

THE ANGRY ARAB: Maxime Rodinson & the Palestinian Question

A new book attacking the French scholar for his views on Israel and Zionism spurs As`ad AbuKhalil to provide his own assessment.

By **As`ad AbuKhalil**

Special to Consortium News

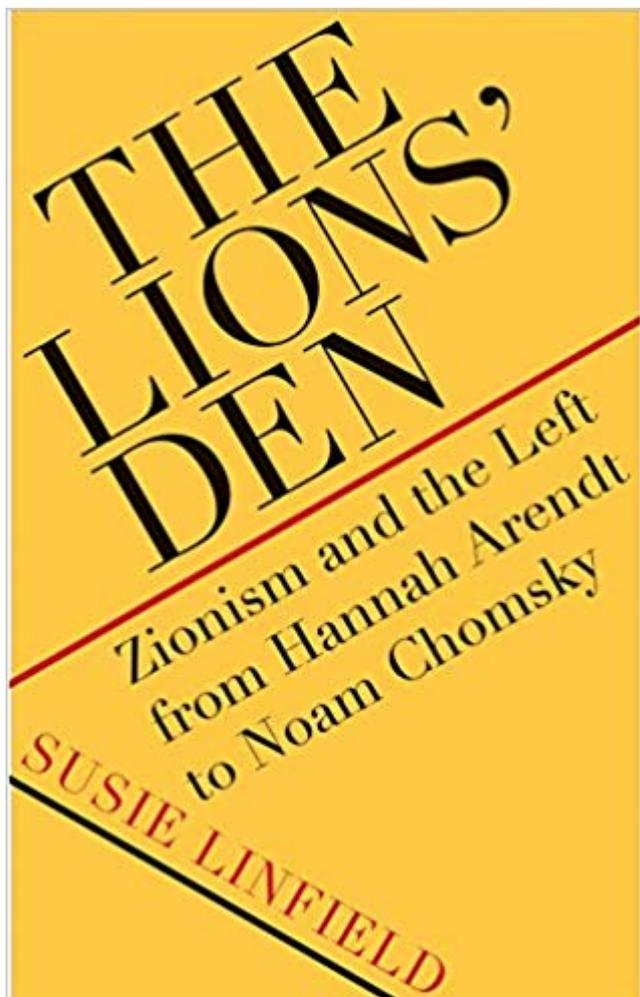


The French Orientalist Maxime Rodinson was by far one of the greatest scholars on Islam and the Arab world in the 20th century (if not ever). His contributions belie the notion that all Orientalist production can be dismissed as purely ideological (and that was not the contention of Edward Said in his “Orientalism,” all distortions of Said’s work notwithstanding). I, for one, owe a great debt of gratitude to Rodinson for influencing me early on in my conception of, and education in, Middle East studies. Rodinson wrote the best contemporary biography of the Prophet, and he examined him from a Marxist historical perspective (the book was translated into many languages, including Persian but not Arabic).

Rodinson’s “Islam and Capitalism” also powerfully debunked classical Orientalist myths about Islam and Muslims (including the thesis of Max Weber about capitalism and Protestantism) by showing that Muslims were able to go around the theoretical theological ban on usury in their financial transactions. Later, in “Europe and the Mystique of Islam,” Rodinson introduced the notion of “theologocentrism” to critically characterize the Western

school of thought in academia that attributes all observable phenomena among Muslims to matters of theology. Furthermore, refreshingly, Rodinson paid attention to Arab leftism and wrote about Lebanese and Syrian communists who he knew well in the seven years he spent between Syria and Lebanon during and after World War II.

Attention to Rodinson is prompted by the publication of Susie Linfield's "The Lions' Den: Zionism and the Left from Hannah Arendt to Noam Chomsky." The author is a professor of journalism at NYU and has no background in Middle East studies. Yet, she uses her platform to launch an attack on critics of Israel and Zionism and situate them in the category of self-hating Jews. But her method of handling Rodinson is not even honest: she accuses the author (who lost his parents in Auschwitz) of not talking about his Jewish background or even about Nazi atrocities when, in fact, he spoke at length about such matters. She even accuses Rodinson of being silent about the crimes of Arab governments and misdeeds of the PLO when he was a harsh critic of them both. And she makes up a story that Rodinson was accused by Arabs of "lacking respect for Islam (and worse)" without providing any evidence. Rodinson remains highly respected in the Arab world.



Rodinson was born to Jewish communist parents (his father played chess with Leon Trotsky), who were fierce anti-Zionists. He grew up in a secular atheist family, and that rankled Linfield, who considered it a disqualifier in his writings on Palestine. Not identifying with an ancestral religion is anyone's right, including Rodinson who became a communist early in his youth. He also developed a keen interest in languages and Middle East studies. Rodinson

never tried to ignore the Palestinian question: in the West, talking about the Palestinian question from a non-Zionist, or anti-Zionist, perspective can result in enormous pressures and negative consequences. To this very day, many Western academics choose to either champion Zionism or to ignore the Arab-Israeli conflict altogether (many of the Western academics who feigned concern for the Syrian people in recent years had never written or said a word about Palestinians).

'Most Famous Anti-Zionist in France'

Rodinson became (in his own words) "the most famous anti-Zionist in France" ("Cult, Ghetto, and State," p. 23). His piece for Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes* in 1967 made

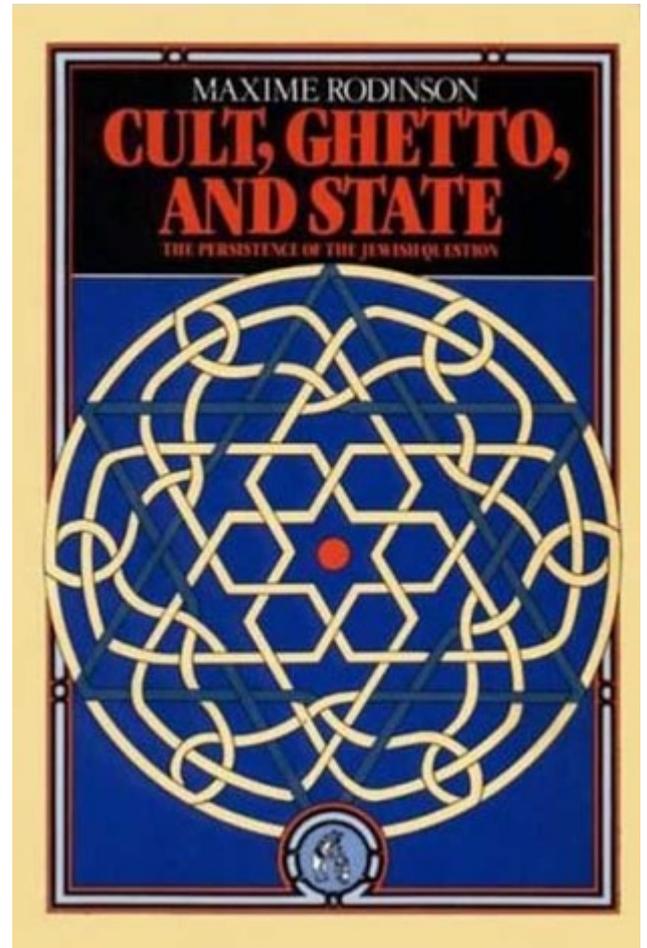
Rodinson a target of Zionist forces worldwide. His article (later published as a book, including in Arabic) was titled "Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?" While Rodinson answered his question in a sophisticated argument in the affirmative, he qualified the answer with an attempt to provide Israeli founding with extenuating circumstances. In other words, Rodinson's stance on the Palestinian question was not as radical as it was reputed to be although his arguments about the nature of the Zionist project were quite radical – and accurate.

Linfield finds Rodinson's characterization of anti-Semitism among Arabs to be apologetic, while he was clearly critical of the plight of non-Muslims under Muslim rule historically. But Rodinson lived among the Arabs, and was accepted by them, in the 1940s, when Jews (regardless whether they were practicing or not) were being exterminated in Europe. Rodinson knows more about Arab attitudes toward Jews than Linfield. Rodinson rightly pointed out that the creation of Israel triggered the rise of anti-Semitism among Arabs and resulted in the translation of some Western works of anti-Semitism (even Bernard Lewis concedes that Arab anti-Semitism is political).

In May 1972, Rodinson gave an interview to *Shu'un Filastiniyyah* in which he gave an accounting of his views of the conflict (it was reprinted in "Cult, Ghetto, and State"). In that interview, Rodinson (commenting on a remark by the late professor Ismail Faruqi to the effect that a Zionist state is objectionable even if it was established on the moon) said that he would not object to a Jewish state on the moon. But should not a secular Marxist object to any state with a religious identify and which is founded on the principle of the juridical supremacy of one religious group over others? Rodinson's point was to remind readers that his objection to the Jewish state was not in principle but was due to the displacement of the native Palestinian population and the harm that Israel has inflicted on them.

Israel's Founding

Having said that, Rodinson in his book, "Israel: A Colonial-Settler State," does not shy away from answering in the affirmative. The extenuating circumstances that he provides to the Zionist argument are that: No. 1) the immigration of Jews from Europe due to Nazi crimes was a matter of survival; No. 2) the socialist character of the Yishuv; No.

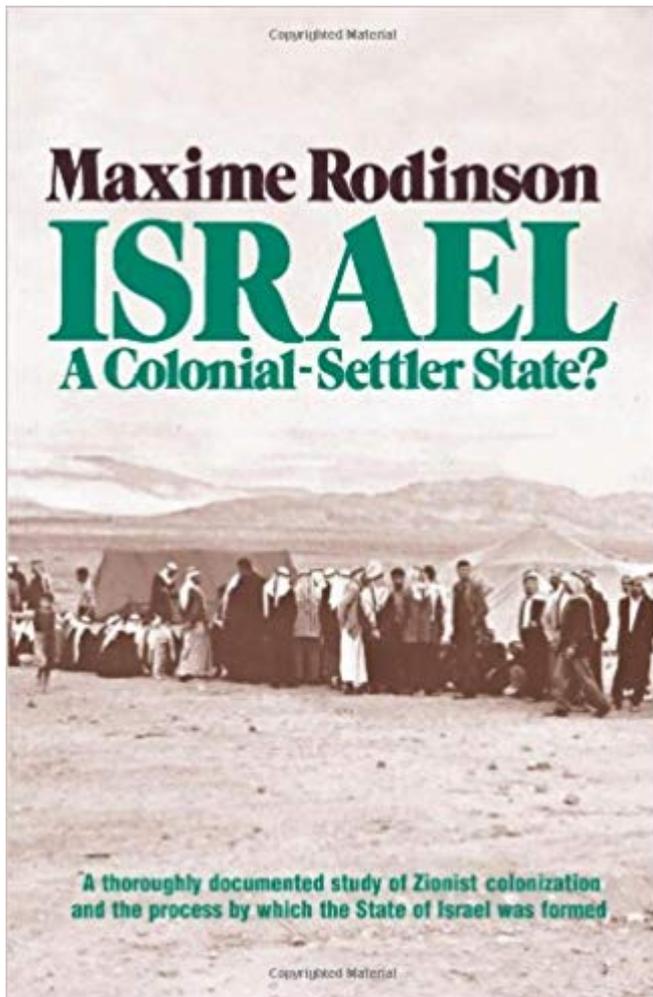


3) he talks about the sale of land to the Jews and says that it was "to the benefit of the seller and the agricultural development of the country" (p. 87).

But the immigration of Jews into Palestine took place without the consent of the native population, and it was forced either by the British government or by illegal immigration of Jews: and Western governments that were generous with their support for Jewish immigration into Palestine were strict about their restriction on Jewish immigration into their lands.

Furthermore, the question of land sale is not really salient to the discussion of the creation of Israel because Israel became a Jewish state by force and not by legal transactions (the percentage of land sold to the Jews was minuscule in comparison to the forced theft of Palestinian land).

Finally, the socialist character of the Yishuv should be irrelevant to a discussion of a colonial subjugation of a people: what does it matter to the victims if their oppressors and killers were socialist or capitalists? (This while the socialist character of the Yishuv has been highly exaggerated and the experiment ended in an ultra-capitalist state, and Western socialists have never been free of racism and prejudice). Zionists began to abuse the natives and practice discrimination against them from early on. (The ideal of "Hebrew labor" referred to the deliberate exclusion of Arab workers from Jewish enterprises).



