

# 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](http://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.

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## 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](#)*



**A**s 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](https://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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**Killing: Legal, Moral, and Geopolitical Issues,**” contains a chapter analyzing Israel’s targeted killing case.

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## 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**

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**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.”

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## Mike Pompeo’s Deranged Foreign Policy

The U.S. secretary of state is a Christian zealot who sees the U.S. as incapable of doing ill, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By **[Lawrence Davidson](#)**

[TothePointAnalysis.com](https://www.tothepointanalysis.com)



**U.S.** Secretary of State Mike Pompeo started out the new year—the date was Jan. 10—preaching “the truth” about U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, and for reasons we will get to below, he chose to do so at the American University in Cairo. He implied that he was particularly capable of discerning the truth because he is “an evangelical Christian” who keeps a “Bible open on my desk to remind me of God and His Word, and The Truth.” This confession indicates that Pompeo is wearing ideological glasses through which he cannot possibly see the world, much less the Middle East, in an objective fashion. We can assume that the decidedly unthinking and amoral president he serves has no problem with this prophet in the State Department because Pompeo is one of the few cabinet ministers whom President Donald Trump has not fired.

So what are Pompeo’s versions of foreign policy truth? In terms of his Cairo pronouncements, they are twofold. First, as is to be expected of a man of his temperament (he declared: “I am a military man” who learned his “basic code of integrity” at West Point), he has identified the true enemy of the civilized world. And, again not unexpectedly given his Christian zealotry, the enemy is of Muslim origin. It is the “tenacious and vicious” cabal of “radical Islamism, a debauched strain of the faith that seeks to upend every other form of worship or governance.”

### **Notable Omissions**

This initial “truth” is noteworthy for what it does not take into consideration, such as traditional U.S. alliances with brutal and corrupt military or monarchical dictatorships. Any move to reduce support for such regimes in the Middle

East is, in Pompeo's view, a "misjudgment" that must have "dire results." As long as these dictatorships oppose what Pompeo opposes, their brutality and corrupt nature can be judged acceptable. For example, Pompeo praised his host, the military dictator of Egypt, Abdel Fattah Saeed Hussein Khalil El-Sisi, who is an archetypical example of this murderous breed of ruler. He praised El-Sisi exactly because he has joined the U.S. in the suppression of "Islamists." The Egyptian dictator, in Pompeo's words, is "a man of courage."

Pompeo's second "truth" is the self-evident fact of American exceptionalism. He told his listeners that "America is a force for good in the Middle East." Pompeo does not articulate the reference, but his claim taps into the Christian image of the U.S. as "a shining city on the hill"—a God-blessed light unto the nations. This was one of Ronald Reagan's favorite themes.

As proof of American's alleged beneficence, Pompeo makes a series of dubious claims about the behavior of the United States government. Here are a few. Comments within brackets are those of this author:

"For those who fret about the use of American power, remember this: (No.1) America has always been, and always will be, a liberating force." [Since World War II we have been liberating dictators from their own rebelling people.] (No.2) "We assembled a coalition to liberate Kuwait from Saddam Hussein." [The subsequent two Gulf Wars plus the U.S. imposed sanctions regime killed at least half-a-million Iraqis.] (No.3) "And when the mission is

over, when the job is complete, America leaves.” [Unless the “liberated” countries’ government wants Washington to establish bases which, it seems, they almost always do. The U.S. now has some 800 military bases in 70 countries around the world.] (No. 4) The U.S. and its allies helped destroy most of ISIS, and in the process “saved thousands of lives.”[There is no official number for the civilians killed in the so-called war on terror, of which the campaign against ISIS is but a part. However, there is no doubt that, to date, it is at least in the high hundreds of thousands. ] (No.5) “Life is returning to normal for millions of Iraqis and Syrians.” [Unless you have a really perverse definition of “normal,” this is a total fantasy.]

## **Rescuing Foreign Policy**

According to Pompeo, achievements No. 4 and No. 5 are due to the “fact” that President Donald Trump rescued U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. Rescued? Rescued from what? From the foreign policy of Barack Obama, of course.

“America, your long-time friend, was absent too much. Why? Because our leaders gravely misread our history, and your historical moment. These fundamental misunderstandings, were set forth in this city in 2009.”

That claim was a direct reference to former President Obama’s speech calling for a “new relationship with the Muslim world” delivered on June 4, 2009, at nearby Cairo University. That is why Pompeo came to Egypt to make his speech, which is in essence, an indictment of Obama’s foreign policy.

In brief, in 2009 Obama, who also claimed in his Cairo talk to be speaking the truth, had referenced the negative impact of Western imperial and colonial history toward the Middle East, and then took a pro-democracy stance that, if carried into policy, would have weakened support for traditional dictatorships in places like Egypt. Obama saw a connection between the brutality of such dictatorships and the spread of religious fanaticism—a connection that was stronger than “radical Islamist” ideology alone. Obama also implied that President George W. Bush’s post 9/11 policy, which led not only to the unnecessary invasion of Iraq, but also to a policy of official torture, resulted in the United States “acting contrary to our ideals.” In addition, Obama was ready to negotiate with those seen as enemies by Pompeo, as symbolized by his willingness to make a deal with Iran.

Pompeo, the Christian zealot who sees the U.S. as incapable of doing ill, cannot objectively consider or perhaps even understand Obama’s positions. He dismisses them as a “misreading” of history. Obama’s brief and, in truth, largely ineffective, wavering from traditional Middle East foreign policy had, in Pompeo’s view, introduced “the age of self-inflicted American shame.” If Pompeo is short on historical understanding, he is long on hyperbole.

### **Retreat and Chaos**

One of Pompeo’s more disquieting propositions is that “when America retreats, chaos often follows.”

Alas, at least in the Middle East, the exact opposite is true—chaos comes from invasion. This can be demonstrated by the consequences of the actions of President George W. Bush.

