

# The Lost Cause of Israeli Justice

When Israel was founded, there was hope among progressive Jews that the new country could rely on the best traditions of Judaism and teach the world how to navigate the shoals of bigotry and injustice, a vision that remains unfulfilled, as Lawrence Davidson describes.

By Lawrence Davidson

An ideologue is someone who sees the world in the limiting terms of a doctrine or dogma. It is limiting because the human world does not operate or evolve according to any one dogma. Therefore ideologues must wear blinders that result in tunnel vision – a tunnel which, like a Procrustean bed, tries to force the world to fit their chosen ideology.

There are hundreds of ideologies out there, both religious and secular, and in every case the resulting tunnel vision eventually results in absurdities – claims about the world that, seen from outside of the ideology, make little or no sense. So it is with the ideology of Zionism and the doctrinaire interpretations its adherents make about their own behavior and the behavior of others who oppose them.

One such proponent of Zionist ideology is David Harris, the Executive Director of the American Jewish Committee (AJC). The AJC describes its mission as “to enhance the well-being of the Jewish people and Israel.” This is a point of dogma for the Zionists – that the well-being of the Jewish people and Israel are bound together. I am often confronted with Harris’s ideological take on events because, curiously, he has me on his mailing list.

## David Harris’s View

On Oct. 11, Harris posted an essay on the ongoing violence in Israel-Palestine. It is entitled “Attacks Against Israelis: The World’s Silence Is Deafening” and the entire piece can be found both on the *Huffington Post* and *The Times of Israel*. The essay seeks to promote a picture of Israeli victimhood. As such it opens up a clear window on the Zionist’s view of the present situation and therefore is worth taking a look at.

What I am going to do is take representative segments from Harris’s essay and show how the grievances he reserves for Israelis seem somehow wrong when considered from outside the Zionist perspective. Indeed, as Harris’s complaint about the “world’s silence” in the face of violence against Israelis suggests, for many people, his picture of Israeli victimhood is quite untenable. Because his ideology will not allow him to consider the possibility of Israel’s

responsibility for the present violence, the world's "silence" leaves him aggrieved and bewildered.

Here then are some representative parts of Mr. Harris's essay. He starts this way: "For days now, I have been watching in dismay as Israeli citizens face random attacks, some deadly, by Palestinian assailants on the streets of their cities and towns. Children have been orphaned, parents have lost children, and some survivors are doubtless scarred for life."

It is true that individual Israelis have been hurt or killed in the recent past in apparently random attacks by Palestinians. Unfortunately, this is as far as Harris's understanding goes. Thus, his tunnel vision renders invisible other perspectives, such as the possibility that dead and injured Israeli Jews, like the Palestinians themselves, are victims of the aggressive Zionist society and culture they live in, the government and laws they obey, and the racist policies they tolerate.

Given this perspective the present Palestinian violence becomes understandable as a product of anger and frustration caused by Israeli occupation and long-standing discrimination against Israeli Arabs. There has been no need for an indoctrination of hate by Hamas or any other religiously inspired group (a favorite red herring of Zionist ideologues) to explain Palestinian actions. Israeli policies and practices in and of themselves are quite sufficient.

Harris cannot perceive, much less understand, this perspective. Yet, in ever greater numbers, the people outside of Israel can see that any portrayal of Israeli victimhood is in conflict with an objective reading of the history of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle.

David Harris continues, "And I've been wondering, not for the first time, what it would take for the world to wake up and acknowledge that Israel, the lone liberal democracy in the Middle East, is facing violence that must be condemned unequivocally, and that it, like any other nation, has the obligation to defend itself."

This "wondering" is also a product of Mr. Harris's constricted view. There has never been any Zionist complaint, from Harris in particular, about the world's silence while the Palestinians experience "liberal" Israel's ethnic bias and occupation. Nor did he and his fellows take note of the world's silence when Palestine's own 2006 democratic election was suppressed by Israel and its American ally.

It is exactly this silence in the face of Palestinian suffering that has left Israeli power in place and allowed for its oppressive use. Yet this particular

silence has no place in Harris's ideologically constructed world.