Rodinson agrees that Zionist settlement amounted to colonialism but then proceeds to suggest that Israel was a peculiar kind of colonialism because the occupiers wanted to rule over a territory but not a population. But how can you rule over a territory and not rule over a population, most of whom were expelled by force in 1948? And does that argument make a difference to the victims? To rule over a territory and not bother with the population is the worst kind of colonialism.

Rodinson makes a strong case against Israel but then provides weak solutions that are not commensurate with the crimes that he helped expose. While he says that Arabs should determine the outcome of the struggle themselves, he advises against military solutions. How did history treat those who called on the French living under Nazi occupation (or blacks under Apartheid South Africa) to practice pacifism?

Rodinson maintains that there are two distinct communities in Palestine that have to be represented in two separate political entities, i.e. two-state (non-solution). It is ironic that Rodinson's powerful refutation of Zionist claims concludes with a weak call for Palestinian accommodation of

Zionist occupation over 78 percent of historic Palestine. But Rodinson also said (in “Israel and the Arabs”): “On the other hand, a total victory for the Arabs some day is not out of the question. Israel’s military superiority will not last forever, or, at least, will not be absolute forever” (p. 352). If only Rodinson had been around to watch the Israeli humiliation in South Lebanon in 2006.

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Israel’s Involvement in Libya’s Civil War

For several reasons, Israel has joined various Arab powers to back a strongman in Libya, explains Giorgio Cafiero.

By [Giorgio Cafiero](#)

Special to Consortium News



Since mid-2014, Libya has been mired in civil war, pitting the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli against a rival administration in Tobruk, the House of

Representatives (HoR), which is allied with General Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA). Despite lacking UN legitimacy, Haftar and his forces have received backing from a host of powerful states whose leaders view the Benghazi-based commander as Libya's only alternative to the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist actors in the war-torn North African country. Among these nations is Israel.

Tel Aviv, along with Cairo, Paris, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi support Haftar, whose opponents suspect him of wanting to become a "new Gaddafi" who seeks to establish an Egyptian-style military dictatorship in Libya.

Israeli backing of the Benghazi-based commander illustrates the regional geopolitical dynamics which have led Sunni Arab states—specifically Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—to find themselves in the same boat with Israel, sharing the same perceptions of security threats.

Coordination between Haftar and the Israelis, which has been conducted through the UAE, began in 2015, if not sooner. Initially, Israel's interests in post-Qaddafi Libya were from the perspective of its interests in the Sinai Peninsular. Links between various jihadist forces in Libya and the Sinai have been well-documented.

In 2015 and 2016, Haftar met Mossad agents in Jordan in "strict secrecy". One military source told *The New Arab* that Israel began providing the LNA with sniper rifles and night vision equipment at that time. This source suggested that the Israeli military began carrying out air raids in Libya in coordination with the LNA after Haftar launched Operation Dignity in 2014. By mid-2017, Algerian media outlets

reported that officials in Algiers warned Haftar against receiving Israeli military support.

Last year, *al-Araby al-Jadeed* explained that Haftar held another meeting in Amman “to deepen security coordination between him and Israel” and that Haftar sought a stronger Israeli presence in southern Libya to thwart Italy from asserting significant influence throughout the Fezzan, the southwest region of Libya. *Middle East Monitor* quoted an unnamed source claiming that Haftar promised Israel “safe centers” in Libya’s desert, and that the commander’s connection with Israel is Oren Hazan, a member of Israel’s Likud party who has Libyan roots.

MEMO’s source also said that while the Egyptian government backs Haftar’s tacit and covert partnership with Israel, authorities in Cairo have not wanted Haftar’s communication with Tel Aviv to become direct.

In May, *Al Jazeera Arabic* published an investigation which uncovered Israeli support for Haftar’s offensive on Tripoli, which the LNA launched on April 4. A joint Emirati-Kazakh firm, Reem Travel, had an aircraft registered to its name which was flying between Egypt, Israel, and Jordan prior to arriving in LNA-controlled territory in Libya shortly before Haftar’s westward assault began, according to *al Jazeera*.

Why Did Israel Take Sides in Libya?

Israel’s intervention in the Libyan civil war on the side of Haftar is understandable from its point of view, given a host of factors. First, when it comes to coordinating with actors in the Middle East and North Africa, Israel’s clear preference is for strongmen regardless of ideology. Like

Hosni Mubarak and Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Egypt, or King Abdullah II in Jordan, Haftar is perhaps the type of Arab leader whom the Israelis can engage with on intelligence sharing.

Second, Israeli support for Haftar brings Israel into greater *de facto* alignment with the Sunni Arab states that have been backing the eastern commander for years, namely Egypt and the UAE, and more recently Saudi Arabia too. Thus, by supporting Haftar, Tel Aviv can further cement its role in this emerging bloc of regional Sunni states, which share Israel's perception of a threat from both Iran and Iranian-backed militias, as well as certain Sunni Islamist groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood. As one Israeli Defense Forces source [told Middle East Eye](#), "A friend of our friend – and an enemy of our enemy – is our friend, and Haftar is a friend of Egypt, Jordan, and UAE. He also fights ISIS."

Third, the opportunities to secure money through lucrative weapons sales also help explain Israel's interest in backing Haftar. As a leading arms dealer, Israel has made billions by selling arms and leasing Israeli military advisers to different conflict-plagued countries in Africa, such as South Sudan. Israel is expanding its clout in Africa, where it is seeking to deepen its role and strengthen its relations with a host of countries. Israel's Africa foreign policy reached a watershed in January when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu travelled to Chad to [meet](#) President Idriss Deby and renew bilateral relations. Tel Aviv's closer relationship with Haftar can further advance Israel's grander geopolitical interests in the region.

Fourth, Libya's natural resources are a factor too.

Constantly looking for oil-rich allies to sell it oil, Israel may expect to secure access to Libya's petroleum after backing Haftar in the country's ongoing civil war. As the eastern commander's forces have demonstrated, their capacity to take control of virtually all onshore oil fields in Libya means Israel likely sees a tacit alliance with Haftar as a prudent move in regard to its energy needs.

France Also Backs Haftar

France's support for Haftar, which has been based on Paris' view of the LNA as a bulwark against Islamist extremism, has created a major division within Europe with respect to Libya. This division has had a remarkably negative impact on French-Italian relations. Unquestionably, Paris and Rome's different ideas about Libya have been another factor contributing to the North African country's crisis, while France and Italy compete for influence in this part of the Maghreb. (The U.S. officially supports the GNA, yet Trump has praised Haftar, so the U.S. position is unclear on Libya).

Turkey and its own interests are in play too. Tension is heating up between the LNA and its external supporters on the one side, and the GNA-allied militias with Turkey on the other. To counter the LNA's advance on Tripoli, the Turks have provided GNA-aligned factions with armored vehicles and drones, including one shot down by Haftar's forces late last month. By siding with Haftar, Israel has firmly positioned itself with Abu Dhabi, Cairo, and other capitals, which view Haftar as the strongest leader in Libya capable of taking on "terrorists," while returning stability to the country.

With the further regionalization of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) crisis, which has been a driver of greater instability in Libya and other countries in Africa, Israel's position is unambiguous in the Abu Dhabi-Doha clash. By supporting the Emirati and Egyptian positions on Libya—firmly placing Israel at odds with both Ankara and Doha—Tel Aviv is making clear it prefers Arab figures representing the model of Western-backed authoritarian stability and secular dictatorships, rather than those who advance the Muslim Brotherhood's vision for the region.

For the Libyan people, a dismal future is most likely. The proxy war has been fueled by many external actors, which have come into the country seeking to fill the power vacuum that emerged after Moammar Qaddafi's fall in 2011. With GNA-allied fighters recently pushing back against the LNA offensive, it is unclear how the civil war will evolve as Haftar's forces continue to shell Tripoli.

The growing danger for Libya, torn apart by various militias fighting with the support of Israel and the other external actors, is long-term fragmentation.

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On The New York Times Cartoon Ban

Daniel Lazare looks into the Times' overreaction to charges of anti-Semitism.

By **Daniel Lazare**

Special to Consortium News



The New York Times was so sorry last month for publishing an allegedly anti-Semitic cartoon showing Benjamin Netanyahu as a guide dog leading a blind Donald Trump, that it's decided never to run any satirical cartoon on any topic again.

Based on five minutes of googling, the consensus seems to be that it's a gross overreaction. But the reason the *Times* can't stop apologizing is that the cartoon shows the Israeli prime minister with a blue Star of David around his neck and Trump with a yarmulke atop his orange hairdo. Using such symbols in this way makes many people uncomfortable, which is understandable.

But imagine, if you will, a cartoon showing Canadian President Justin Trudeau with a maple leaf on his shirt, Angela Merkel with a German eagle, France's Emmanuel Macron dressed up like Napoleon, or Britain's Theresa May draped in a British flag? Why don't any of those stir an outcry?

The reason, one might counter, is that those images are

political whereas the Star of David is religious. True, but that's precisely the point. Canada, France, and Germany are all secular societies in which church and state are firmly separate. (Britain is a bit more complicated thanks to the queen's role as head of the Church of England, but that's another story.) But the upshot is zero overlap as far as political and religious imagery are concerned.

Indeed, for all its sins, the same is true even for the United States. Think of America and what comes to mind – Uncle Sam, a bald eagle, or a missile-laden F-16? Perhaps. What does not come to mind is the cross even though 75 percent of Americans identify as Christian, a higher portion than Canadians (67.3 percent), Germans (64.2), Brits (59.5), or French (51.1). Thanks to the First Amendment and a succession of Supreme Court cases dealing with things like school prayer, the U.S. government has been de-religionized and the very idea of America has been de-religionized as well.

But it's not true for Israel. To the contrary, the same Star of David that appears in the cartoon also appears on the national flag while the yarmulke is also virtually a national symbol thanks to the growing ultra-orthodox influence. Instead of separation of church and state, the consequence is an ever-closer union. Back in 2003, the late historian Tony Judt stirred a hornet's nest by pointing out that Israel has less in common in this respect with other postwar nations than it does with the ethno-religious states of the 1920s and '30s. As he put it in *The New York Review of Books*:



“At the dawn of the twentieth century, in the twilight of the continental empires, Europe’s subject peoples dreamed of forming ‘nation-states,’ territorial homelands where Poles, Czechs, Serbs, Armenians, and others might live free, masters of their own fate. When the Habsburg and Romanov empires collapsed after World War I, their leaders seized the opportunity. A flurry of new states emerged; and the first thing they did was set about privileging their national, ‘ethnic’ majority – defined by language, or religion, or antiquity, or all three – at the expense of inconvenient local minorities, who were consigned to second-class status: permanently resident strangers in their own home.”

Ethno States

Ironically, the most inconvenient local minority of all was the Jews, who were all but obliterated when the same ethno-states were taken over by fascism during World War II. Yet, under the Zionists, Israel has reduced Palestinians to strangers in their own land as well.

Indeed, the situation is far worse than when Judt wrote. Where Israel “risks falling” into the camp of “belligerently intolerant, faith-driven ethno-states,” as he put it, it’s now the leader of the pack, a role model for up-and-coming ethno-authoritarians like Hungary’s Viktor Orbán, Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro, or, of course, Trump, as they make their way through an increasingly illiberal political landscape.

One purpose of an ethno-state is to dazzle, confuse, and disarm. There are many reasons that the Star of David appears on the Israeli flag, but one of the most important

is to de-legitimize the criticism of de-legitimization by making it all but impossible to attack the Jewish state without attacking Jews. Outsiders wind up damned if they do and damned if they don't, spineless apologists for an increasingly brutal regime if they keep their mouths shut, and anti-Jewish bigots if they dare to speak up.

This is the boat that António Moreira Antunes, the unfortunate Portuguese artist behind the *Times* cartoon, finds himself in now that he's been branded as anti-Semite across the globe. Antunes says he merely wanted to use Israeli national symbols to make a point, which is that "Trump's erratic, destructive and often blind politics encouraged the expansionist radicalism of Netanyahu." Yet he found himself running headlong into a buzz saw of condemnation almost before he laid down his pen.

Not only does such doubled-edged symbolism make honest criticism more difficult – it also makes real anti-Semitism easier. Traditionally, anti-Semites have hidden their bigotry behind seemingly legitimate criticism of the Jewish state. Going on about this or that crime against the Palestinians is supposedly a way of going on and on about the Jews without quite saying so. But as the British anti-Zionist campaigner Tony Greenstein points out, today's anti-Semites are good deal cleverer. Instead of hiding behind criticism, they hide behind support.