It was Bush's invasion of Iraq, the results of which were predictable, that opened the region to chaos, including the growth of ISIS. The Iraq invasion also opened the flood gates of an ongoing refugee crisis (which the Syrian civil war—arguably prolonged by U.S. involvement—made even worse). Subsequent intervention in Libya, under Obama's watch, only intensified the turmoil. However, none of these actions, or the misery they inflicted, seems have bothered the Christian sensibilities of Pompeo.

Examining the history of events can give us guides, albeit imperfect ones, for present policies and behaviors. A necessary precondition to making the most of this examination is the ability to do so as objectively as possible. Otherwise, to use Pompeo's phrasing, we end up "making bad mistakes." Part of the process is to be able to recognize the actual causes of events and to know when to discard traditional practices that no longer take you where you want to go.

Yet here is Secretary of State Mike Pompeo insisting, on the one hand, on maintaining outworn policies that support dictators. These policies have not produced the stability he thinks they have, but have rather helped bring about the very chaos he attributes to Obama. On the other hand, his Christian fundamentalism has blinded him to any objective understanding of Middle East history and America's role in that region. That is why he ends up stating contradictions. For instance, toward the end of his talk he tells us (No. 1) "the Trump administration will also continue to press for a real and lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians" and (No. 2) "we've adhered to our word. President Trump

campaigned on the promise to recognize Jerusalem—the seat of Israel’s government—as the nation’s capital. In May, we moved our embassy there.” Those two statements are in direct contradiction to each other. However, Pompeo misses this fact entirely. This is a product of ideology compounded by ignorance.

This being the case, Mike Pompeo and Donald Trump make for strange bedfellows. Of course, both are ignorant. But, the nearest thing Trump has to an ideology is his egotism and that infamous “gut” of his that ostensibly tells him what is right and wrong. He certainly is not a believing Christian nor even an American chauvinist, but rather he is a personal chauvinist who thinks of himself as a personification of the U.S.

If Pompeo and Trump share anything (besides ignorance), it seems to be a firm dislike for everything connected to Obama. We know that Trump may well be obsessed with Obama, perhaps for racist reasons. As one Democratic Party adviser has noted, “His [Trump’s] only guiding principle seems to be to undo what Obama did. His driving motivation seems to be his animosity towards Obama.” Mike Pompeo seems in lockstep with his boss in this regard. After all, Pompeo went out of the way to indict Obama, blaming him for the death of thousands, and doing so in the same city where Obama gave his most promising Middle East initiative. Pompeo’s actions in this regard were personal and spiteful.

So here we have it. What motivates Secretary of State Mike Pompeo: (No. 1) Christian zealotry (No. 2) American exceptionalism and (No. 3) a personal dislike of the first black president of the United States. In terms of the

position he holds in the government, this is a losing combination for the rest of us. Personally, I would not trust this man to guide the ongoing relationships between my own neighbors and me, so you can imagine my horror at having to put up with him as secretary of state.

**Lawrence Davidson is professor of history emeritus at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He has been publishing his analyses of topics in U.S. domestic and foreign policy, international and humanitarian law and Israel/Zionist practices and policies since 2010.**

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## Israel's Drive to Become a Modern-Day Sparta

A former army chief may present a challenge to Benjamin Netanyahu, but his campaign's exultation of destruction and oppression is chilling, reports Jonathan Cook.

**By [Jonathan Cook](#)**

*[Jonathan-Cook.net](#)*



**W**ith April's elections looming, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has good reason to fear Benny Gantz, his former army chief. Gantz has launched a new party, named Israeli Resilience, just as the net of corruption indictments is closing around the prime minister.

Already, at this early stage of campaigning, some 31 per cent of the Israeli public prefer Gantz to head the next government over Netanyahu, who is only months away from

becoming the longest-serving leader in Israel's history.

Gantz is being feted as the new hope, a chance to change direction after a series of governments under Netanyahu's leadership have over the past decade shifted Israel ever further to the right.

Like Israel's former politician generals, from Yitzhak Rabin to Ehud Barak and Ariel Sharon, Gantz is being portrayed – and portraying himself – as a battle-hardened warrior, able to make peace from a position of strength.

Before he had issued a single policy statement, polls showed him winning 15 of the 120 parliamentary seats, a welcome sign for those hoping that a centere-left coalition can triumph this time.

But the reality of what Gantz stands for – revealed this week in his first election videos – is far from reassuring.

### **Savage 2014 Operation**

In 2014, he led Israel into its longest and most savage military operation in living memory: 50 days in which the tiny coastal enclave of Gaza was bombarded relentlessly.

By the end, one of the most densely populated areas on earth – its 2 million inhabitants already trapped by a lengthy Israeli blockade – lay in ruins. More than 2,200 Palestinians were killed in the onslaught, a quarter of them children, while tens of thousands were left homeless.

The world watched, appalled. Investigations by human rights groups such as Amnesty International concluded that Israel had committed war crimes.

One might have assumed that during the election campaign Gantz would wish to draw a veil over this troubling period in his military career. Not a bit of it.

One of his campaign videos soars over the rubble of Gaza, proudly declaring that Gantz was responsible for destroying many thousands of buildings. "Parts of Gaza have been returned to the Stone Age," the video boasts.

This is a reference to the Dahiya doctrine, a strategy devised by the Israeli military command of which Gantz was a core member. The aim is to lay waste to the modern infrastructure of Israel's neighbors, forcing survivors to eke out a bare existence rather than resist Israel.

### **War Crime**

The collective punishment inherent in the apocalyptic Dahiya doctrine is an undoubted war crime.

More particularly, the video exults in the destruction of Rafah, a city in Gaza that suffered the most intense bout of bombing after an Israeli soldier was seized by Hamas. In minutes, Israel's indiscriminate bombardment killed at least 135 Palestinian civilians and wrecked a hospital.

According to investigations, Israel had invoked the Hannibal Procedure, the code name for an order allowing the army to use any means to stop one of its soldiers being taken. That includes killing civilians as "collateral damage" and, more controversially for Israelis, the soldier himself.