Harris goes on, "It's striking how some otherwise intelligent and thoughtful people in government, media, or think tanks, just shut down their critical faculties. Instead, they resort to a Pavlovian response mechanism that essentially rejects any possible legitimacy for the Israeli position and blindly defends whatever Palestinian narrative comes along."

As noted above, an ideological outlook usually leads to absurdities. The truth is that until recently the Zionist narrative on Israel-Palestine held a monopoly in the West. Now, finally, Israel's consistent apartheid-like practices are being noticed and as a result that monopoly is crumbling.

The best Harris can do is evoke a fictional "Pavlovian mechanism" to explain the responses to Israeli policies. Nonetheless, the weakening of the Zionist narrative is at an early stage, which means that, even now, it is often not the Israeli narrative that has to fight its way into the media, think tanks and government councils. It is the Palestinian one.

There is much more to Harris's missive, and almost every paragraph is shaped by the doctrinal demands of his ideology. The ersatz victimhood he claims for the Israelis is, in fact, a measure of the resulting distortion. For he, and his fellow Zionists, have stolen that depiction of suffering from their own victims, the Palestinians. Such is the power of ideological blinders.

To pull off this reversal of roles and posit the Israelis as victims of the Palestinians, Harris's essay must leave out the seminal fact that for the past 67 years Israel has possessed overwhelming power. With this power Israel has oppressively controlled almost every aspect of Palestinian life. The inevitable result is the violence of resistance. Israelis who suffer from that violence should take this reality into consideration. But, few of them can do this.

The explanation for this inability brings us back to the problem of tunnel vision. Consider the following: many Palestinians can understand Western Jewish history, including the Holocaust, and recognize how it shapes, though ultimately cannot excuse, Zionist behavior. This ability to understand is facilitated by the fact that the Palestinians were not responsible for the suffering of Western Jewry.

Unfortunately, the Zionists can't reciprocate by understanding the history that drives Palestinian behavior. They cannot do so because their ideology precludes the possibility that they are, in fact, responsible for Palestinian suffering. Ideologues are not known for their skill at self-criticism.

One of the most renowned Jewish journalists, I. F. Stone, once said, referring

to his own Jewish brethren, “[how we act toward the Arabs will determine what kind of people we become: either oppressors and racists in our turn like those from whom we have suffered, or a nobler race able to transcend the tribal xenophobias that afflict mankind.](#)”

Well, the verdict is in, at least for those Jews who adhere to the Zionist ideology. For them “oppression and racism” has won out. And so has denial – just read David Harris.

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of [Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest](#); [America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood](#); and [Islamic Fundamentalism](#).

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## Awash in Guns and Bloodshed

The U.S. and Israel stand apart from most of the developed world as modern societies awash in guns with powerful forces overriding large numbers of

citizens, even majorities, alarmed at the rates of violence, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

Here is the question: What two “modern” societies have cultures that allow and even idealize the possession of guns? Answer: the United States and Israel.

In the U.S., there are 88 guns floating around for every 100 people, which comes to about 300 million of these weapons in circulation. This includes military-style assault weapons, of which it is estimated there are about 3.75 million in private hands. This state of affairs makes the U.S. the most weaponized modern society on the planet.

This weaponized status is not because most Americans want it this way. As President Barack Obama has pointed out, multiple national polls have shown that most Americans want stricter gun control, but that seems not to matter. Why? Because most Americans are not sufficiently politically organized around this issue to out-lobby the minority who are – mostly in the form of the National Rifle Association (NRA).

We are here referring to a rather fanatical, though culturally decisive, minority who define freedom as, first and foremost, the right to “pack” a firearm or two, or ten, ad infinitum. They errantly believe that somehow owning a gun (almost any gun) is “a birthright and an essential part of the nation’s heritage.” They expend much energy on misinterpreting the Second Amendment of the Constitution so as to allegedly prove their point. In other words, for these folks, being armed with a gun is a cornerstone of American culture.