This is why someone like Orbán is so eager for Israeli approval even as he goes about rehabilitating Miklós Horthy, the Hungarian dictator from 1920 to 1944 who was a key Nazi ally and who, according to the historian Raphael Patai, bragged of being "an anti-Semite throughout my life." All

Orbán wants is for Netanyahu to sprinkle him with a little holy water, so to speak, so he can continue with his neo-Horthyite goal of creating an ethnically pure Greater Hungary in which Muslim refugees are prohibited. When the Hungarian president visited Jerusalem's Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial last summer, furious demonstrators blocked his motorcade shouting, "Never again!" and "Shame on you!" and denouncing Yad Vashem for hosting him.

Favorite Target

Bad as this is, the real story is even worse. Orbán's favorite target, the key to his success in fact, turns out to be the Hungarian-American financier George Soros. Soros is a major funder of liberal causes and organizations throughout the world, including the Free University in Budapest, a liberal bastion that has long been a thorn in Orbán's side. Soros also happens to be Jewish. For the Hungarian president, therefore, he's straight out of central casting, an international Jew who can be blamed for everything from the migrant crisis to the economic slowdown and know-it-all foreign critics. A recent government-funded poster campaign showed Soros's portrait along with the inscription, "Let's not let George Soros have the last laugh" – a reference, Tony Greenstein's suggests, to a famous speech that Hitler gave in January 1939:

"I have often been a prophet in my life and was generally laughed at. During my struggle for power, the Jews primarily received with laughter my prophecies that I would someday assume the leadership of the state and ... then, among many other things, achieve a solution of the

Jewish problem. I suppose that meanwhile the then surrounding laughter of Jewry in Germany is now choking in their throats.”

Just as Hitler didn't want Jews to have the last laugh, Orbán doesn't want them to either.

But Orbán didn't dream up the anti-Soros campaign on his own. To the contrary, a pair of rightwing American Jewish political consultants named Arthur Finkelstein and George Birnbaum thought it up for him. After Finkelstein and Birnbaum helped Netanyahu become prime minister in 1996, he returned the favor by recommending their services to his old friend in Budapest. Amid the economic devastation caused by the 2008 financial blowout, they helped him win re-election, Hannes Grassegger reports in [Buzzfeed](#), by persuading him to target bureaucrats and foreign capital. When Orbán needed a fresh enemy to consolidate his control, they then came up with another target. Following their advice to the letter, Orbán [sailed into Soros](#) at the height of the 2015 refugee crisis:

“His name is perhaps the strongest example of those who support anything that weakens nation states, they support everything that changes the traditional European lifestyle. These activists who support immigrants inadvertently become part of this international human-smuggling network.”

This was the international Jew as enemy of the nation, tradition, and Christianity – an angle of attack that a couple of Netanyahu emissaries not only inspired but designed. Instead of defending Jews, Israel was egging on their attackers. Not for nothing does Israeli dissident

Ronnie Barkan [argue](#) that “the greatest anti-Semitic force in the world today is the state of Israel.”

Yet the only thing *The New York Times* can do in response is to shoot the messenger by forever banning political cartoons from its pages. By censoring critics, editorial page editor James Bennet, the genius behind the new policy, hopes that maybe the problem will just go away. But it won't of course. He's guilty, rather, of a hear-no-evil strategy that will only make matters worse. The *Times's* definition of “all the news that's fit to print” grows narrower and more distorted by the day.

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

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Echoes of FDR in Trump's Bid for Palestinian Surrender

There's nothing new about a U.S. president assuming that Palestinians can be bribed into cooperating with Zionist ambitions, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By [Lawrence Davidson](#)



President Donald Trump's peace plan for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, or at least the economic side of it, was discussed at a meeting in Bahrain on June 25 and 26. The plan, euphemistically entitled "Peace to Prosperity" and the "Deal of the Century" is also, inaccurately, likened to a "Marshall Plan for Palestinians." It is based on the assumption that money, ultimately the better part of \$50 billion, can lure the Palestinian people into surrender – that is, the surrender of their right to a state of their own on their stolen ancestral land as well as the right of return for the 7.5 million Palestinians who have been forced into exile. Upon surrender, according to the plan, "an ambitious, achievable ... framework for a prosperous future for the Palestinian people and the region" will be put into place. How this idealized future is to be integrated into the apartheid and Bantustan system of control that constitutes the Israeli government's "facts on the ground" is left unexplained.

This bit of gilded bait was put together by "senior White House adviser" Jared Kushner, the president's son-in-law; Jason Greenblatt, chief lawyer of the Trump Organization and now U.S. envoy for international negotiations; and David Friedman, the president's bankruptcy lawyer who is now the U.S. ambassador to Israel. All of these men are at once unqualified for their present positions as well as Zionist supporters of Israeli expansionism. It is not surprising then that the Israeli government has welcomed this effort. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that he "would listen

to the American plan and hear it fairly and with openness.” On the other hand, the Palestinian West Bank leader, Mahmoud Abbas, said, “As long as there is no political [solution], we do not deal with any economic [solution].”

There are, no doubt, some Palestinians who are upset at Abbas’s position: perhaps some business people, often-unpaid bureaucrats, and a portion of the frustrated middle-class, who will be dearly tempted by the promise of all that money. These are people who, given over a century of struggle, see no hope of a just political settlement.

Caution Signs

Nonetheless, those tempted might consider these facts: (1) All those billions of dollars are, as yet, hypothetical. The money is not in the bank, so to speak. And, it is not a given that Trump can actually raise the funds. Thus, for all those ready to trade justice for dollars, it might be premature to actually make the leap. (2) There is a prevailing belief among the Trump cabal putting this plan together that the Palestinians themselves are incapable of running the proposed development programs. They are assumed to be too corrupt or tainted with “terrorist” backgrounds to be trusted. Thus, the question of who would run this effort (Israelis? American Zionists? anyone other than those dedicated to Palestinian interests?) is left unanswered. Relative to this question, it should be kept in mind that the Israelis have made something of a science of robbing the Palestinians of their resources. They are hardly likely to stop now. (3) The raising of money for the Trump plan is in competition with a UN effort to raise \$1.2 billion for UNRWA (which Trump stopped funding), the agency that supports

programs for Palestinian refugees. That fund-raiser was running at the same time as the Bahrain meeting. If the Trump plan gains traction, there might well be pressure to shut down UNRWA altogether.

Is this really an honest proposal to provide the Palestinians with prosperity? The history of “third world” development efforts sponsored by and run under the guidance of “first world” powers, be they Western governments or institutions like the IMF, is largely one of failure. There is no reason to believe that the Trump plan will fare any better. While these problematic economic efforts may eventually fall short, the political conditions almost certain to be attached to the aid will probably require immediate cessation of all anti-Zionist activities, including the relatively successful ongoing boycott of Israel.

The Precedent

It might come as a surprise, but this is not the first time that financial bribery to procure Arab cooperation with Zionist ambitions has been tried.

There is a historical precedent for Trump’s attempted “deal of the century” that is detailed my book, [“America’s Palestine”](#) (cheap used copies of which are available on line). Here is how that precedent went: Back in 1942, the Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann told members of the U.S. State Department’s Division of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) that Winston Churchill wished to make the Saudi king, Ibn Saud, “the boss of bosses in the Arab World.” The only condition to this offer was that Ibn Saud must “be willing to work out

with Weizmann to achieve a sane solution to the Palestine problem." Weizmann further claimed that the U.S. president Franklin Roosevelt was "in accord on this subject."

The response of the head of the NEA, Wallace Murray, a man who knew the Middle East much better than did Chaim Weizmann, was one of skepticism. Murray noted that British influence over Ibn Saud was small and that he doubted the Saudi king wanted to be the Arab "boss of bosses." Finally, he expressed doubt that anything the Zionists would consider a "solution" would be something Ibn Saud would consider to be "sane."

Nonetheless, the Zionists persisted along these lines and soon came up with a plan where, in return for a Jewish Palestine, Ibn Saud would be made the "head of an Arab federation in control of a 'development' budget of 20 million British pounds."

At this point Murray became adamant that this would never work. He predicted that Ibn Saud would interpret the offer as a bribe – the offer of a throne in exchange for turning Palestine over to the Zionists. He would interpret the 20 million pounds as a "slush fund." Consequently, there was every reason to believe that the Saudi ruler would see this whole plan as a personal insult. So Murray suggested that "the less we have to do with the ... proposals of Dr. Weizmann the better."

As it turned out Roosevelt disagreed with Murray and after a conversation with Weizmann in early June of 1943, authorized an approach to Ibn Saud along the lines of the Zionist plan. Why did he ignore Murray in favor of Weizmann? Because

Murray's accurate assessment of Ibn Saud conflicted with FDR's stereotyped view of Arabs. This is revealed in the minutes of the June meeting with Weizmann wherein the president said that "he believes the Arabs are purchasable." In other words, following a common Western view, the president saw the Arabs as a backward people who would do just about anything for the right amount of "bakshish."

Subsequently, the entire scheme came to naught when, in the fall of 1943, Ibn Saud rejected it out of hand. He would subsequently tell FDR that the Jews should "be given the choicest lands and homes of the Germans who had oppressed them." When the president replied that the Jews would not wish to stay in Germany after the war, Ibn Saud noted that the "allied camp" had "fifty countries" in it. Surely they could find enough open space (he even alluded to the underpopulated areas of the American West) to take in Europe's Jewish refugees. Roosevelt came away from the exchange rather shaken. He finally understood from it that "the Arabs mean business" when it comes to Palestine.

Change and Continuity

The world has changed a lot since the 1940s. Ibn Saud has been replaced by the Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman. This can be seen as real step down in terms of personal integrity and strategic judgment. Franklin Roosevelt has been replaced with Donald Trump. I will let readers make their own judgments on this change. Actually, the thing that has stayed constant, perhaps because it was always devoid of real empathy for the Palestinians, is the nature of Zionist leadership. Thus, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, Danny Danon, has said that the only way the Palestinians can

be economically liberated is through their political surrender. But as suggested above, Israel is now a confirmed apartheid state that feels its own “security” necessitates both military and economic control of the Palestinians. Given that reality, Danon’s notion of economic liberation means about as much as Weizmann’s promise of someone else’s (i.e., Britain’s) money. And then there is the replacement of Chaim Weizmann (the Zionist pre-state leader) with Benjamin Netanyahu. The former may have had more persuasive charm than the latter, but certainly their goals were, and continue to be, the same.

It is Zionism’s ambition to possess biblical Palestine that has reduced the Palestinians to destitution. Perfectly predictable and legal Palestinian resistance is the excuse the Israelis use to cover up the segregationist and impoverishing policies that are necessitated by their ideological worldview. And now Trump and his Zionist son-in-law come forward with their plan, fully expecting the Palestinians to trust the Americans and their Israeli allies to make them “developed” and prosperous? I wonder what Ibn Saud would say to that?

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This article is from his website TothePointAnalysis.com.

Trump's Underwhelming Deal for Palestine and the Gulf Monarchies' Complicated Ties with Israel

Giorgio Cafiero gauges the shortcomings of the U.S.-backed "Peace to Prosperity" summit in Bahrain this week.

By **Giorgio Cafiero**

Special to Consortium News



The U.S.-backed two-day "Peace to Prosperity" summit in Bahrain on Tuesday and Wednesday was designed to advance the Trump administration's vision for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. But without any significant Palestinian representation at the summit, as well as the absence of any Israeli government officials, the gathering was ultimately little more than a face-saving effort on the White House's part following two years of the administration's "futile" peacemaking efforts.

The conference is understood to have laid the foundation for the "Deal of the Century." The details have yet to be released, although the White House claims it will unveil the plan following Israel's elections in September. Yet some details have leaked, leading the Palestinian Authority to declare it dead on arrival. Virtually all Palestinian factions are united in opposition to it.

Telling was the 40-page **proposal** put out earlier this month by the White House, which used the terms "investment" and "financing" dozens of times, yet never once mentioned "occupation." Dan Kurtzer, who previously served as

Washington's ambassador to Israel and Egypt and is now a professor of Middle East policy studies at Princeton University, tweeted: "I would give this so-called plan a 'C' from an undergraduate student. The authors of the plan clearly understand nothing."

Astute analysis. I would give this so-called plan a C- from an undergraduate student. The authors of the plan clearly understand nothing.