Gantz's video flashes up a grand total of "1,364 terrorists killed," in return for "three-and-a-half years of quiet." As

Israel's liberal Haaretz daily observed, the video "celebrates a body count as if this were just some computer game."

But the casualty figure cited by Gantz exceeds even the Israel army's self-serving assessment – as well, of course, as dehumanizing those "terrorists" fighting for their freedom.

A more impartial observer, Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, estimates that the Palestinian fighters killed by Israel amounted to 765. By their reckoning, and that of other bodies such as the United Nations, almost two-thirds of Gazans killed in Israel's 2014 operation were civilians.

Further, the "quiet" Gantz credits himself with was enjoyed chiefly by Israel.

In Gaza, Palestinians faced regular military attacks, a continuing siege choking off essential supplies and destroying their export industries, and a policy of executions by Israeli snipers firing on unarmed demonstrators at the perimeter fence imprisoning the enclave.

Gantz's campaign slogans "Only the Strong Wins" and "Israel Before Everything" are telling. Everything, for Gantz, clearly includes human rights.

It is shameful enough that he believes his track record of war crimes will win over voters. But the same approach has been voiced by Israel's new military chief of staff.

Aviv Kochavi, nicknamed the Philosopher Officer for his university studies, was inaugurated this month as the army's

latest head. In a major speech, he promised to reinvent the fabled “most moral army in the world” into a “deadly, efficient” one.

### **Expert in Destruction**

In Kochavi’s view, the rampaging military once overseen by Gantz needs to step up its game. And he is a proven expert in destruction.

In the early stages of the Palestinian uprising that erupted in 2000, the Israeli army struggled to find a way to crush Palestinian fighters concealed in densely crowded cities under occupation.

Kochavi came up with an ingenious solution in Nablus, where he was brigade commander. The army would invade a Palestinian home, then smash through its walls, moving from house to house, burrowing through the city unseen. Palestinian space was not only usurped, but destroyed inside-out.

Gantz, the former general hoping to lead the government, and Kochavi, the general leading its army, are symptoms of just how complete the militaristic logic that has overtaken Israel really is. An Israel determined to become a modern-day Sparta.

Should he bring about Netanyahu’s downfall, Gantz, like his predecessor politician-generals, will turn out to be a hollow peace-maker. He was trained to understand only strength, zero-sum strategies, conquest and destruction, not compassion or compromise.

More dangerously, Gantz’s glorification of his military past

is likely to reinforce in Israelis' minds the need not for peace but for more of the same: support for an ultranationalist right that bathes itself in an ethnic supremacist philosophy and dismisses any recognition of the Palestinians as human beings with rights.

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

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## Israeli Politics Enter Grubby Realm of Reality TV

Netanyahu demands a TV showdown with his corruption accusers and Roseanne Barr prepares to address the Knesset. The poverty of public discourse has never been more apparent, writes Jonathan Cook.

**By Jonathan Cook**

*[Jonathan-Cook.net](https://www.jonathan-cook.net)*



Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu commandeered the country's airwaves last week in what many assumed would prove a moment of profound national import. They could not have been more wrong.

The context was his decision last month to move forward the general election to April, widely seen as a desperate effort to turn the vote into a referendum on his innocence as long-standing corruption investigations close in.

The police have recommended that he be charged over three

separate allegations of bribery. By calling the election, Netanyahu has forced the attorney-general, Avichai Mendelblit, onto unfamiliar- and constitutionally tricky-terrain.

Mendelblit, an appointee of Netanyahu's, has indicated that he will make a decision on whether to issue an indictment before the ballot, so that voters have the facts to make an informed choice.

But Netanyahu has said he won't drop out or resign, even if indicted, and there is no decisive precedent to suggest he must.

Instead, he would prefer to bully the attorney-general into delaying a decision until after voters have spoken. That was the purpose of his unexpected live national TV address.

His supporters have already set the stage, claiming that an indictment mid-campaign would influence the outcome and usurp the will of the people.

Either way, Netanyahu hopes to benefit. If an indictment is served before the vote, it will rile up his base and bolster a carefully crafted narrative that he faces a campaign of persecution from state authorities.

If Mendelblit delays, Netanyahu will aim to exploit any electoral success to face down prosecutors, accusing them of seeking to reverse his popular mandate.

Netanyahu's strategy was on full show last week when he took to the main TV channels. He used this moment of enforced national attention for nothing more serious than a self-serving gripe.

The investigators, led by a far-right police commander he personally approved, had supposedly joined a leftist plot to oust him. The proof was that they had denied him a chance to confront in person his accusers—former aides turned state witness—and challenge their testimony.

### **Demanding Showdown**

Claiming that he had been stripped of his legal rights, Netanyahu demanded a showdown be broadcast live—effectively trailblazing a new type of reality TV show for suspects in high-profile criminal cases.

Of course, Netanyahu understands only too well that such confrontations with witnesses are decided by the police, not the accused, and used only when evidence needs to be tested.

The police believe they already have the evidence required for a conviction, and hope to test it in a court of law, not in the type of TV spectacle in which Netanyahu excels.

Netanyahu's move was intended to reinforce his claim that the "system"—one that has kept him and the ultra-nationalist right in uninterrupted power for a decade—is rigged against him.

There was a striking parallel with events last week in the United States, where President Donald Trump similarly addressed the nation to corner his opponents in Congress.

In his case, Trump sought to rally his base by fearmongering about a supposed "invasion" of immigrants, suggesting that the Democrats were subverting his efforts to block their entry with an Israeli-style wall.

But whereas many have described Netanyahu's latest intervention as "Trumpian," in truth the Israeli leader is as well-practiced as his American counterpart in the dark arts of media manipulation.

Two of the three bribery cases he faces relate directly to allegations that he offered favors—in one case captured on tape—to Israeli media moguls in return for better coverage in their publications.

Netanyahu has long demonstrated an obsession with controlling his image, and has proved an arch-manipulator of passions to mobilize support for his hawkish agenda.