Isn’t this somehow a corruption of the democratic process? Shouldn’t that process demand that, in matters of national security (and this certainly is such a matter), the safety of the vast majority should prevail?

Unfortunately that is not the American way of democratic politics. In truth, the U.S. is not a democracy of individual citizens, but rather one of competing interest groups. The interest group that is the NRA is better funded and more politically influential than its opponents, and so, in the matter of gun legislation, it wins. And this is so despite the fact that its victories make society much more dangerous than it ought to be.

The NRA is in total denial of the fact that, ipso facto, to be armed is to be dangerous. They illogically deny that there is any connection between the publicly held 300 million firearms in the country and the fact that the U.S. has

the highest gun-related homicide rate in the “developed” world.

You can find higher rates of gun-related murder, but you have to go to places like Honduras and El Salvador to see them. Indeed the best the NRA can do in the face of the deadly mayhem for which it is at least indirectly responsible, is the statement by Wayne LaPierre, the organization’s executive vice president, who has declared that “the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun” – an absurdly simplistic assertion leading to the conclusion that what the nation needs is more guns and not fewer.

### **The Israeli Gun Culture**

While the U.S. has evolved a self-destructive gun culture, it is not unique among the “modern” nations. There is also America’s “partner” in so much that is violent, Israel. It is hard to know how many guns are loose among the Israeli Jewish population. I remember that the first time I went to Israel, back in the early 1970s, it seemed that everyone, both men and women, was draped with military assault rifles. In later trips these became less evident but that does not mean less available.

Near universal military service, followed by enlistment in the active reserves, means that most Jewish citizens over 18 have access to a gun. Some Israelis would qualify this assertion by pointing out that, unlike the U.S., Israel has “strict gun regulations,” including a ban on assault weapons. In addition, “a person must also show genuine cause to carry a firearm, such as self-defense.”

But Israel is a chronically insecure place due to its expansionist policies and oppression of Palestinians. So “self-defense” is in the forefront of a great majority of Israeli minds.

According to Liel Leibovitz, writing in the magazine Tablet, “It doesn’t take much of an expert to realize that these restrictions, in and of themselves, do not constitute much by the way of gun control.” Every Israeli Jew can justify wanting a gun and many possess them.

So why don’t we hear about killings in Israel similar to those in the United States? Well, *it is not* for the misleading reasons offered by Liel Leibovitz in his *Tablet* article: that Israelis are more responsible gun owners and, as a nation, Israel does a better job treating disturbed, potentially violent, individuals.

As to this last assertion, Leibovitz fails to account for the significant number of armed Israeli fanatics running loose in the country’s illegal settlements. The truth is that we in the U.S. *do often hear* of the Israeli version of gun-related rampages. Unfortunately, most Americans don’t recognize in these reports



the same sort of chronic murder we have generated here at home.

While Americans most often use their guns on each other, the Israelis primarily use their guns on Palestinians. The result is the daily harassment, injury and murder of an entire ethnically specific population by Israeli soldiers, police, settlers and other armed civilians. As a result over 9,000 Palestinians have been killed and over 73,000 injured since 2000.

This is reported to the world as acts of self-defense on the part of Israelis. But is it? Such an assertion is hard to sustain when one sees the lopsided kill and injury ratio between Palestinian and Israeli victims. Indeed, the numbers averaging around 33 to 1, suggest ongoing collective punishment against Palestinians audacious enough to resist Israeli occupation.

Both the U.S. and Israel have historically rooted gun cultures. Perhaps this is because both societies matured against the backdrop of territorial conquest, delusions of racial superiority, and near-genocidal treatment of indigenous populations.

This sort of history has produced two related consequences: first, particularly among more conservative and traditionalist elements of the population, it has resulted in obsessive concerns with self-defense. Second, it has built up an association between the possession and use of deadly weapons and the image of the brave and independent citizen defending hearth and home.

These consequences are now underpinned by psychological states that are, apparently, impervious to counter-argument. Neither the NRA devotee nor the ardent Zionist is open to the proposition that their own ideas and actions have something to do with the dangers and insecurities they feel.