<https://t.co/tbjp1lKex0>

– Daniel Kurtzer (@DanKurtzer) June 23, 2019

The "workshop" in Bahrain began with President Donald Trump's adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner delivering a speech in which he unveiled a \$50 billion economic package intended to "unleash" the Palestinians' potential as well as help develop neighboring Lebanon and Jordan. Kushner referred to a "bustling tourist center in Gaza" without acknowledging Israel's siege of the coastal strip and the dire humanitarian crises in the blockaded enclave. IMF Director Christine Lagarde spoke about applying lessons from Mozambique to Palestine. Steve Schwarzman, an American billionaire whose personal wealth exceeds Palestine's annual GDP, advised the Palestinians to follow the model of Singapore. The U.S. ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, hailed the "workshop" as an "attempt to jumpstart the Palestinian economy" and "improve the quality of life of Palestinians."

Unrealistic and Disingenuous

Undeniably, the White House's plans for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are as unrealistic as they are disingenuous. With an ongoing conflict and no clearly defined borders, it is at best naïve to imagine the Occupied Palestinian Territories fostering a climate that is ripe for

foreign investment. Building a tourism sector and stimulating vibrant economic growth under occupation are also unrealistic. Whereas Kushner sought to first discuss the economic dimensions of the Palestinians' problems while saving meetings over the political ones for later, he fails to understand how Palestine's economic crises are linked to politics. Put simply, the Palestinians will not be able to achieve economic development through some foreign-driven technocratic plan without finding a solution to the political issues at the heart of the conflict.

The Palestinian view is that the White House is simply trying to liquidate their cause by buying them off with foreign money. Moreover, no experts believe that the Trump administration has the political or diplomatic capital to serve as a credible mediator between the Palestinians and Israel. The White House has absolutely no goodwill among Palestinians, particularly in the aftermath of the administration formally recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and slashing funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

As the first U.S. administration to officially reject the two-state solution as the basis for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the current White House represents an opportunity for Israel to cement its colonization of territory in land annexed during 1967. As such, the "Deal of the Century" is about the consolidation of Israel's occupation of Palestinian land and a way toward establishing a "second homeland" for Palestinians in Jordan and/or Egypt. The Israeli UN ambassador's opinion piece in *The New York Times*, which called for a Palestinian

“surrender” and was published just before the Bahrain summit kicked off, essentially summed up both the Israeli government and the Trump administration’s views on the Palestinian question.

GCC-Israel Ties

Nonetheless, although the summit did not raise important questions about Palestinian-Israeli relations, it raised some about Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member-states and Israel’s gradual normalization of ties. That this summit was held in Bahrain was not a major surprise considering that the archipelago kingdom has led the GCC in terms of moving toward normalization of relations with Israel.

Indeed, Bahrain’s openness to closer relations with the Jewish state was on display in September 2017 when Prince Nasser bin Hamad al-Khalifa attended a multinational event in Los Angeles where two American rabbis stated that the king of Bahrain had voiced his opposition to the Arab League’s economic boycott of Israel. As the “Peace to Prosperity” workshop began, the Bahraini Crown Prince welcomed delegates with a message that called the Bahraini capital, Manama, the Gulf’s most religiously diverse city and referenced its tiny Jewish community. Notably, Bahrain’s former Jewish ambassador to Washington, Houda Ezra Ebrahim Nonoo, attended the summit.

Much like the dynamics which have brought other GCC member-states closer to Israel, a mutual perception of Iran as a threat is at the heart of Bahrain’s interest in establishing warmer ties with Tel Aviv. Yet for Bahrain and other Arabian Peninsula monarchies – until the Palestinian issue is

resolved – prospects for moving toward a full normalization of relations will remain complicated.

Whereas Kuwait stands out as the only country in the GCC that principally rejects this trend of Gulf states moving in the direction of normalizing ties with Israel, it is the GCC's only semi-democracy, thus this firm "pro-Palestinian" stance partially reflects pressures from Kuwaiti public opinion. For other states in the Arabian Peninsula that are far less democratic, especially the absolute monarchies, public opinion is less relevant to foreign policy decision-making but all statesmen in the Arab world are aware that appearing too close to Israel risks making them targets.

It appears that the Gulf states that participated in this "workshop" are keen to maintain their links to Israel, which are vibrant in the domains of private enterprise, yet maintain low profiles for political reasons. Also, at a time in which the Trump administration continues applying "maximum pressure" on Iran, officials in Manama, Abu Dhabi and Riyadh find themselves in the same boat as their Israeli counterparts in terms of backing the White House's aggressive anti-Iranian agenda.

Unquestionably, this summit reinforced the message that most in the GCC remain interested in moving toward warmer relations with Israel and there is a genuine desire in the Gulf to see the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis come to an end. Yet as *The Economist* [put it](#), this summit was "an underwhelming start to the 'ultimate' Israeli-Palestinian deal" which has no chance of being struck through American mediation so long as the U.S. is so one-sided in this conflict.

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Trump's Bipartisan Support for Eradicating the Palestinian Cause

The U.S. is now formally supporting Israel's efforts at economic pacification, writes Jonathan Cook.

By [JonathanCook](#)

[Jonathan-Cook.net](#)



The White House's prolonged financial bullying of the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinians' government-in-waiting, has reached the point where there are now credible warnings that it is close to collapse. The crisis has offered critics further proof of the administration's seemingly chaotic, often self-sabotaging approach to foreign policy matters.

Meanwhile, U.S. officials charged with resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have demonstrated ever more blatant bias, such as the recent claims by David Friedman, the ambassador to Israel, that Israel is "[on the side of God](#)" and should have the "[right to retain](#)" much of the West Bank.

Critics view the Trump administration's approach as a dangerous departure from the traditional U.S. role of "honest broker."

Such analyses, however common, are deeply misguided. Far from lacking a strategy, the White House has a precise and clear one for imposing a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – President Donald Trump's "deal of the century." Even without publication so far of a formal document, the plan's contours are coming ever more sharply into relief, as its implementation becomes observable on the ground.

Repeated delays in announcing the plan are simply an indication that Trump's team needs more time to engineer a suitable political environment for the plan to be brought out of the shadows.

Further, the Trump administration's vision of the future for Israelis and Palestinians – however extreme and one-sided – has wide, bipartisan support in Washington. There's nothing especially "Trumpian" about the administration's emerging "peace process."

Choking Off Aid

Paradoxically, that was evident last week, when leading members of the U.S. Congress from both sides of the aisle introduced a bill to boost the ailing Palestinian economy by \$50m. The hope is to create a "Partnership Fund for Peace" that will offer a financial fillip to Israelis and Palestinians seeking to resolve the conflict – or, at least, that is what is being claimed.

This sudden concern for the health of the Palestinian

economy is a dramatic and confusing U-turn. Congress has been an active and enthusiastic partner with the White House in choking off aid to the PA for more than a year.

Mohammad Shtayyeh, the Palestinian prime minister, told *The New York Times* last week that the PA was on the brink of implosion. "We are in a collapsing situation," he told the newspaper.

The PA's crisis comes as no surprise. Congress helped initiate it by passing the Taylor Force Act in March 2018. It requires the U.S. to halt funding to the PA until it stops paying stipends to some 35,000 families of Palestinians jailed, killed or maimed by Israel.

Brink of Collapse

Previous U.S. administrations might well have signed a waiver to prevent such legislation from going into effect – just as presidents until Trump blocked a congressional law passed in 1995 demanding that the U.S. move its embassy to Jerusalem.

But the Trump White House is not interested in diplomatic face-saving or reining in the pro-Israel zealotry of U.S. legislators. It fervently and explicitly shares the biases that have long been inherent in the U.S. political system.

In line with the Taylor Force Act, the White House has cut off vital funds for Palestinians, including to UNRWA, the United Nations' refugee agency for Palestinians, and to hospitals in Israeli-occupied East Jerusalem.

The decision by Congress to throttle the PA has had further repercussions, leaving Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu exposed domestically. Not daring to be seen as less anti-PA than U.S. legislators, Netanyahu implemented his own version of the Taylor Force Act earlier this year.

Since February, he has withheld a portion of the taxes Israel collects on behalf of the PA, the vast bulk of its income, equal to the stipends transferred to the Palestinian families of prisoners and casualties of Israeli violence – or those who Israel and the U.S. simplimindedly refer to as “terrorists.”

That, in turn, has left Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, in an impossible position. He dare not be seen accepting an Israeli diktat that legitimizes withholding Palestinian money, or one that defines as “terrorists” those who have sacrificed the most for the Palestinian cause. So he has refused the entire monthly tax transfer until the full amount is reinstated.

Now, just as these various blows against the PA finally threaten to topple it, the U.S. Congress suddenly prepares to step in and bail out the Palestinian economy with \$50m. What on earth is going on?

‘Money for Quiet’

The small print is telling. The PA, the Palestinians’ fledgling government, is not eligible for any of the U.S. Congress’s promised largesse.

If the legislation passes, the money will be handed to “Palestinian entrepreneurs and companies,” as well as non-governmental organizations, willing to work with the U.S.

and Israel on “people-to-people peace-building” programs and “reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians.”

In other words, the legislation is actually designed as another strike against the Palestinians’ existing leadership. The PA is being bypassed yet again, as the U.S. and Israel try to bolster an alternative economic, rather than political, leadership.

This move by U.S. representatives is not occurring in a vacuum. Since the effective collapse of the Oslo accords nearly two decades ago, Washington has sought to downgrade a national conflict that needs a political solution into a humanitarian crisis that needs an economic one.

It is a variation on Netanyahu’s long-standing goal to smash the Palestinian national struggle and replace it with “economic peace.”

Where once the goal of peacemaking was “land in exchange for peace” – that is, a Palestinian state in return for an end to hostilities – now the aim is “money in exchange for quiet.” The U.S. is now formally supporting Israel’s efforts at economic pacification.

Outrage at New Elections

The Trump administration has devised a two-stage process for neutralizing Palestinians.

Firstly, Trump’s son-in-law, Jared Kushner, has been tasked with winning over Arab states, particularly those in the oil-rich Gulf, to stump up money for pacifying Palestinians and their neighbors.

This is the aim of an investment conference due to be held in Bahrain later this month – the lynchpin of the “deal of the century,” not simply a prelude to it.

That was why Trump himself was so visibly outraged at the delay caused by Netanyahu’s decision to dissolve the Israeli parliament last month, a reflection of his political weakness as he faces imminent corruption trials. The new elections in Israel, Trump grumbled, were “ridiculous” and “messed up.”

The intention of the Bahrain conference is to use tens of billions of dollars raised by Washington to buy off opposition to the Trump deal, chiefly from Egypt and Jordan, which are critical to the pacification program’s success.

Any refusal by the Palestinians to surrender, either in Gaza or the West Bank, could have major repercussions for these neighboring states.

Alternative Leaders

Secondly, Friedman is at the center of efforts to identify recipients for the Gulf-funded handouts. He has been seeking to forge a new alliance between the settlers, with whom he is closely aligned, and Palestinians who may be willing to help in the pacification project. Late last year, he attended a meeting of Palestinian and Israeli business leaders in the West Bank city of Ariel.

Afterwards he tweeted that the business community was “ready, willing and able to advance joint opportunity & peaceful coexistence. People want peace and we are ready to help! Is the Palestinian leadership listening?”

At the invitation of the Judea and Samaria Chamber of Commerce, I met in Ariel with Palestinian & Israeli business leaders ready, willing & able to advance joint opportunity & peaceful coexistence. People want peace & we are ready to help! Is the Palestinian leadership listening? pic.twitter.com/g91fGHNDzF

– David M. Friedman (@USAmbIsrael) [October 16, 2018](#)

Friedman has made no bones about where his – and supposedly God’s – priorities lie, throwing his weight behind the growing clamor in Israel to annex much of the territory that was once seen as integral to creating a Palestinian state. With that as the administration’s lode star, the task is now to find a Palestinian leadership prepared to stand by as the finishing touches are put on a Greater Israel ordained by God.

Concerns in Washington about the PA’s unwillingness to comply were voiced last week by Kushner, though he dressed them up as doubts about the Palestinians’ ability to govern themselves. He said of the PA: “The hope is that they, over time, will become capable of governing.” He added that the real test of the administration’s plan would be whether Palestinian areas became “investable.”

Kushner, second from left, in 2017, with other members of the Trump administration, arriving as honored guest of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, 2017, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. (White House/ Shealah Craighead)

“When I speak to Palestinian people, what they want is they want the opportunity to live a better life. They want the opportunity to pay their mortgage,” he said.