It was at the last general election, in 2015, that he turned the tables on his right-wing rivals at the last moment. He rallied voters by claiming that Israel's Palestinian citizens—a fifth of the population—were turning out in "droves" at polling booths. Only a vote for Netanyahu, he suggested, would save the Jewish state.

Not only did he imply that voting by Palestinian citizens was illegitimate, he claimed that the Israeli left was "bussing" them to the polls, citing this falsehood as proof of the left's treachery.

### **Leftist Slur**

Now Netanyahu is again deploying the "leftist" slur, this time to discredit the police and prosecution service.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Netanyahu's Likud party is the only faction opposed to a plan by the Central Elections Committee to bar online propaganda in the campaign's final two months.

Underscoring the way TV has increasingly become a tool in Israel not for clarifying issues but for inflaming emotions, the U.S. TV comedian Roseanne Barr has been invited to address the Israeli parliament at the end of the month.

She will use the opportunity to denounce as Jew haters activists in the international boycott movement who stand in solidarity with Palestinians. Only in Israel's current degraded public discourse would Barr, who has a history of making offensive comments variously about Jews, Muslims and black people, be taken seriously as an arbiter of racism.

Analysts widely expect this election campaign to be the dirtiest in Israel's history. But, although they worry about Netanyahu's demagoguery, they still overlook its grubbiest aspect.

Palestinians under occupation have been effectively disappeared from the campaign. They will have no voice in choosing the Israeli politicians who have determined their fate for the past five decades.

In fact, not one of the Israeli Jewish parties is highlighting Palestinian rights or putting the occupation at the center of its platform. The vast majority of Israeli politicians want to entrench the occupation, not end it.

Israeli commentators noted that Netanyahu had another pressing reason— apart from legal threats—to bring forward the election. He feared that otherwise Trump might unveil his long-promised peace plan.

However bad that plan will be for Palestinians, Netanyahu does not want his unwillingness to make concessions exposed.

But Netanyahu is far from the gravest threat to Israel's "democracy." The most dangerous thing of all is the widespread refusal in Israel to recognize that the Palestinians are human beings too—and that they should be able to determine their own fate, just like Israelis.

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

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## A Workers' Struggle in India to 'Make the Land Proud' as Global Unrest Spreads

This has been one of the largest general strikes in the world, writes Vijay Prasad from Kerala, as social unrest grows in Morocco, Sudan, Nigeria and Los Angeles.

### ***Workers Around the World Greet 2019 With Wave of Demonstrations***

By **Vijay Prasad**

*Tricontinental: Institute  
for Social Research*



**O**ver two days—Jan. 8 and 9—more than 160 million workers went on strike in India. This has been one of the largest general strikes in the world. The workers, exhausted by almost three decades of neoliberal policies and by the attack on their rights, came onto the streets to make their case for better livelihoods and workplace democracy. Blockades on train tracks and on

national highways closed down sections of the country.

In Bengaluru, information technology workers joined the strike. In Himachal Pradesh workers gathered to demand an end to precarious employment in government service. Workers from a broad range of sectors, from manufacturing to health care, joined the strike. There has been no response from the government. Please read my [report](#) on the strike.

My report is written from Kerala, where almost the entire workforce went on strike. This strike comes after the powerful [Women's Wall](#) that was built on Jan. 1. For a fuller sense of what brought 5.5 million women to form a wall along Kerala, see my [report](#). The title for this newsletter comes from a well-known poem by the late radical poet [Vayalar Ramavarma](#) (1928-1975). When workers struggle, Vayalar wrote, "isn't it something to make the land proud?"

### **Morocco, Sudan, Nigeria and Los Angeles**

This two-day strike comes as workers around the world greeted 2019 with a wave of demonstrations—from the “month of anger” launched in Morocco by trade unions, to the protests in Sudan over rising prices; from teachers’ strike in Los Angeles, to the potential general strike in Nigeria over wages.

An International Trade Union Confederation [report](#) from last year showed that more countries are excluding workers from labor laws—65 percent of countries, at last count—excluding migrant workers and public sector employees and others from the rights afforded to them. There is every indication that the attack on workers’ rights and workplace democracy will continue despite the unrest amongst workers.

## India

Brinda Karat, a leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), reflects—in our January Dossier—on the record of the current far-right government in India, the BJP, and on the challenges before the left to produce an alternative agenda to put before the people in the April 2019 general election. Karat offers a sharp assessment of the attacks on women and the denigration of the project of women's emancipation in India:

“Over the past several decades, women have entered public spaces to work and to live. They have established their talents, their skills, and their capacities in numerous spheres. There has been a backlash against this increased assertion. The backlash is shaped by extreme misogyny – or a strong feeling in sections of our society that women have a specific place and anyone who crosses the boundary is liable to be punished. These cultural walls behind which women and girls are expected to live (with some exceptions for certain classes), are stronger than the high walls of a prison. When a woman is raped, she is blamed for entering public space, for being a free citizen, for the clothes she wears, for the person she speaks to, for the place and time where she was. It is the woman who is held responsible for the crime. That is the character of the misogyny.”

Karat's interview goes into depth about the difficult situation under the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. For example, she makes the following points:

- Because of India's government policies, agrarian distress is acute: An average of 12,000 farmers committed suicide every year of this government's rule. Unemployment is at its highest.
- India stands out for its increased inequalities under Modi's rule. Just 1 percent of the population holds 68 percent of all household wealth, an almost 20-point increase in the last five years. On the other hand, according to the government's socio-economic survey, over 90 percent of India's people have an income of less than 10,000 rupees, or \$143, a year.

It is not axiomatic that high inequality and social distress lead to a progressive politics. In such a context, it is as likely that the culture of working-class solidarity erodes, and social violence grows, producing the seedbed of neo-fascist politics. To that end, Karat makes the case that the left in India—but also elsewhere—needs to engage with the rigidities of our culture.