And, in both countries such fanatics seem to be politically dominant. That means all citizens of these two "modern" and "developed" societies, even those rational enough to understand what is going on, are stuck within gun cultures and the explosive cycles of violence they produce.

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# Reflections on 'Deep Poverty'

The Constitution's Framers set as one of the new government's priorities providing for the "general Welfare," but that progressive mandate was soon swept away by slaveholders and industrialists who shaped America into a "me-first" society amazingly tolerant of "deep poverty," as Lawrence Davidson reflects.

By Lawrence Davidson

In the assessment of poverty in the United States there is a category known as "deep poverty," defined in a recent article in the Philadelphia Inquirer as: "income of 50% or less of the poverty rate." In other words, the current poverty level income for a U.S. family of four is \$24,000 a year, which means that the same family receiving only \$12,000 is in deep poverty. At this level, hopelessness prevails and one's day-to-day goal is just staying alive.

The deep poverty rate for the United States as a whole is 6.8 percent of the population. Using the rounded-off 2014 census figure of 322 million residents, that comes to about 22 million men, women and children in deep poverty. This is a pretty shocking figure for what most regard as the richest country on earth.

It should come as no surprise that, according to the article, "deep poverty increased nationwide after 1996, when the welfare system was changed. The number of people on cash welfare was drastically reduced and the amount of time people could receive benefits was limited." This was a public policy decision taken by elected officials at the national level. All at once, the "safety net" for the poor, and particularly for those at this deep level of poverty, all but disappeared.

## **Tradition of Not Caring**

The Inquirer article of Sept. 30 goes on to state that "most Americans cannot fathom the level of privation that deep poverty represents."

I am not sure this is the case. Deep poverty is very visible. Consider that at present 81 percent of Americans live in urban environments. In such environments it is easy to encounter the homeless and the beggars, most of whom are in deep poverty. So ubiquitous are they that a Hollywood movie has recently been made about them, entitled "Time Out of Mind" and starring Richard Gere.

Here is a quote from the Philadelphia Inquirer's Oct. 2 film review, "People talk on cell phones, run for the bus, head for meals almost uniformly indifferent" to the fate of the homeless man Gere portrays.

Also keep in mind that it was not that long ago that people had older relatives

who lived through the Great Depression, a time when deep poverty was even more visible. That story is a big part of the nation's modern history.

Rather than pretending that Americans "cannot fathom" deep poverty, it is better to argue that popular perception is more complex. When the non-poor see that homeless person, they probably feel a bit of worry and disgust all at once. In the end, they turn aside and pretend not to see. And this denotes a collective sentiment of not caring enough about the problem to push for the policies needed to correct it policies which go way beyond welfare.

Why would this be the case? Here are a couple of reasons:

First, there is the fact that the people of the United States, perhaps more than any other Western country, are still influenced by the primitive outlook of Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century capitalism. In those centuries both the middle and upper classes favored government restricted to three functions: 1. defense of the realm; 2. police, courts and the enforcement of contracts; 3. and upholding the sanctity of private property. Care for the poor was the responsibility of the churches.

This entire setup was designed to maximize individual freedom by keeping government small in both power and scope. Maintaining this status would also hold taxes down to a minimum.

You can easily see this attitude toward government in the ideology of the Tea Party and the conservative politicians who cater to that group's complaints. For instance, take the reason given by Ben Shapiro, a journalist and Tea Party advocate, why the Republican Party was successful in the 2010 congressional elections: "In 2010, Republicans soared to historic victory because the much-maligned Tea Party spearheaded mass resistance to Obama's takeover of the healthcare industry."

The statement is a gross exaggeration, at least as to the claim that the government had taken over the healthcare industry. It did no such thing, but rather moved to work with private insurance companies so as to facilitate healthcare for the poor and uninsured. However, spending tax money on the poor only fed into the paranoia over big government that afflicts Shapiro and his lot.

Another angle on this sentiment can be found in the declaration of Michele Bachmann, another Tea Party advocate, that the Tea Party "stands for the fact that we are taxed enough already." This statement is misleading at best. While it is true that those of moderate or low income are often highly taxed, those of high income are definitely not. In the U.S., the wealthy pay lower taxes than

those of moderate income.