Washington is therefore looking to influential families in the West Bank that could potentially be recruited with

bribes to serve as an alternative, compliant leadership. In February it was reported that around 200 businesspeople, Israeli mayors and heads of Palestinian communities met in Jerusalem “to advance business partnerships between Israeli and Palestinian entrepreneurs”.

Corrupt Tribal Fiefdoms

It has been natural for the Trump administration to look to a business elite – one that, it hopes, will be prepared to forgo a national solution if the economic environment is liberalized enough to allow for new regional and global investment opportunities.

These individuals belong to extended families that dominate the West Bank’s major cities. Such powerful families may be prepared to assist in the elimination of the PA, in return for a corrupt patronage system allowing them to take control of their respective cities.

Palestinian analysts, like Samir Awad, a politics professor at Bir Zeit University near Ramallah, have told me that the Israeli and U.S. vision of Palestinian “autonomy” may amount to little more than a system of tribal fiefdoms, reminiscent of Afghanistan.

There are already a few Palestinian partners emerging, such as Hebron businessman Ashraf Jabari, who is reportedly planning to attend the Bahrain conference.

He and other business leaders have been quietly developing ties with counterparts in the settler movement, such as Avi Zimmerman. Together, they have set up a joint chamber of commerce covering the West Bank.

It is precisely such initiatives that are being promoted by Friedman and would be eligible for grants from the \$50m fund the U.S. Congress is currently legislating.

Ultimately, these Palestinian business “partners” could form an elite to serve as an ostensible national address for the international community in its dealings with the Palestinian people.

Sword Over PA

The PA doesn't have to be discarded for the Trump plan to progress. But alternative national and local leaderships need to be cultivated by Washington to serve both as a sword hanging over the PA's head, to encourage it to capitulate, and as an alternative ruling class, should the PA fail to submit to the “deal of the century.”

In short, Washington is playing a game of chicken with Abbas and the PA. It is determined that the Palestinians will blink first.

Deeply implicated in Washington's vision, even if largely out of sight, are the Arab states, whose role is to strong-arm whatever Palestinian leadership is required for the Greater Israel “deal of the century” to be implemented.

The burden of managing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will shift once again. When Israel occupied the Palestinian territories in 1967, it became directly responsible for the welfare of Palestinians living there.

Since the mid-1990s, when the Palestinian leadership was allowed to return under the Oslo accords, the PA has had to shoulder the task of keeping the territories quiet on

Israel's behalf. Now, after the PA has refused to sign off on Israel's ambitions to take for itself East Jerusalem and much of the West Bank, the PA is increasingly seen as having outlived its usefulness.

Instead, Palestinian expectations may have to be managed via another route – through the key Arab states of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Jordan. Or, as Palestinian analyst Hani al-Masri recently noted, the Bahrain conference “foreshadows the beginning of abandoning the [Palestine Liberation Organization] as the Palestinians' representative, thereby opening the door ... for a new era of Arab patronage over the Palestinians to take hold.”

Years of Imperial Overreach

Under Trump, what has changed most significantly in the U.S. approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the urgency of Washington's efforts to set aside the Palestinian national struggle once and for all.

Since the Six-Day War of 1967, U.S. administrations – with the possible exception of Jimmy Carter's – had only a marginal interest in forcing a settlement on Israelis and Palestinians. Aside from lip service to peace, they were mostly content to leave the two sides to engage in an asymmetrical struggle that always favored Israel. This was sold as “conflict management.”

But after 15 years of U.S. imperial overreach in the Middle East – and faced with major foreign policy setbacks in Iraq and Syria, and Israel's related failures in Lebanon – Washington desperately needs to consolidate its position against rivals and potential rivals in this oil-rich region.

Russia, China, Turkey, Iran, and even Europe, are jostling in different ways for a more assertive role in the Middle East. As it tries to counter these influences, the U.S. wishes to bring together its main allies in the region: Israel and the key Arab states, led by Saudi Arabia.

Although secret ties between the two sides have been growing for some time, unresolved tensions remain over Israel's demand that it be allowed to maintain regional superiority in military and intelligence matters. That has been obvious in current power battles playing out in Washington.

The Trump administration last month declared extraordinary measures to bypass Congress so that it could sell more than \$8 billion in weapons to Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Jordan. In retaliation, Congressional leaders close to Israel vowed they would block the arms sales.

Splinter in Region's Windpipe

In the White House's view, little further progress can be made until the Palestinian splinter stuck deep in the Middle East's windpipe is removed.

Most Arab leaders care nothing for the Palestinian cause, and have come to bitterly resent the way the Palestinians' enduring struggle for statehood has complicated their own dealings in the region, especially with Iran and Israel.

They would enthusiastically embrace a full partnership with the U.S. and Israel in the region, if only they could afford to be seen doing so.

But the Palestinians' struggle against Israel – and its powerful symbolism in a region that has experienced so much

malign Western interference – continues to serve as a brake on Washington's efforts to forge tighter and more explicit alliances with the Arab states.

Serious Case of Hubris

As such, the Trump administration has concluded that "conflict management" is no longer in U.S. interests. It needs to isolate and dispose of the Palestinian splinter. Once that encumbrance is out of the way, the White House believes it can get on with forging a coalition with Israel and most of the Arab states to reassert its dominance over the Middle East.

All of this will likely prove far harder to achieve than the Trump administration imagines, as U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo intimated last week in private.

But it would be wrong nonetheless to assume that the strategy behind Trump's "deal of the century," however unrealistic, is not clear-sighted in both its aims and methods.

It would be similarly misguided to believe that the administration's policy is a maverick one. It is operating within the ideological constraints of the Washington foreign policy elite, even if Trump's "peace plan" lies at the outer margins of the establishment consensus.

The Trump administration enjoys bipartisan backing from Congress both for its Jerusalem embassy move and for economic measures that threaten to crush the PA, a government-in-waiting that has already made enormous compromises in agreeing to statehood on a tiny fraction of

its people's historic homeland.

No doubt the Trump White House is suffering from a serious case of hubris in trying to eliminate the Palestinian cause for good. But that hubris, however dangerous, we should remember, is shared by much of the U.S. political establishment.

Jonathan Cook is a freelance journalist based in Nazareth. This article is from his website, [Jonathan Cook.net](http://JonathanCook.net).

A USS Liberty's Hero's Passing

On the 52nd anniversary of the attack on the USS Liberty, Ray McGovern focuses on Terry Halbardier, who sent the SOS that saved the ship from Israeli destruction.

This article was written in 2014 on the occasion of Halbardier's death.

By Ray McGovern

Special to Consortium News

Terry Halbardier, who as a 23-year old seaman in 1967 thwarted Israeli attempts to sink the USS Liberty, died on Aug. 11 in Visalia, California. It took the U.S. government 42 years after the attack to recognize Halbardier's heroism by awarding him the Silver Star, a delay explained by Washington's determination to downplay Israeli responsibility for the 34 Americans killed and the 174 wounded.

On June 8, 1967, during the Six-Day War, the Israeli military attacked the USS Liberty, an American spy ship which had been monitoring Israeli transmissions about the conflict. Intercepted Israeli communications indicated that the goal was to sink the Liberty and leave no survivors.

Warplanes and torpedo boats had already killed 34 and wounded 174, when Halbardier slid over the Liberty's napalm-glazed deck to jury-rig an antenna and get an SOS off to the Sixth Fleet. The Israelis intercepted the SOS and broke off the attack immediately. In effect, Halbardier prevented the massacre of all 294 onboard. Still, the infamy of the attack on the Liberty was two-fold.

First, the Liberty, a virtually defenseless intelligence collection platform prominently flying an American flag in international waters, came under deliberate attack by Israeli aircraft and three 60-ton Israeli torpedo boats off the coast of the Sinai on a cloudless June afternoon during the six-day Israeli-Arab war. Second, President Lyndon Johnson called back carrier aircraft dispatched to defend the Liberty lest Israel be embarrassed, the start of an unconscionable cover-up, including top Navy brass, that persists to this day.

Given all they have been through, the Liberty survivors and other veterans who joined Halbardier to celebrate his belated receipt of the Silver Star on May 27, 2009 can be forgiven for having doubted that the day of the hero's recognition would ever come.

In the award ceremony at the Visalia (California) office of Rep. Devin Nunes, the Republican congressman pinned the

Silver Star next to the Purple Heart that Halbardier found in his home mailbox three years ago. Nunes said, "The government has kept this quiet I think for too long, and I felt as my constituent he [Halbardier] needed to get recognized for the services he made to his country."

Nunes got that right. Despite the many indignities the Liberty crew has been subjected to, the mood in Visalia was pronouncedly a joyous one of Better (42 years) Late Than Never. And, it did take some time for the moment to sink in: Wow, a gutsy congressman not afraid to let the truth hang out on this delicate issue.

Treatment Accorded the Skipper

I was present that day and I could not get out of my head the contrast between this simple, uncomplicated event and the earlier rigmarole that senior Navy officers went through to pin a richly deserved Medal of Honor on another hero of that day, the Liberty's skipper, Captain William McGonagle.

Although badly wounded by Israeli fire on June 8, 1967, McGonagle was able to keep the bombed, torpedoed, napalmed Liberty afloat and limping toward Malta, where what was left of the bodies of the 34 crewmen killed and the 174 wounded could be attended to. Do the math: yes, killed and wounded amounted to more than two-thirds of the Liberty crew of 294.

I remembered what a naval officer involved in McGonagle's award ceremony told one of the Liberty crew: "The government is pretty jumpy about Israel the State Department even asked the Israeli ambassador if his government had any objections to McGonagle getting the medal."

When McGonagle received his award, the White House (the normal venue for a Medal of Honor award) was all booked up, it seems, and President Lyndon Johnson (who would have been the usual presenter) was unavailable.

So it fell to the Secretary of the Navy to sneak off to the Washington Navy Yard on the banks of the acrid Anacostia River, where he presented McGonagle with the Medal of Honor and a citation that described the attack but not the identity of the attackers.

Please don't misunderstand. The Liberty crew is not big on ceremony. They are VERY-not-big on politicians who wink when Navy comrades are killed and wounded at sea. The Liberty survivors are big on getting the truth out about what actually happened that otherwise beautiful day in June 1967.

The award of the Silver Star to Terry Halbardier marked a significant step in the direction of truth telling. Halbardier said he accepted his Silver Star on behalf of the entire 294-man crew. He and fellow survivor Don Pageler expressed particular satisfaction at the wording of the citation, which stated explicitly – with none of the usual fudging – the identity of the attackers: “The USS Liberty was attacked by Israeli aircraft and motor torpedo boats in the East Mediterranean Sea.”

In the past, official citations, like Captain McGonagle's, had avoided mentioning Israel by name when alluding to the attack. I think former U.S. Ambassador Edward Peck put it best in condemning this kind of approach as “obsequious, unctuous subservience to the peripheral interests of a foreign nation at the cost of the lives and morale of our

own service members and their families.” Strong words for a diplomat. But right on.

Just a Guy From Texas

Were it not for Halbardier’s bravery, ingenuity, and technical expertise, the USS Liberty would surely have sunk, taking down much if not all of the crew.

You see, the first thing the Israeli aircraft bombed and strafed were the Liberty’s communications antennae and other equipment. They succeeded in destroying all the antennae that were functional. One antenna on the port side, though, had been out of commission and had escaped damage.

In receiving the Silver Star, Halbardier made light of his heroism, claiming that he was just a guy from Texas who could do a whole lot with simple stuff like baling wire. (In the infantry we called this kind of thing a “field expedient.”)

In any case, with his can-do attitude and his technical training, he figured he might be able to get that particular antenna working again. But first he would have to repair a cable that had been destroyed on deck and then connect the antenna to a transmitter.

The deck was still being strafed, but Halbardier grabbed a reel of cable, ran out onto the deck, and attached new cable to the antenna so a radioman could get an SOS out to the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean.

Voila. “Mayday” went out; almost immediately the Israeli aircraft and torpedo ships broke off the attack and went back to base; the Israeli government sent a quick apology to

Washington for its unfortunate “mistake;” and President Johnson issued orders to everyone to make believe the Israelis were telling the truth, or at least to remain silent.

To their discredit, top Navy brass went along, and the Liberty survivors were threatened with court martial and prison if they so much as mentioned to their wives what had actually happened. They were enjoined as well from discussing it with one another.

