vashem Holocaust museum later [repudiated](#) on the grounds that it “contains highly problematic wording that contradicts existing and accepted historical knowledge in this field.” His government has also supplied weapons to the [neo-Nazi Azov Battalion](#) fighting pro-Russian separatists in the eastern Ukraine.

So what’s the explanation? If Netanyahu is a hawk’s hawk when it comes to enemies of the Jewish state, then doesn’t

it follow that he should be no less militant when it comes to enemies of the Jews?

The answer is, no, it doesn't, for the simple reason that Zionism's attitude toward anti-Semitism is more ambiguous than people realize. Theodore Herzl, the Viennese journalist who founded modern Zionism, made this clear in the 1890s. Rather than combatting anti-Semitism, he argued that Jews should accept it as an ineradicable fact of life. Instead of opposing it, they should make use of it as a lever with which to pry their co-religionists loose from western society so that they would move to Palestine. As he put it in "The Jewish State," the 1896 manifesto that put modern Zionism on the map:

"Great exertions will hardly be necessary to spur on the [emigration] movement. Anti-Semites provide the requisite impetus. They need only do what they did before, and then they will create a desire to emigrate where it did not previously exist, and strengthen it where it existed before."

Herzl's goal was twofold: to provide Jews with a homeland and to win over non-Jews by removing an irritant from their midst. Jews, he wrote, "continue to produce an abundance of mediocre intellects who find no outlet, and this endangers our social position as much as it does our increasing wealth. Educated Jews without means are now rapidly becoming Socialists." The more radical they become, the more Christian society would close ranks against them. The solution was to provide them with a homeland of their own so they would cease subverting someone else's.

“They will pray for me in the synagogues, and in the churches as well,” Herzl confided to his diary. Not only would Jews liberate themselves, but they would be liberating Christians too, “liberating them from us.”

Zionism's DNA

Modern observers might dismiss such ideas as ancient history since they date to more than 120 years ago. But they have become part of Zionism's DNA. Instead of battling anti-Semites, the movement has repeatedly followed Herzl's advice by emulating them and adopting their techniques for their own purposes.

In the 1920s, Jews were thus shocked when Zionist settlers organized a movement to drive out Arab workers in Palestine. The reason is that it was all too similar to anti-Semitic nationalists in Poland who were seeking to drive out Polish Jews. An immigrant socialist complained in the *Jewish Daily Forward*, according to the historian [Yaacov N. Goldstein](#), that the “conquest of labor” campaign “sends shudders through the Jewish workers in the Diaspora countries because the gentiles could try out this principle against the Jewish workers...” Said another: “How do we react when the reactionary chauvinists in Poland fight for their ‘conquest of labor,’ meaning prevention of Jews working in Polish industrial and commercial enterprises? How do we respond to the ‘conquest of labor’ of the Romanians?”

In the 1930s, a growing rightwing Zionist movement latched onto Benito Mussolini for much the same reason – because he wished to purify Italy just as they wished to purify

Palestine. With Mussolini's permission, a rightwing Zionist leader named Vladimir "Ze'ev" Jabotinsky opened a training school in Civitavecchia, some 40 miles west of Rome. According to the Marxist historian [Lenni Brenner](#), this is how an Italian Zionist newspaper described the opening ceremonies:

"The order – 'Attention!' A triple chant ordered by the squad's commanding officer – 'Viva L'Italia! Viva Il Re! Viva Il Duce!' resounded, followed by the benediction which rabbi Aldo Lattes invoked in Italian and Hebrew for God, the king, and Il Duce... 'Giovinezza' [the Fascist Party anthem] was sung with much enthusiasm..."

Mussolini [praised](#) Jabotinsky as a good fascist in 1935 while Abba Ahimeir, a leader of the Palestinian branch of Jabotinsky's "Revisionist" movement, wrote a regular newspaper column entitled "Diary of a Fascist." Ahimeir's editor was Benzion Netanyahu, father of the current prime minister, who would later become Jabotinsky's personal assistant. In Poland, the leader of the Revisionists was a young man named Mieczslaw Biegun, better known by the Hebrew name [Menachem Begin](#), who would serve as Israeli prime minister from 1977 to 1983.