Finally, Elizabeth Warren, a liberal Democrat, has correctly concluded that the Tea Party is dedicated to “unraveling just about everything the federal government had ever built.” That is straight out of the playbook of primitive Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century capitalism.

### **Looking Out for Number One**

There is a second reason why many non-poor Americans do not actively concern themselves with poverty, deep or not, and that has to do with what I call “natural localness” the generic tendency for all of us to concentrate foremost on our local sphere. Thus, caring, like charity, begins at home and usually does not go far beyond it.

We care for our family and friends, sometimes (though not always) for our neighbors, local co-religionists, co-workers or others in local social groups we might identify with. But we rarely actively care about strangers.

The primitive, yet still extant, capitalist ideology referred to above comes in here and reinforces this space between us and the stranger who happens to also be poor. This ideology teaches that poverty is a personal failing with moral implications. That is, if you are poor, it is your fault. It is because you are lazy and otherwise morally deficient.

The possibility that poverty, and particularly deep poverty, could be a structural problem of both capitalist and racial or ethnically biased economies is never considered in this interpretation. And, tax-wise, it is cheaper to blame the victim in this case, than pay out adequate welfare.

The argument given here, that not caring is an age-old tradition, should not be taken to mean that there are no individuals out there who do in fact actively care and advocate for strangers who are poor, oppressed and otherwise mistreated. These folks do exist.

There are individuals who actively advocate for the ultimate strangers people suffering on other continents. There are even those who dedicate their lives to giving solace to incarcerated murderers. The point is that these folks are a small minority amidst a sea of ultimate indifference. They are, if you will, counter-cultural, despite occasionally getting good press.

It might be the case that we could, over time, teach the nation’s youth to be more caring of strangers in need. After all, being human means that we are not necessarily slaves to evolution-rooted tendencies like natural localness. But to do this would be to challenge tradition and wage a political struggle against

narrow-minded school boards.

So, the odds are against it. It is easier to go with the indifference that just comes naturally.

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## Decline of Western Ethnic States

The neocon-driven wars in the Middle East have unleashed a demographic tidal wave on Europe, the arrival of refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and other war-torn countries. Despite political resistance, this flood inevitably will reshape the Continent's ethnic character, says Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

If you were transported back to Europe in 1900 and asked educated citizens to describe the ideal political arrangement, what they would outline to you is a homogeneous nation-state: France for the French, Germany for the Germans, Italy for the Italians, and the like. They would note exceptions, but describe them as unstable.

For instance, at this time the Austro-Hungarian Empire was, ethnically, a very diverse place, but it was politically restless. Come World War I, ethnic desires for self-rule and independence would help tear this European-centered multinational empire apart. In truth, even those states that fancied themselves ethnically unified were made up of many regional outlooks and dialects, but the friction these caused was usually minor enough to allow the ideal of homogeneity to prevail. The ethnically unified nation-state was almost everyone's "ideal state."

This standard of homogeneity started to break down after World War II. After this war, the foreign empires run by many of Europe's homogeneous states were in retreat and in their wake came a slew of new nations in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Simultaneously, the impact of the end of empire on the European nations was to have their own homogeneous status eroded.

For instance, when Great Britain set up the Commonwealth as a substitute for empire she allowed freer immigration into England for Commonwealth citizens. The

result was an influx of people of color from former British colonies in Africa, India-Pakistan and the Caribbean.

A similar thing happened as the French empire crumbled. With its demise many North Africans, as well as Vietnamese Catholics, went to France. Later, Turks would go to Germany, a preference that reflected the close relations between Berlin and the defunct Ottoman Empire.

Then came the formation of the European Union (EU) in 1993, which facilitated the flow of labor across European borders. Now citizens of one EU state could go and work in any other member state. In other words, the 20 or 30 years following World War II marked the beginning of the end of the Western homogeneous state.