As Liberty crewman Don Pageler put it, “We all headed out after that, and we didn’t talk to each other.” The circumstances were ready-made for serious Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The stories shared by Liberty survivors after the award ceremony, including descriptions of the macabre but necessary effort to reassemble torpedoed body parts, and the plague of survivor’s guilt, were as heart-rending as any I have heard. They are stories that should be shared more widely for those muzzled far too long.

These were the deep emotional scars to supplement the ones all over Halbardier’s body, some of which he uncovered when asked by the local press gathered there in Visalia. Typically, Halbardier made light of the shrapnel that had to be plucked out of his flesh, emphasizing that he was lucky compared to some of the other crew.

No Mistake

Despite Israeli protestations, the accumulated evidence, including intercepted voice communications, is such that no

serious observer believes Israel's "Oops" excuse of a terrible mistake. The following exchanges are excerpts of testimony from U.S. military and diplomatic officials given to Alison Weir, founder of "If Americans Knew" and author of *American Media Miss the Boat*:

Israeli pilot to ground control: "This is an American ship. Do you still want us to attack?"

Ground control: "Yes, follow orders."

"But sir, it's an American ship, I can see the flag!"

Ground control: "Never mind; hit it!"

Haviland Smith, a CIA officer stationed in Beirut during the Six-Day War, says he was told that the transcripts were "deep-sixed," because the U.S. government did not want to embarrass Israel.

Equally telling is the fact that the National Security Agency (NSA) destroyed voice tapes seen by many intelligence analysts, showing that the Israelis knew exactly what they were doing. I asked a former CIA colleague, who was also an analyst at that time, what he remembered of those circumstances. Here is his e-mail reply:

"The chief of the analysts studying the Arab-Israeli region at the time told me about the intercepted messages and said very flatly and firmly that the pilots reported seeing the American flag and repeated their requests of confirmation of the attack order. Whole platoons of Americans saw those intercepts. If NSA now says they do not exist, then someone ordered them destroyed."

One need hardly add at this point that the destruction of evidence without investigation is an open invitation to repetition in the future. Think the more recent torture-interrogation videotapes.

As for the legal side: the late Captain Ward Boston, unburdened himself on his accomplice role as the Navy lawyer appointed as senior counsel to Adm. Isaac Kidd, who led a one-week (!) investigation and then followed orders to pronounce the attack on the Liberty a case of "mistaken identity." Boston signed a formal declaration on Jan. 8, 2004, in which he said he was "outraged at the efforts of the apologists for Israel in this country to claim that this attack was a case of 'mistaken identity.'" Boston continued:

"The evidence was clear. Both Adm. Kidd and I believed with certainty that this attack was a deliberate effort to sink an American ship and murder its entire crew. Not only did the Israelis attack the ship with napalm, gunfire, and missiles, Israeli torpedo boats machine-gunned three lifeboats that had been launched in an attempt by the crew to save the most seriously wounded, a war crime

"I know from personal conversations I had with Adm. Kidd that President Lyndon Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara ordered him to conclude that the attack was a case of 'mistaken identity' despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary."

W. Patrick Lang, Col., USA (ret.), who was the Defense Intelligence Agency's top analyst for the Middle East for eight years, recounted the Israeli air attacks as follows: "The flight leader spoke to his base to report that he had

the ship in view, that it was the same ship he had been briefed on, and that it was clearly marked with the U.S. flag

“The flight commander was reluctant. That was very clear. He didn’t want to do this. He asked them a couple of times, ‘Do you really want me to do this?’ I’ve remembered it ever since. It was very striking. I’ve been harboring this memory for all these years.”

Lang, of course, is not alone. So too Terry Halbardier, who told those assembled at his Silver Medal award ceremony, “I think about it [the attack on the Liberty] every day.”

Why Sink the Ship?

What we know for sure is, as the independent commission headed by former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Thomas Moorer put it, the attack “was a deliberate attempt to destroy an American ship and kill her entire crew.”

What we do not know for sure is why the Israelis wanted that done. Has no one dared ask the Israelis? One view is that the Israelis did not want the United States to find out they were massing troops to seize the Golan Heights from Syria and wanted to deprive the U.S. of the opportunity to argue against such a move.

James Bamford offers an alternative view in his excellent book, *Body of Secrets*. Bamford adduces evidence, including reporting from an Israeli journalist eyewitness and an Israeli military historian, of wholesale killing of Egyptian prisoners of war at the coastal town of El Arish in the Sinai.

The Liberty was patrolling directly opposite El Arish in international waters but within easy range to pick up intelligence on what was going on there. And the Israelis were well aware of that. But the important thing here is not to confuse what we know (the deliberate nature of the Israeli attack) with the ultimate purpose behind it, which remains open to speculation.

Also worth noting is the conventional wisdom prevalent in our Fawning Corporate Media (FCM) that Egypt forced Israel into war in June 1967. An excellent, authoritative source has debunked that, none other than former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin! In an unguarded moment in 1982, when he was prime minister, he admitted publicly:

“In June 1967, we had a choice. The Egyptian army concentrations in the Sinai approaches do not prove that [Egyptian President] Nasser was really about to attack us. We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him.”

Thus, the Israeli attack admittedly amounted to starting a war of aggression, and the occupied West Bank territories and the Golan Heights gained by the Israelis in the 1967 war remain occupied to this day. The post World War II tribunal at Nuremberg distinguished a “war of aggression” from other war crimes, terming it the “supreme international crime, differing from other war crimes only in that it contains the accumulated evil of the whole.”

Perhaps the attempt to sink the Liberty and finish off all survivors qualifies as one of those accumulated evils. Terry

Halbardier summed it up this way when he was awarded his Silver Star: "There's lots of theories but let's just say they didn't want us listening in to what they wanted to do."

Getting Away With Murder

In sum, on June 8, 1967, the Israeli government learned that it could get away with murder, literally, and the crime would be covered up, so strong is the influence of the Israel Lobby in our Congress, and indeed, in the White House. And those USS Liberty veterans who survived well enough to call for an independent investigation have been hit with charges of, you guessed it, anti-Semitism.

Does all this have relevance today? Of course. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu understands that there is little that Israel could do that would earn the opprobrium of the U.S. Congress or retaliation from the White House, whether it's building illegal settlements or slaughtering civilians in Gaza. The Israelis seem convinced they remain in the catbird's seat, largely because of the Israel Lobby's influence with U.S. lawmakers and opinion makers.

One of the few moments when a U.S. official has had the audacity to face Israel down came from significantly a U.S. Navy admiral. In early July 2008, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Mike Mullen, was sent to Israel to read the riot act to then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who seemed to be itching to start hostilities with Iran while President George W. Bush was in office.

We learned from the Israeli press that Mullen, fearing some form of Israeli provocation, went so far as to warn the Israelis not to even think about another incident like the

attack on the USS Liberty on June 8, 1967, that the Israelis should disabuse themselves of the notion that U.S. military support would be knee-jerk automatic if Israel somehow provoked open hostilities with Iran.

This is the only occasion I am aware of in which a U.S. official of such seniority braced Israel about the Liberty incident. A gutsy move, especially with Vice President Dick Cheney and national security aide Elliott Abrams then in the White House, two hawks who might well bless, or even encourage, an Israeli provocation that would make it very difficult for Washington to avoid springing to the defense of its "ally."

The Israelis know that Mullen knows that the attack on the Liberty was deliberate. Mullen could have raised no more neuralgic an issue to take a shot across an Israeli bow than to cite the attack on the Liberty. The *Jerusalem Post* reported that Mullen cautioned that a Liberty-type incident must be avoided in any future military actions in the Middle East.

Perhaps Mullen had learned something from the heroism of Terry Halbardier

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Palestinian Authority No Longer Crying Wolf

Jonathan Cook reports on the bind that Netanyahu has created by withholding tax transfers as a reelection tactic.

By **JonathanCook**

Jonathan-Cook.net



We have been here many times before. However, on this occasion even the principal actors understand that the Palestinian Authority is not crying wolf as it warns of imminent collapse.

Keen to pander to hawkish public opinion in the run-up to last month's election, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu struck a severe blow against Mahmoud Abbas and his government-in-permanent-waiting.

He announced that Israel would withhold a portion of the taxes it collects on behalf of the Palestinians, and which it is obligated under the Oslo accords to pass on to the PA, based in the West Bank.



The money deducted is the sum the PA transfers as stipends to the families of political prisoners and those killed and maimed by the Israeli army.

This is an incendiary issue, as Netanyahu well knows, given that Palestinians view these families as having made the ultimate sacrifice in the struggle to liberate their people from brutal Israeli occupation.

Abbas cannot be seen to back down, and so has refused to accept any of the monthly tax transfers until the full sum is reinstated, amounting to nearly two-thirds of the PA's

revenues.

Given how precarious Palestinian finances are, after decades of resource theft and restrictions on development imposed by Israel, the PA is already on the brink of bankruptcy.

The problem for Netanyahu and Washington is that the PA was established – under the 25-year-old Oslo accords – to take the pressure and costs off Israel of policing the Palestinian population under occupation.

If the PA collapses, so do the Palestinian security forces that have been keeping order in the West Bank as Israel has continued to plunder Palestinian land and resources.

UN Warning

Late last month the United Nations warned that the standoff had left the PA facing “unprecedented financial, security and political challenges.” Which means that, despite his recent electoral triumph, Netanyahu is in a serious bind. He cannot be seen by his even more rightwing coalition partners to be climbing down and restoring stipends to people Israelis view simply as “terrorists.” Equally, he dares not risk a Palestinian uprising in the West Bank. That would be a real possibility if the Palestinian economy implodes and there are no Palestinian security forces to suppress the resulting wave of popular anger.

A preview of the difficulties in store was given at the start of the month, when more than 600 rockets were fired out of Gaza, threatening the cancellation of the Eurovision song contest in Israel later this month. By May 5, four Israelis were reported dead, while 20 Palestinians had been

killed by Israeli airstrikes. The Palestinian fatalities included two pregnant women and a toddler.

There is also the danger, from Israel's point of view, that if Abbas's PA collapses, the void in the West Bank will be filled by his Hamas rivals, who run Gaza. Israel has been delighted to keep the Palestinian territories divided under feuding Fatah and Hamas leaderships.

A way out – or a change of tack – is urgently required.

Israel has tried twice to quietly make partial tax transfers to the PA's bank account, in the hope the money would be accepted. The PA returned it.

Then, the European Union stepped in. Ostensibly an "honest broker," it appears to be occupying a role the Trump administration has formally abandoned. The EU proposed this month that the PA accept the transfers on a "provisional basis," until the crisis can be resolved.

PA officials were dismissive. "Let the people take to the streets," one said. "We have our backs to the wall." The PA line is that in the current climate, if it backtracks, Israel will simply intensify unilateral measures harming the Palestinian cause.

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UK Israel Lobby Adds Muscle as US Lobby Weakens

British politics are being plunged into a stifling silence on the longest example of mass human rights abuses sanctioned by the West in modern history, writes Jonathan Cook.

By **JonathanCook**

Jonathan-Cook.net



For decades it was all but taboo to suggest that pro-Israel lobbies in the United States such as AIPAC used their money and influence to keep lawmakers firmly in check on Israel-related issues – even if one had to be blind not to notice that that was exactly what they were up to.

When back in February U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar pointed out the obvious – that U.S. lawmakers were routinely expected to submit to the lobby's dictates on Israel, a foreign country – her colleagues **clamored** to distance themselves from her, just as one might have expected were the pro-Israel lobby to wield the very power Omar claimed.

But surprisingly Omar did not – at least immediately – suffer the crushing fate of those who previously tried to raise this issue. Although she was **pressured into apologizing**, she was not battered into complete submission for her honesty.

She received support on social media, as well as a wavering, **muted defense** from Democratic grandee Nancy Pelosi, and even a relatively **sympathetic hearing** from a few prominent figures in the U.S. Jewish community.

The Benjamins Do Matter

Omar's comments have confronted – and started to expose – one of the most enduring absurdities in debates about U.S. politics. Traditionally it has been treated as anti-Semitic to argue that the pro-Israel lobby actually lobbies for its chosen cause – exactly as other major lobbies do, from the financial services industries to the health and gun lobbies – and that, as with other lobbies enjoying significant financial clout, it usually gets its way.

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erself in the firing line in February when she noted that what mattered in U.S. politics was “It’s all about the Benjamins” – an apparent reference to the 1997 [Puff Daddy song](#) of the same name in which Benjamins refer to \$100 bills. She later clarified that AIPAC leverages funds over congressional and presidential candidates.