When Begin embarked on a U.S. speaking tour in 1948, Albert Einstein, Hannah Arendt, Sidney Hook, and some two dozen other Jewish intellectuals sent a [letter](#) to the *The New York Times* denouncing his movement as "akin in its organization, methods, political philosophy and social appeal to the Nazi and Fascist parties," one that "preache[s] an admixture of ultra-nationalism, religious mysticism, and racial superiority."

Given this rich history of fascism, it's no surprise 70 years later that Netanyahu would enjoy hobnobbing with a new generation of rightwing strong men (including new Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro) or that he would look the other way when it comes to the anti-Semitism of the Polish government, which last year made it a crime to say that Poles were complicit in the Holocaust, or of Orbán's campaign against international financier George Soros. Indeed, it's no surprise that Netanyahu's 26-year-old son Yair would join in the fun by posting an anti-Semitic cartoon on Facebook showing George Soros directing a conspiracy against his father.

"Is this what the kid hears at home?" wondered former Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who was also targeted by the cartoon. But not everyone was displeased. "Welcome to the club, Yair – absolutely amazing, wow, just wow," tweeted Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke.

Welcome to the club, Yair – absolutely amazing, wow, just wow.
pic.twitter.com/D3yMWhUIGa

– David Duke (@DrDavidDuke) [September 10, 2017](#)

Declared the neo-Nazi *Daily Stormer* website: "Yair Netanyahu is a total bro. Next he's going to call for gassings."

Role Model for Xenophobes

What's a little anti-Semitism among friends? Netanyahu's devotion to Jewish ethnic purity has meanwhile turned him into a role model for xenophobes the world over. So has his hostility to refugees. Last March, he declared that illegal African migrants are "much worse" than terrorists, adding:

“How could we assure a Jewish and democratic state with 50,000 and then 100,000 and 150,000 migrants a year? After a million, 1.5 million, one could close up shop. But we have not closed down. We built a fence and at the same time, with concern for security needs, we are making a major investment in infrastructures.” This is the same fence that Donald Trump now points to as his model for his Mexican wall.

Thanks to such attitudes at the top, Israel has seen an upsurge of racial violence. In 2014, an Israeli stabbed a baby three times in the head, telling police: “They said that a black baby, blacks in general, are terrorists.” A few months later, a mob shot and beat to death an African refugee named Halton Zarhum in the southern city of Beer Sheva. A year after that, two Israeli teenagers beat to death an African refugee named Babikir Ali Adham-Abdo in a suburb of Tel Aviv.

Netanyahu, of course, will reply that he was nowhere near the scene of the crime. But the more Zionism’s true colors come out, the more such atrocities are likely to occur.

It must be stressed that the problem with Jewish nationalism lies not with the first half of the term but the second. Nationalism in general suffers from a similar combination of chauvinism and separatism. Examples are rife. Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan is a well-known anti-Semite who last summer inveighed against “Satanic Jews who have infected the whole world with poison and deceit.” His ideological predecessor, Marcus Garvey, whose back-to-Africa movement in the 1920s had curious parallels with Zionism, repeatedly provoked black leftists of the day by speaking

out in favor of Jim Crow and meeting with a Ku Klux Klan leader named Edward Young Clarke in Atlanta.

“I regard the Klan, the Anglo-Saxon clubs and White American societies, as far as the Negro is concerned, as better friends of the race than all other groups of hypocritical whites put together,” he wrote. “I like honesty and fair play. You may call me a Klansman if you will, but, potentially, every white man is a Klansman as far as the Negro in competition with whites socially, economically and politically is concerned, and there is no use lying.”

Garvey’s dark side was forgotten in the 1960s when he emerged as a hero of the Black Power movement. Zionism’s dark side was similarly forgotten after the [Six Day War in 1967](#) when it emerged as a favorite ally of the United States. Thereafter, anyone who tried to bring up the love affair with fascism was ostracized by neo-conservatives, many of them Jewish, who increasingly dominated intellectual discourse.

But with ethno-chauvinism now staging a powerful comeback, Zionism’s far-right past has returned to haunt it – and the rest of the world as well.

Daniel Lazare is the author of “The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy” (Harcourt Brace, 1996) and other books about American politics. He has written for a wide variety of publications from *The Nation* to *Le Monde Diplomatique* and blogs about the Constitution and related matters at [Daniellazare.com](#).