Cultures promoted by capitalism and the market promote and glorify individualism and promote individualistic solutions. All these add to the depoliticization of a whole generation of young people. This is certainly a challenge: how to find the most effective ways of taking our message to the youth. Then again in India class exploitation is intensified through the caste system and vice versa. To build resistance struggles against the caste system and caste oppression and to link such struggles with the fight against capitalism in terms of struggles and goals is also a challenge. Trade unions and other class organizations certainly have to be more assertive and attentive to these aspects.

The left, Karat suggests, needs to enter fully into the struggle over how to define the terms of a culture. Questions of dignity as well as discrimination are fundamental to the development of a progressive politics. No emancipatory movement can turn its back on any form of social hierarchy. The democratic impulse must work its way into the most rigid of cultural forms.

Karat offers a clear-headed assessment of the challenges for the left in India's upcoming elections.

## **Brazil**

Meanwhile, from Brazil, João Pedro Stedile looks back at the Brazilian election that elected the neo-fascist Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency. Stedile's interview, which you can read [here](#), explains the current, ugly context in Brazil. Bolsonaro has rapidly proved correct all the concerns about his politics. Stedile believes that the only antidote to Bolsonaro is a vibrant working-class movement; rooted not only in the countryside but also in the urban periphery.

Meanwhile, our Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research team in São Paulo—André Cardoso, Cristiane Tiemi and Olivia Carolino — have a full [assessment](#) (in Portuguese) of the Brazilian economy for 2019. A new law drops the minimum wage while another set of decrees directly attacks Brazil's indigenous communities. The department in charge of indigenous rights, or FUNAI, will lose its oversight to the ministry of agriculture, which is dominated by agricultural, logging and mining business interests. Bolsonaro's Minister of Agriculture Tereza Cristina Dias was the leader of the agricultural business lobby in the Congress. Sonia

Guajajara, the leader of the National Articulation of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil, or APIB, said after Bolsonaro's decisions: "We are the first to be attacked. We have to be the first to react."

## **Palestine**

We have to be the first to be react. This would have been a phrase familiar to the Palestinian communist [Shadia Abu Ghazaleh](#), born in Nablus in 1949 and killed in 1968. In 1967, Abu Ghazaleh joined the newly formed Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. She abandoned her studies in Cairo to the consternation of her family, who had lost their home in Palestine. "What good is a university degree," Abu Ghazaleh questioned them, "if I have no wall at home to attach it to?"

Last year, 56 Palestinian children, most from Gaza, were killed by the Israeli military forces. Focus has turned to the elections in Israel, but there is little concentration on the Israeli war crimes against the Palestinians.

Adalah, the legal center for Palestine, notes in a new [report](#) that Israel has shown no willingness to conduct an inquiry or investigation into the killings at the Gaza perimeter. It calls for the intervention of the International Criminal Court. None will be forthcoming.

It will remain to brave people to follow the example of Shadia Abu Ghazaleh and act to force the opening of a new road towards peace in Palestine. Their struggles will be struggles to make their land proud.

**Vijay Prashad is an Indian historian, journalist,**

commentator and a Marxist intellectual. He is the Executive Director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research and the Chief Editor of LeftWord Books.

Photographs in this article were by Rahul, an independent journalist based in Anantapur (Andhra Pradesh), whose work can be seen at the [People's Archive of Rural India](#).

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## Fired School Employee Sues Over Israel Loyalty Oath

A Texas school employee has sued her school district because it fired her after she refused to sign a loyalty oath to Israel, as Marjorie Cohn reports.

**By Marjorie Cohn**

*Truthout*



**I**n a return to the bad old days of McCarthyism, Bahia Amawi, a U.S. citizen of Palestinian descent, lost her Texas elementary school job after refusing to pledge in writing that she would not participate in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Earlier this month, Amawi sued the school district that fired her.

The BDS movement against Israel has become a hot button issue in the closing month of 2018. A bipartisan group of senators tried to [attach](#) the [Israel Anti-Boycott Act](#) to the unanimous spending bill that Trump almost signed to avoid the current government shutdown. Meanwhile, Donorbox, a US software company, [blocked](#) the BDS fundraising account at the

behest of a pro-Israel group.

“The language of the affirmation Amawi was told she must sign reads like Orwellian – or McCarthyite – self-parody, the classic political loyalty oath that every American should instinctively shudder upon reading,” Glenn Greenwald wrote at *The Intercept*.

On Dec. 12, the Council on American-Islamic Relations filed a lawsuit on Amawi’s behalf in the US District Court for the Western District of Texas against Pflugerville Independent School District, alleging that Texas’ law requiring the oath violates the First Amendment. Amawi’s complaint says the law constitutes an impermissible attempt “to impose an ideological litmus test or compel speech related to government contractors’ political beliefs, associations, and expressions.”

Amawi had contracted with the school district for nine years to work with students with autism and developmental disabilities in Austin. This fall, for the first time, Amawi was required to sign an oath that she would not boycott Israel. When she refused to sign it, she was fired.

“The point of boycotting any product that supports Israel is to put pressure on the Israeli government to change its treatment, the inhumane treatment, of the Palestinian people,” Amawi explained. “Having grown up as a Palestinian, I know firsthand the oppression and the struggle that Palestinians face on a daily basis.”

## **BDS**

The BDS movement was launched by representatives of

Palestinian civil society in 2005, calling 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.”

This call specified that “these non-violent punitive measures” should last until Israel fully complies with international law by (1) ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the barrier wall; (2) recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and (3) respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their land as stipulated in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194.

Even though it is a nonviolent movement, Israel sees BDS as a threat to its hegemony over the Palestinians. Israel illegally occupies Palestinian territories, maintaining effective control over Gaza’s land, airspace, seaport, electricity, water, telecommunications and population registry. Israel deprives Gazans of food, medicine, fuel and basic services, and continues to build illegal Jewish-only settlements in the occupied West Bank.

“There will not be progress toward a just peace without pressure on Israel to respect Palestinian rights,” said Rebecca Vilkomerson, executive director of Jewish Voice for Peace. “Bringing about that pressure, through a global grassroots mobilization, is exactly what BDS is about.”