The claim that the pro-Israel lobby isn't really in the persuasion business can only be sustained on the preposterous basis that Israeli and U.S. interests are so in tune that AIPAC and other organizations serve as little more than cheerleaders for the two countries' “unbreakable bond.” Presumably on this view, the enormous sums of money raised

are needed only to fund the celebrations.

Making the irrefutable observation that the pro-Israel lobby does actually lobby on Israel's behalf, and very successfully, is typically denounced as anti-Semitism. Omar's comments were perceived as anti-Semitic on the grounds that she pointed to the canard that Jews wield outsized influence using money to sway policymaking.

Allegations of anti-Semitism against her deepened days later when she [gave a talk](#) in Washington, D.C., and questioned why it was that she could talk about the influence of the National Rifle Association and Big Pharma but not the pro-Israel lobby – or “the political influence in this country that says it is OK for people to push for allegiance to a foreign country.”

That pro-Israel lobbyists – as opposed to Jews generally – do have dual loyalty seems a peculiar thing to deny, given that the purpose of groups like AIPAC is to rally support for Israel in Congress.

Casino billionaire Sheldon Adelson, a key backer of Republican candidates for the presidency, has never hidden his passion not only for Israel but specifically for the ultra-nationalist governments of Benjamin Netanyahu.

In fact, he is so committed to Netanyahu's survival that he [spent nearly \\$200 million](#) propping up an Israeli newspaper over its first seven years – all so he could assist the prime minister of a foreign country.

Similarly, Haim Saban, one of the main donors to Democratic presidential candidates, including Hillary Clinton, has made

no secret of his commitment to Israel. He has said: “I’m a one-issue guy and my issue is Israel.”

Might Saban and Adelson’s “Benjamins” have influenced the very pro-Israel – and very anti-Palestinian – positions of Democratic and Republican presidential candidates? You would have to be supremely naïve or dishonest to claim not.

‘No Bernie-Like Approach’

This point really should be beyond doubt by now. This month *The New York Times* published an unprecedented essay in which author Nathan Thrall quoted political insiders and lobbyists making plain that, as one would expect, the pro-Israel lobby uses its money to pressure congressional candidates to toe the lobby’s line on Israel.

Some of the lobby’s power operates at the level of assumption about what Jewish donors expect in return for their money. According to the *Times*, some three-quarters of all donations over \$500,000 to the major political action committee supporting Democratic nominees for the U.S. Senate race in 2018 were made by Jews.

Though many of those donors may not rate Israel as their main cause, a former Clinton campaign aide noted that the recipients of this largesse necessarily tailor their foreign policy positions so as not to antagonize such donors. As a result, candidates avoid even the mild criticism of Israel adopted by Sen. Bernie Sanders, the Democratic party’s challenger to Clinton in the 2016 presidential race and a primary contender for 2020.

“There’s no major donor that I can think of who is looking

for someone to take a Bernie-like approach,” said the aide. Sanders raised his campaign funds from small donations rather than these major funders, leaving him freer to speak openly about Israel.

Other insiders are more explicit still. Ben Rhodes, a former confidant of Barack Obama, says the lobby effectively tied Obama’s hands domestically on efforts to promote peace. “The Washington view of Israel-Palestine is still shaped by the donor class,” he told Thrall, adding: “The donor class is profoundly to the right of where the activists are, and frankly, where the majority of the Jewish community is.”

Joel Rubin, a former political director at lobby group J Street and a founding board member of the centrist Jewish Democratic Council of America, concurred: “The fight over Israel used to be about voters. It’s more about donors now.”

All of these insiders are stating that the expectations of major donors align candidates’ U.S. foreign policy positions with Israel’s interests, not necessarily those of the U.S. It is hard not to interpret that as reformulation of “dual loyalty.”

What’s so significant about the *Times* article is that it signals, as did the muted furor over Omar’s comments, that the pro-Israel lobby is weakening. No powerful lobby, including the Israel one, wants to be forced out of the shadows. It wants to remain in the darkness, where it can most comfortably exercise its influence without scrutiny or criticism.

The pro-Israel lobby’s loyalty to Israel is no longer unmentionable. But it is also not unique.

As *Mondoweiss* recently noted, Hannah Arendt, the Jewish scholar and fugitive from Nazi Germany, pointed to the inevitability of the “double loyalty conflict” in her 1944 essay “Zionism Reconsidered,” where she foreshadowed the rise of a pro-Israel lobby and its potential negative impacts on American Jews. It was, she wrote, “an unavoidable problem of every national movement of a people living within the boundaries of other states and unwilling to resign their civil and political rights therein.”

For that reason, the U.S.-Cuban lobby has an obvious dual loyalty problem too. It’s just that, given the Cuban lobby’s priority is overthrowing the Cuban government – a desire shared in Washington – the issue is largely moot.

In Israel’s case, however, there is a big and growing gap between image and reality. On the one hand, Washington professes a commitment to peace-making and a promise to act as an honest broker between Israel and the Palestinians. And on the other, the reality is it has offered full-throated support for a series of ultra-nationalist Israeli governments determined to destroy any hope of peace and swallow up the last vestiges of a potential Palestinian state.

The Lord’s Work

It’s important to point out that advocates for Israel are not only Jews. While the pro-Israel lobby represents the views of a proportion of Jewish Americans, it is also significantly comprised of Christians, evangelicals in particular.

Millions of these Christians – including Vice-President Mike

Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo – can be accused of dual loyalty too. They regard Israel's role in Biblical prophecy as far more important than the future of the U.S., or mankind for that matter.

For many of these evangelicals, bringing about the end of the world by ensuring Jews return to their Biblical homeland – triggering a final reckoning at the Battle of Armageddon – is the fulfillment of God's will. And if it's a choice between support for Washington's largely secular elites and support for God, they know very definitely where they stand.

Again, the *Times* has started to shine a light on the strange role of Israel in the U.S. political constellation. Another recent article reminded readers that in 2015 Pompeo spoke of the end-times struggle prophesied to take place in Israel, or what is often termed by evangelicals as "The Rapture." He said: "We will continue to fight these battles."

During his visit last month to Israel, he announced that the Trump administration's work was "to make sure that this democracy in the Middle East, that this Jewish state, remains. I am confident that the Lord is at work here."

Divorced from Reality

If the debate about the pro-Israel lobby in the U.S. is for the first time making a nod to truth, the conversation about the pro-Israel lobby in the U.K. is becoming more and more divorced from reality.

Part of the reason is the way the Israel lobby has recently emerged in the U.K. – hurriedly, and in a mix of panic and damage-limitation mode.

Given that for decades European countries largely followed Washington's lead on Israel, pro-Israel lobbies outside the U.S. were much less organized and muscular. European leaders' unquestioning compliance was assured as long as Washington appeared to act as a disinterested broker overseeing a peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. As a result, Europe was in little need of vigorous pro-Israel lobbies.

But that illusion has now been shattered, first by the explicit Greater Israel ideology espoused by a series of Netanyahu governments, and latterly by Donald Trump's occupancy of the White House and his vehement backing of Israeli demands, however much they violate international law.

That has left European policy towards Israel – and its enabling by default of Netanyahu and Trump's efforts to crush Palestinian rights – dangerously exposed.

Popular backlashes have taken the form of a rapid growth in support for BDS, a grassroots, nonviolent movement promoting a boycott of Israel. But more specifically in Britain's case, it has resulted in the surprise election of Jeremy Corbyn, a well-known champion of Palestinian rights and anti-racism struggles generally, to lead the opposition Labour Party.

For that reason, Jewish leadership groups in the U.K. have had to reinvent themselves quickly, from organizations to promote the community's interests into vehicles to defend Israel. And to do that they have had to adopt a position that was once closely identified with anti-Semitism:

conflating Jews with Israel.

This, we should remember, was the view taken 100 years ago by arch anti-Semites in the British government. They regarded Jews as inherently “un-British,” as incapable of assimilation and therefore as naturally suspect.

Lord Balfour, before he made his abiding legacy the 1917 Declaration of a Jewish “national home” in Palestine, helped pass the Aliens Act to block entry to the U.K. of Jews fleeing pogroms in Eastern Europe. Balfour believed Jewish immigration had resulted in “undoubted evils.”

Lobby Cobbled Together

Also significantly, unlike the U.S., where the pro-Israel lobby has maintained fervent support for Israel as a bipartisan matter over decades, the need for an equivalent pro-Israel lobby in the U.K. has emerged chiefly in relation to Corbyn’s unexpected ascent to power in the Labour Party.

Rather than emerging slowly and organically, as was the case in the U.S., the British pro-Israel has had to be cobbled together hastily. Israel’s role in directing this immature lobby has been harder to hide.

Most of the U.K.’s Jewish leadership organizations have been poorly equipped for the task of tackling the new sympathy for Palestinian rights unleashed in the Labour Party by Corbyn’s rise. The Board of Deputies, for example, has enjoyed visible ties to the ruling Conservative Party. Any criticisms they make of the Labour leader are likely to be seen as having an air of partisanship and point-scoring.

So unusually in Britain’s case, the chief pro-Israel lobby

group against Corbyn has emerged from within his own party – in the form of the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM).

The JLM is trumpeted in the British media both as a venerable Jewish group, more than a century old, and as one that is widely representative of Jewish opinion. Neither claim is true.

The JLM likes to date its origins to the Poale Zion organization, which was founded in 1903. A socialist society, Poale Zion affiliated itself not only with the British Labour Party but also with a wide range of anti-Palestinian Zionist organizations such as the World Zionist Organisation and the Israeli Labour Party. The latter carried out the ethnic cleansing of the vast majority of Palestinians in 1948 and the party's leaders to this day publicly support the illegal settlement "blocs" that are displacing Palestinians and stealing their land.

But as the investigative journalist Asa Winstanley has shown, before the unexpected ascent of Corbyn to the Labour leadership in 2015, the JLM had largely fallen into dormancy.

It was briefly revived in 2004, when Israel was facing widespread criticism in Britain over its brutal efforts to crush a Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories. But the JLM only really became active again in 2015.

According to a covert recording of a private JLM event in late 2016, its then chair Jeremy Newmark said he and other activists had agreed to reform the group in September 2015 in response to "the rise of Jeremy Corbyn" and "Bernie

Sanders in the States.” Corbyn has been elected Labour leader only days previously. According to the transcript, Newmark told the other activists that it would be the “start of a struggle and a battle we will all be engaged in for months and probably years ahead of us.” He added that the JLM would be a suitable vehicle for their work because of the “rights and privileges” it enjoyed as a Labour Party affiliate organization.

Front for Israeli Embassy

The motive behind the JLM’s resuscitation was also revealed by an undercover documentary made by *Al-Jazeera*, [aired](#) in early 2017. It showed that the JLM was acting as little more than a front for the Israeli embassy, and that the mission it set itself was to weaken Corbyn in the hope of removing him from the leadership.

Early on, the JLM and other pro-Israel lobbyists within the party realized the most effective way to damage Corbyn, and silence solidarity with the Palestinian cause, was to weaponize the charge of anti-Semitism.

Support for Palestinian rights necessarily requires severe criticism of Israel, whose popular, rightwing governments have shown no interest in making concessions to the Palestinians on self-determination. In fact, while Westerners have debated the need for urgent peacemaking, Israel has simply got on with grabbing vast tracts of Palestinian land as a way to destroy any hope of statehood.

But pro-Israel lobbyists in the U.K. have found that they can very effectively turn this issue into a zero-sum game –

one that, in the context of a British public conversation oblivious to Palestinian rights, inevitably favors Israel.

The thrust of the lobby's argument is that almost all Jews identify with Israel, which means that attacks on Israel are also attacks on Jewish identity. That, they claim, is a modern form of anti-Semitism.

This argument, if it were true, has an obvious retort: if Jews really do identify with Israel to the extent that they are prepared to ignore its systematic abuse of Palestinians, then that would make most British Jews anti-Arab racists.

Further, if Jewish identity really is deeply enmeshed in the state of Israel, that would place a moral obligation on Jews to denounce any behavior by Israel towards Palestinians that violates human rights and international law.

And yet the very Jewish leaders claiming that Israel is at the core of their identity are also the ones who demand that Jews not be expected to take responsibility for Israel's actions – and that to demand as much is anti-Semitic.

Could there be a clearer example of having your cake and eating it?

Nonetheless, the JLM has very successfully hijacked the debate within Labour of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to silence criticism. It has worked hard to impose a highly controversial new definition of anti-Semitism that conflates it with criticism of Israel. Seven of the 11 examples of anti-Semitism used to illustrate the new definition relate to Israel.