After Amawi's firing, *The New York Times* editorial board wrote,

"It's not just Israel's adversaries who find the [BDS] movement appealing. Many devoted supporters of Israel, including many American Jews, oppose the occupation of the West Bank and refuse to buy products of the settlements in occupied territories. Their right to protest in this way must be vigorously defended."

Omar Barghouti, co-founder of BDS, said in an email to *The New York Times*, "Having lost many battles for hearts and minds at the grass-roots level, Israel has adopted since 2014 a new strategy to criminalize support for BDS from the top" in order to "shield Israel from accountability."

Barghouti called Shurat HaDin, the group behind the Donorbox action blocking the BDS account, a "repressive organization with clear connections to the far-right Israeli government" that is "engaging in McCarthyite ... tactics ... in a desperate attempt to undermine our ability to challenge Israel's regime of apartheid and oppression."

Twenty-six U.S. states have anti-BDS laws and 13 others are pending. The Israel Anti-Boycott Act, which would have to be reintroduced when the new Congress convenes in January, was supported by Senate Republican Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Democratic Minority Leader Chuck Schumer. Senators Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont) and Dianne Feinstein (D-California) opposed the bill.

### **Boycotts' 1st Amendment Protection**

The law that triggered Amawi's firing prohibits the State of

Texas from entering into government contracts with companies, including sole proprietorships, that boycott Israel. It defines “boycott Israel” to include “refusing to deal with, terminating business activities with, or otherwise taking any action that is intended to penalize, inflict harm on, or limit commercial relations specifically with Israel, or with a person or entity doing business in Israel or in an Israeli-controlled territory.”

Boycotts are a constitutionally protected form of speech, assembly and association. They have long been used to oppose injustice and urge political change. The Supreme Court has held that “speech on public issues occupies the highest rung of the hierarchy of First Amendment values, and is entitled to special protection.” The high court ruled that advocating and supporting boycotts “to bring about political, social, and economic change” – like boycotts of Israel – are indisputably protected by the First Amendment.

The National Lawyers Guild, Palestine Legal and the Center for Constitutional Rights wrote in a legal memorandum challenging anti-BDS legislation in New York that such laws “harken back to the McCarthy era when the state sought to deny the right to earn a livelihood to those who express controversial political views.” The memo says, “The courts long ago found such McCarthy-era legislation to be at war with the First Amendment,” as they “unconstitutionally target core political speech activities and infringe on the freedom to express political beliefs.”

Even staff members at the right-wing Anti-Defamation League (ADL) opposed anti-BDS laws and admitted they are unconstitutional. Although the leadership officially favors

outlawing BDS, ADL staff wrote in an internal 2016 memo that anti-BDS laws divert “community resources to an ineffective, unworkable, and unconstitutional endeavor.”

Greenwald cited the grave danger anti-BDS laws pose to freedom of speech, tweeting, “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.”

Demonstrating the incongruity of allowing Amawi to boycott any entity but Israel, Greenwald noted, “In order to continue to work, Amawi would be perfectly free to engage in any political activism against her own country, participate in an economic boycott of any state or city within the US, or work against the policies of any other government in the world – except Israel.”

The US government remains Israel’s lap dog on the world stage. On December 5 the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly passed a resolution calling for an end to Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories. The United States opposed the resolution.

Meanwhile, the BDS movement continues to achieve victories. After more than 24,000 people complained to HSBC, the banking giant pulled out its investments in Israeli arms company Elbit Systems. Elbit sells military equipment, including drones, aircraft, artillery and weapon control systems to the Israeli army, US Air Force and British Royal Air Force. It also provides surveillance equipment to the US Customs and Border Protection agency.

On the legal front, the ACLU has mounted successful

court [challenges](#) to anti-BDS laws in Kansas and Arizona and has filed litigation in Arkansas and Texas.

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## Local Forces Who Defeated ISIS in Syria Defend Their Territory

The outcry against Trump's decision to withdraw troops from Syria reveals an appetite for regional hegemony, writes As'ad AbuKhalil. It also minimizes the capacity of native militia to defend territory for which they fought and died.

## **A Wise and Rare Decision**

**By [As'ad AbuKhalil](#)**

*Special to Consortium News*



President Donald Trump's announcement that he will withdraw 2000 U.S. troops from Syria has caused great alarm in elite circles. [The New York Times](#) and [The Washington Post](#) both warned it would leave Israel "abandoned" and "isolated" and would embolden enemies of the U.S. Martin Indyk, a former Mideast envoy for Democratic administrations, [complained](#) that Trump did not factor in the national security interests of Israel.

Hillary Clinton, the former secretary of state who lost the presidency to Trump, tweeted: "Actions have consequences, and whether we're in Syria or not, the people who want to harm us are there & at war. Isolationism is weakness. Empowering ISIS is dangerous. Playing into Russia & Iran's hands is foolish. This President is putting our national security at grave risk."

Hollywood celebrities have also [jumped into](#) the act.

The strong reaction to Trump's decision (which fulfills a campaign promise to disengage militarily from the Middle East) highlights his gap with a mainstream media and foreign policy establishment that supports a more aggressive U.S. military intervention in the Middle East. The only time these detractors ever strongly supported Trump was when he ordered the bombing of Syria. Establishment spokesman Farid Zakaria, a favored CNN host and pundit, said Trump had finally become "presidential." The only reservation was that the bombing should have been more massive.

The latest [civilian death toll in Syria](#) is over 107,000. The media has, by and large, disregarded the extent to which U.S. bombs have contributed to this enormous loss of life.

When the history of the Syrian war is written, it is very likely that the destruction of Raqqa will be categorized as a U.S. war crime—to be added to the many war crimes committed by all sides in the protracted war.

### **Exaggerations of US Role**

The outcry against Trump's withdrawal announcement include exaggerations of the role that 2000 U.S. troops played in defeating ISIS (which exclude personnel involved in covert actions).

[In a Tweet](#), Rukmini Callimachi of *The New York Times* oddly attributed the loss of 99 percent of ISIS territory in Syria and Iraq to the work of the U.S.-led "coalition" (so broadly defined to include Sweden and Bahrain among others). This estimate typically ignores the contributions and sacrifices of native Syrian, Lebanese and Iraqi fighters, many of whom are foes of the U.S.

While it can't be determined mathematically the extent to which the U.S. and others contributed to the demise of ISIS, it is certain that the bulk of the fighting against ISIS—and the dying—was done by locals, the majority of whom opposed the U.S.

This was the case in Lebanon, where the fight against ISIS and al-Qaida, over the last two years, was carried out almost single-handedly by Hizbullah, which the U.S. State Department designates a terrorist organization. Similarly, Russia and its allies in Syria did most of the fighting against ISIS despite the contributions of pro-U.S. Kurdish militias and some rebel groups.

The economic power of ISIS—in terms of the oil trade—was largely destroyed by Russian, not U.S., bombing. In Iraq, the virtual collapse of the U.S.-trained Iraqi Army in June 2014, when Mosul was overrun, was a major factor in the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria and beyond.

In Iraq, the process of mobilization and recruitment against ISIS began with the formation of Hashd, or “mass,” militias formed at the behest of Ayatollah Sistani, the senior Iranian Shia cleric based in Iraq. Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards became directly involved. While these natives fought back and destroyed ISIS in Iraq the U.S. provided air cover. Locals did the fighting and the dying.

Trump’s agenda poses a danger to the U.S. and the world. But the global agenda of the Democratic and Republican (establishment) is even more dangerous. It would expand wars in the Middle East and beyond. It would intensify U.S. enmities to places such as Russia, China, North Korea and Iran and abort any attempts at reconciliation. It would prevent the U.S. from leaving a military occupation. It would challenge the enemies of the U.S. and Israel with direct U.S. military projection of force throughout the Middle East.

### **Presidents Obey the Military**

Trump’s fault, in the eyes of those who criticize his decision to withdraw troops from Syria, is that he did not follow the advice of his military. The notion that a president must follow military orders is entirely undemocratic. But since Sept. 11, 2001, it has been

established—especially by Democrats—that the commander in chief should do just that. Thus, President Barack Obama went against his own views and agreed to expand the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan.

Due to its strong popular support, the U.S. military often operates outside the reach of congressional supervision or public accountability. By occasionally challenging the generals, as with this decision to withdraw troops from Syria and Afghanistan, Trump has proven more politically courageous than Obama, who was afraid to defy the brass. (While Obama resisted his own foreign policy advisors' pressures to intervene more deeply in Syria, the U.S. military at that time was less enthusiastic about intervention.)

Israel was clearly unhappy with Trump's announcement of troop withdrawal from Syria, although Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was one of the few world leaders briefed by Trump before announcing his decision. (Is there a matter of any significance over which the U.S. president—whether Bush or Obama or Trump—does not brief Netanyahu?)

To satisfy Israel, the U.S. must deploy troops in all Arab countries and to join Israel in its unending wars against the whole Arab world. (Paradoxically, Israel is loathed by the Arab people while cruel Arab despots in the Gulf—such as those leading Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar—race to establish relations with Israel and often try to ingratiate themselves with the U.S. president and Congress.)

Israel, through its powerful lobby, has been agitating for the U.S. to wage war on Iran, Syria, Hizbullah and the

Palestinian territories. And Western media—no matter how much Israel accumulates by way of its massive arsenal of WMDs, and no matter how much Israeli gives itself the right to bomb at will in Syria and Palestine—still treats Israel as a vulnerable entity in need of permanent U.S. military protection.

All of this explains why Clinton is more popular than Trump. She had promised more military hegemony in the Middle East. And she was just as enthusiastic as Trump about propping up Middle East despots. For instance, as secretary of state, Clinton supported Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak at all costs. When Mubarak fell she wanted the head of the secret police, Omar Suleiman, to be his successor.

The underlying causes for U.S. withdrawals from Syria can't be known and some wager it won't pan out. But it is unlikely that it's part of a large geo-strategic scheme on Trump's part. Nor is the move likely to predict a U.S. strike on Iran. After two years in office, Trump is showing more self-confidence in his foreign policy decisions than when he started. It is likely that he will follow his original isolationist instincts. Those instincts are at odds with the bipartisan consensus in D.C., which has heaped an avalanche of criticism upon one of the rare wise decisions of an often rash president.

ISIS is indeed on the run, and it has lost the bulk of its territorial base. It retains some fighters in its remnants in Eastern Syria, but its ability to expand is drastically limited. The major enemies of ISIS—those who drove ISIS from most of its territory—remain on the ground in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. While overlooked by Western reporters and

columnists, they are ready to go to war again to fight back an ISIS offensive.

As'ad AbuKhalil is a Lebanese-American professor of political science at California State University, Stanislaus. He is the author of the "Historical Dictionary of Lebanon" (1998), "Bin Laden, Islam and America's New War on Terrorism (2002), and "The Battle for Saudi Arabia" (2004). He tweets as [@asadabukhalil](#)

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## Israel's Overlooked Strategic Losses in Wars Against Arabs

After conventional Arab armies failed to deter Israeli invasions, Lebanese and Palestinian volunteers have changed the strategic balance in the Middle East, writes As'ad AbuKhalil.

## **2006 Lebanese War Changed Power Calculus**

**By As`ad AbuKhalil**

*Special to Consortium News*



In South Lebanon, the Museum for Resistance, also known as the Mlita Museum, for the town in which it is located, is a wildly popular tourist attraction and a place where you can run into Arabs visiting from around the region.

In it, Hizbullah—the political party with an armed wing that, with Iranian assistance, emerged in response to the Israeli invasion of 1982—celebrates its military successes, displaying weapons captured from the occupation army and replicas of some of its military tunnels.