Arguing, for example, that Israel is a “racist endeavor,”

the view of many in the growing BDS movement and among Corbyn supporters, is now being treated as evidence of anti-Semitism.

For this reason, the JLM has been able to file a complaint against Labour with the Equality and Human Rights Commission arguing that the party is “institutionally anti-Semitic.”

Labour is only the second political party after the neo-Nazi British National Party to have been subjected to an investigation by the equality watchdog.

Despite its claims, the JLM does not represent Jewish opinion in the Labour Party. The JLM says it has 2,000 members, though that figure – if accurate – includes non-Jews. Attendance at its annual general meeting this month could be measured in the dozens.

As one Jewish critic observed: “There are some 300,000 Jews in Britain. The Jewish Labour Movement claims to represent us all. So why were there fewer people at their AGM [annual general meeting] than at my Labour Party branch AGM?”

Many Jews in the Labour Party have chosen not to join the JLM, preferring instead to act as a counterweight by creating a new Jewish pressure group that backs Corbyn called Jewish Voice for Labour.

Even a new JLM membership drive publicized by former Labour leader Gordon Brown reportedly brought only a small influx of new members, suggesting that support for the JLM’s anti-Corbyn, pro-Israel agenda is very limited inside Labour.

Speaking for 'the Jews'

The re-establishment of the JLM has one very transparent aim in mind: to push out Corbyn, using any means at its disposal. At its annual general meeting, the JLM unanimously passed a motion of no confidence in Corbyn, describing him as "unfit to be Prime Minister." The resolution declared that "a Labour Government led by (Corbyn) would not be in the interests of British Jews."

One Jewish commentator derisively noted the JLM's arrogance in speaking for all British Jews at a time of Conservative government-imposed austerity: "I would not presume to proclaim what is in the interests of 'the Jews', but I really cannot imagine that the person who drafted this resolution had any real experience of meeting unemployed Jews, Jewish pensioners and single mothers just scraping by, or Jews who are struggling as they use under-resourced mental health services."

In other circumstances, a group of people operating inside a major political party using underhand methods to disrupt its democratic processes would be described as entryists. Some 2,000 pro-Israel fanatics within Labour are trying to overturn the overwhelming wishes, twice expressed at the ballot box, of the Labour membership, now numbering more than 500,000.

Nonetheless, last week the JLM started to show its hand more publicly. It has been noisily threatening to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. In the circumstances that would at least be an honorable – if very unlikely – thing for it to do.

Instead it announced that it would begin scoring local and national Labour politicians based on their record on anti-Semitism. After the JLM's frantic lobbying for the adoption of the new anti-Semitism definition, it seems clear that such scores will relate to the vehemence of a candidate's criticism of Israel, or possibly their ideological sympathy with Corbyn, more than overt bigotry towards Jews.

That was underscored this week when a senior Labour politician, Richard Burdon, the shadow justice secretary, came under fire from the JLM and Board of Deputies for comments he made in 2014, during Israel's attack on Gaza, that only recently came to light. He was recorded saying: "The enemy of the Palestinian people is not the Jewish people, the enemy of the Palestinian people are Zionists." He had previously denied making any such comment.

Mike Katz, the JLM's new chair, responded: "Insulting a core part of their [Jewish people's] identity and then dissembling about it is shameful behaviour from a senior frontbencher in our party, let alone someone who aspires to administer our justice system."

According to the Labour Party's own figures, actual anti-Jewish prejudice – as opposed to criticism of Israel – is extremely marginal in its ranks, amounting to some 0.08 percent of members. It is presumably even less common among those selected to run as candidates in local and national elections.

The JLM has nonetheless prioritized this issue, threatening that the scores may be used to decide whether activists will campaign for a candidate. One might surmise that the scores

could also be serve as the basis for seeking to deselect candidates and replace them with politicians more to the JLM's liking.

"We have got elections coming up but we are not going to put that effort in unless we know people are standing shoulder to shoulder with us," said Katz.

Need for Vigorous Debate

Paradoxically, the JLM appears to be preparing to do openly what pro-Israel lobbyists in the U.S. deny they do covertly: use their money and influence to harm candidates who are not seen as sympathetic enough to Israel.

Despite claims from both U.S. and U.K. pro-Israel lobby groups that they speak for their own domestic Jewish populations, they clearly don't. Individuals within Jewish communities are divided over whether they identify with Israel or not. And certainly, their identification with Israel should not be a reason to curtail vigorous debates about U.S. and U.K. foreign policy and Israeli influence domestically.

Even if the vast majority of Jews in the U.S. and U.K. do support Israel – not just in a symbolic or abstract way, but the actual far-right governments that now permanently rule Israel – that does not make them right about Israel or make it anti-Semitic for others to be highly critical of Israel.

The overwhelming majority of Israeli Jews support a narrow spectrum of politicians, from the militaristic right to religious fundamentalists and fascists. They view Palestinians as less deserving, less human even, than Jews

and as an obstacle to the realization of Jewish rights in the whole of the “Land of Israel,” including the Palestinian territories. Does that make them right? Does their numerical dominance excuse their ugly bigotry towards Palestinians? Of course not.

And so it would be the same even were it true that most Jewish members of the Labour Party supported a state that proudly upholds Jewish supremacism as its national ideology. Their sensitivities should count for nothing if they simply mask ugly racist attitudes towards Palestinians.

Lobbies of all kinds thrive in the dark, growing more powerful and less accountable when they are out of view and immune from scrutiny.

By refusing to talk frankly about the role of pro-Israel lobbies in the U.K. and the U.S., or by submitting to their intimidation, we simply invite Israel’s supporters and anti-Palestinian racists to flex their muscles more aggressively and chip away at the democratic fabric of our societies.

There are signs that insurgency politicians in the U.S. are ready for the first time to shine a light into the recesses of a political system deeply corrupted by money. That will inevitably make life much harder for the pro-Israel lobby.

But paradoxically, it is happening just as the U.K.’s Israel lobby is pushing in exactly the opposite direction. British politics is being plunged into a stifling, unhealthy silence on the longest example of mass human rights abuses, sanctioned by the west, in modern history.

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ANGRY ARAB: Memories and Omissions of the Iraq Wars

The Iraq wars and their consequences have been callous, bipartisan campaigns that have profoundly altered Arabs' views of the United States, says As'ad AbuKhalil.

By [As'ad AbuKhalil](#)

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It has been sixteen years since the U.S. invasion of Iraq of 2003. The event barely gets a mention in the U.S. press or is any longer part of American consciousness. Iraq remains a faraway land for most Americans and the remembrance of the Iraq war is only discussed from the standpoint of U.S. strategic blunders. Little attention is paid to the suffering and humiliation of the Iraqi people by the American war apparatus. Wars for Americans are measured in U.S. dollars and American blood: suffering of the natives is not registered in war metrics.

The Iraq calamity is not an issue that can be dismissively blamed on George W. Bush alone. For most Democrats, it is too easy to blame the war on that one man. In reality, the Iraq war and its consequences have been a callous bipartisan campaign which had begun in the administration of George HW Bush and Bill Clinton after him. The war and the tight, inhumane sanctions established a record of punishment of civilians, or the use of civilians as tools of U.S. pressure on foreign governments, which became a staple of U.S. foreign policy.

The U.S. government under Ronald Reagan resisted pressures to impose sanctions on South Africa under the pretext that sanctions would “hurt the people that we want to help”—this at a time when

the blacks of South Africa were calling on the world to impose sanctions to bring down the apartheid regime. This was the last time that the U.S. resisted the imposition of sanctions on a country.

For the Arab people, the successive wars on Iraq—and the sanctions should be counted as part of the cruel war effort of the U.S. and its allies—changed forever the structure of the Middle East regional system. The wars established a direct U.S. occupation of Arab lands and it reversed the trend since WWII whereby the U.S. settled for control and hegemony, but without the direct occupation. (The U.S. only left the Philippines because Japan had awarded independence to the country during the war, long after the U.S. failed to deliver on promises of independence).

Washington succeeded in the political arrangement designed by the Bush-Baker team to create an unannounced alliance between the Israeli occupation state and the reactionary Arab regime system, which included the Syrian regime, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Gulf states in the same sphere. This arrangement served to oppress the Arab population and to prevent political protests from disrupting U.S. military and political plans, and to ensure the survival of the oppressive regimes who are willing to cooperate with the U.S. The Syrian regime, which cooperated with Washington in the 1991 Iraq war was even rewarded with control of Lebanon.

But the war on Iraq altered the regional structure of regimes. They were no more split into progressive and reactionary. Syria in the past was associated with the "rejectionist stance," even though the Syrian regime never joined the "Rejectionist Front" of the 1970s led by Saddam Hussein, the arch enemy of Syrian leader Hafidh Al-Asad.

It was no coincidence that the U.S. invaded Iraq and expelled Saddam's army from Kuwait in the wake of the end of the Soviet Union. The U.S. wanted to assert the new rules just as it asserted the new rules of Middle East politics after WWII when it signaled

to Britain in 1956 in Suez that it is the U.S. and not Europe which now controls the Middle East region. Similarly, the Iraq war of 1991 was an opportunity for the U.S. to impose its hegemony directly and without fears of escalation in super power conflict.

The U.S. did not need direct control or colonization after after WWII, with the exception of oil-rich Gulf region. (Historian Daniel Immerwahr makes that argument persuasively in his brand new book, "How to Hide and Empire: A History of the Greater United States.") After the 1973 oil embargo on Western countries because of U.S. support for Israel in that year's war, the U.S. military had plans on the books for the seizure of Gulf Arab oil fields. But the significance of oil has diminished over the decade especially as fracking has allowed the U.S. to export more oil than it imports.

Indelible Memory

Furthermore, the previous reluctance of Gulf leaders to host U.S. troops evaporated with the 1991 war.

But the memory of that first Iraq war remains deep in the Arab memory. Here was a flagrant direct military intervention which relied for its promotion on a mix of lies and fabrications. The U.S. wanted to oppose dictatorship while its intervention relied on the assistance of brutal dictators and its whole campaign was to—in name at least—to restore a polygamous Emir to his throne.

The U.S. also bought about official Arab League abandonment of Israel's boycott, which had been in place since the founding of the state of Israel. As a reward for U.S. convening of the Madrid conference in 1991, Arab despots abandoned the boycott in the hope that Washington would settle the Palestinian problem one way or another. Yet, the precedent of deploying massive U.S. troops in the region was established and the U.S. quickly made it clear that it was not leaving the region anytime soon. Regimes that wanted U.S. protection were more than eager to pay for large-scale U.S. military bases to host U.S. troops and intelligence services. But

that war in 1991 was not the only Iraq war; in fact, Washington was also complicit in the 1980-1988 Iraq-Iran war, when it did its best to prolong the conflict, resulting in the deaths of some half million Iraqis and Iranians.

The invasion of Iraq in 2003 was not about finishing an unfinished business by son toward his father. It certainly was not about finding and destroying WMDs. And no one believed that this was about democracy or freedom. The quick victory in the war of Afghanistan created wild delusions for the U.S. war machine. Bush and his lieutenants were under the impression that wars in the region could be fought and won quickly and on the cheap. The rhetoric of "the axis-of-evil" was a message from the U.S. to all its enemies that the U.S. would dominate the region and would overthrow the few regimes which are not in its camp. The quick "victory" in Kabul was illusory about what had just happened in Afghanistan. Seventeen years later the U.S. is now begging the Taliban—which it had gone to war to overthrow—to return to power to end the agony for U.S. troops and for U.S. puppets in the country who are terrified of the prospect of a country free of U.S. occupation.

Iraq created new images of the U.S.: from Abu Ghraib to the wanton shooting at civilians by U.S. troops or by contractors, to the installation of a puppet government and the issuance of capitalistic decrees and laws to prevent the Iraqi government from ever filing war crime charges against the occupiers. Arabs and Muslims developed new reasons to detest the U.S.: it is not only about Israel anymore but about the U.S. sponsorship of a corrupt and despotic regional order. It is also about Arabs witnessing first hand the callous and reckless forms of U.S. warfare in the region. Policy makers, think tank experts, and journalists in DC may debate the technical aspects of the war and the cost incurred by the U.S.. But for the natives, counting the dead and holding the killers responsible remains the priority. And the carnage caused by ISIS and its affiliates in several Arab countries is also

blamed—and rightly so—on U.S. military intervention in the Middle East.

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