The museum enshrines an important realization for the country: that while conventional Arab armies failed to deter Israeli invasions, Lebanese and Palestinian volunteers succeeded in holding the mighty Israeli army at bay and have become the real defenders against Israeli attacks and occupation. As such, the museum offers testimony to the current nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The U.S. and other Western powers want to disarm Hizbullah while denying the Lebanese Army the weapons to deter Israel. In other words, they want to return Lebanon to its former state of weakness.

The problems this situation poses for Israel are often overlooked given its apparently clear strategic advantage.

Israel's arsenal of weapons of mass destruction is still being protected by Western countries from scrutiny or even criticism. The Obama administration guaranteed Israel a most generous financial assistance program for the next decade.

Israeli's 100-percent occupation of Palestine remains immune from U.N. or other international condemnation. Israeli citizens' settlement building in Palestine territories—despite violating international law—has not caused a rift between Israel and either the European Union or the U.S.

Egypt, meanwhile, remains committed to the peace treaty with Israel and to security coordination with the occupation state, as does Jordan. And Israel does not fear an assault from any Arab state or a combination of Arab states. (Arab threats—largely rhetorical—have only been intended to pacify popular anger.)

But things are not as secure for Israel as they might seem.

### **The Resistance Persists**

A century after the Balfour Declaration, the Arab-Israeli conflict has not ended. Early Zionist thinkers and leaders—influenced by racist European attitudes about the natives—never considered that the Palestinians would continue to resist Zionism for so long. This in itself is a big failure for Zionism as it defies the long-held belief that force is the only language that Arabs understand. At the same time, economic offers and political ploys have not deceived the Palestinians—or Arabs—into accepting the Israeli occupation project either.

The resistance is not only tenacious, its effectiveness reached a new level in 2000. That year, after an escalating pattern of resistance operations that began in 1982—first by secular (communist and Syrian nationalist) groups and later by Hizbullah—the Israeli occupation army was forced to

withdraw from South Lebanon.

Israel's biggest strategic loss came in 2006 during the [Lebanese-Israeli War](#), when armed groups (not part of an Arab conventional army) resisted Israeli assaults and deterred a ground offensive against Arab territory. Unless you have studied the performance of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Lebanon between 1970 and 1982, it's difficult to fathom how seriously this changed the power calculus of Lebanese and Palestinian resistance groups vis-à-vis Israel.

But the significance of that war—and most importantly on Arab perceptions of it—was obscured by Saudi regime propaganda intent on undermining the standing of any resistance, leftist or Islamist, Sunni or Shi'ite. The House of Saud began to promote sectarian hatred and agitation and emphasize the losses for the Arab side to downplay the precedent set by the war. (Examples of this are so pervasive it would be unfair to single out any one broadcaster or publication.)

During the invasions of Gaza, Israel failed again to advance or even to prevent primitive Hamas rockets from firing; all claims to the (fake) successes of the [Iron Dome air defense system](#) notwithstanding.

This is a marked contrast to previous confrontations. In 1978, Israel invaded Lebanon and the PLO's resistance was disorganized and largely spontaneous. Four years later, in the face of the 1982 massive Israel invasion, the PLO failed again to formulate a joint resistance plan. Fighting was stiff in some cases, such as at the refugee camp`Ayn Al-

Hilwi and the medieval-era [Beaufort castle](#). And later at Khaldah, on the outskirts of Beirut, the PLO did implement a defense plan for Beirut (designed by West Point graduate Abu Al-Walid), which explains why Israel never dared to invade West Beirut until after the evacuation of PLO forces from Lebanon. Overall, however, the PLO resistance record pales in comparison to that of Hamas and Hizbullah, in Gaza and South Lebanon, respectively.

### **Former Psychological Advantage**

Israeli strategy in dealing with the Arabs was based on massive, indiscriminate use of force and the promotion of the Israeli soldier as invincible and terrifying. This produced a psychological advantage that, from 1948 to 1967, sowed fear and resignation.

More recently, however, the image of the mighty Israeli soldier and a fearful Arab resistance has been reversed. In the 2006 war, Israeli soldiers in South Lebanon were terrified by Hizbullah fighters who prevented the enemy army from advancing one inch into Lebanese territory. I grew up in Lebanon in the 1960s and 1970s, when Israel used to bomb and invade at will. This no longer happens because Israel has come to fear Hizbullah.

Another problem for Israel is its once-vaunted intelligence, which has developed a reputation for clumsiness. The failed raid in Gaza (by an elite unit of the Israeli occupation army) is the most recent example. In 2010, Dubai police plastered the faces of top agents of Mossad, the intelligence agency, around the world in the wake of the [assassination of Mahmoud Al-Mabhouh](#), a co-founder of the

military wing of Hamas. Before that, in 1997, there was the botched assassination attempt on Khalid Misha`l', the Doha-based former leader of Hamas, by Mossad agents.

In the 2006 war with Lebanon, Israel's intelligence failures included the famous and (almost) comical kidnapping of a poor man whose only crime was that his name was Hasan Nasrallah, the same as that of the Hizbullah leader. Presumably, Mossad experts on the Arab world assumed there was only one Hasan Nasrallah in all of Lebanon.

Hizbullah and Hamas, meanwhile, have run intelligence operations that the PLO has rarely ever matched. Hizbullah's 2012 kidnapping of Israeli soldiers is an example of careful preparations and reliable intelligence. Hizbullah and Hamas have special operatives monitoring the communications of the Israeli military. Hizbullah has its own Hebrew language school. PLO organizations, by contrast, had so few Hebrew speakers they often had to rely on Hebrew teachers from the Institute of Palestine Studies in Beirut to translate important documents.

The Arab-Israeli conflict is not about to end anytime soon. Trump's "[Deal of the Century](#)" hinges on the belief that [Saudi Arabia's Mohammad bin Salman](#) can convince the Palestinians to give up their cause. This is a conflict that is unlikely to end in compromise, and the Israeli occupation state has made it clear that historical Palestine belongs to the Jewish people and that the Palestinians represent a mere nuisance on the land.

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