### **The Refugee Crisis**

Now we may be witnessing the final stage of that demise. The present refugee crisis resulting from wars raging in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen and Libya, among other places in the Middle East, has set in movement millions of displaced people. Many of these refugees are heading for Europe.

While initially most of the European Union leaders showed some willingness to take in substantial numbers of refugees, strong resistance from Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic caused a pause in the effort. This was a predictable moment. All established populations, even relatively diverse ones, fear that their cultural norms and economic advantages will be threatened by large waves of new immigrants.

At the extreme, one finds ideologically and religiously defined nations such as the Arab Gulf states and the allegedly Westernized Israel (itself a product of an overwhelming refugee invasion of Palestine) refusing to take in any of the present refugees. Even in a country such as the United States, which is historically built upon the inflow of diverse populations, it is politically difficult to open borders to new refugees in need. Initially, announcing a willingness to allow an embarrassingly small number of 10,000 refugees to enter, Washington has increased that to 100,000 between now and 2017.

Getting back to the European scene, the pressures now building on the borders eventually resulted in a EU decision, allegedly binding on all its 28 member states, to speed up the intake screening process for refugees and distribute the accepted numbers across the EU countries. How many will ultimately be allowed into Europe is still unclear.

If the leaders of Europe are smart about it they will go beyond merely symbolic numbers. If they are not, then there will be concentration camps on their borders and eventual violence that will mark a dark period in their supposed

civilized histories. Controlled or not, in the end, many of the refugees will probably find a way in.

### **Ironic Justice**

There is ironic justice in this prospect. After all, the wars that have uprooted so many were triggered by Western intervention in the Middle East. One can thank George W. Bush and his neoconservative colleagues (along with British allies) for the 2003 invasion of Iraq. That action set loose the forces that have subsequently displaced the people who make up the bulk of today's refugees.

To this can be added the 2011 NATO intervention in the civil war in Libya, in which France, Italy and the U.S. led the way. This action has prolonged the anarchy in that country and is one of the reasons that 300,000 people attempted to cross the Mediterranean Sea in the direction of Europe in 2015 alone. At least 2,500 of them died in the attempt.

It is a testimony to the fact that the average citizen has little knowledge and less interest in their nation's foreign policies that few in Europe and the U.S. recognize, much less acknowledge, responsibility for the present disaster.

The population in western and central Europe has been shifting in the direction of diversity for the last 70 years, and that of the United States more or less consistently since the nation's founding. Along with diversity comes a complementary, if perhaps more gradual, shift in culture.

Opposing this historical trend is the fact that anti-immigrant resistance among established national populations is almost a default position. However, this is like spitting in the wind. In the long term, the evolution of populations moves from homogeneity to diversity. It is just a matter of how long the process takes.

Thus, from every angle, ethical as well as historical, the way to approach the present refugee crisis is to allow, in a controlled but adequately responsive way, the inflow of those now running from the ravages of invasion and civil war.

In so doing we should accept the demise of the homogeneous state. Whether it is Germany, France, Hungary, Israel or Burma, the concept is historically untenable and neither raises nor even maintains our civilizational standards. Rather it grinds them down into the dust of an inhumane xenophobia.

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# US Confusion over the Syrian War

Official Washington is in a tizzy over Russia's decision to join the fight in Syria to defeat Al Qaeda and ISIS, though one might have thought the U.S. would welcome Moscow's help. But there are other factors, including the wishes of Israel and Saudi Arabia, complicating matters, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

On May 1, I wrote an analysis on "[Changing Alliances and the National Interest in the Middle East](#)." In this piece, I made the argument that, at least since September 2001 and the declaration of the "war on terror," the defeat of Al Qaeda and its affiliates has been a publicly stated national interest of the United States. This certainly has been the way it has been presented by almost continuous government pronouncements and media stories dedicated to this "war" over the years.

Given this goal, it logically follows that, with the evolution of Al-Qaeda-affiliated organizations such as the so-called Islamic State (aka ISIS or Daesh) and Jabhat al Nusra (aka Al Qaeda in Syria), those who also seek the destruction of such groups are America's de facto allies in the "war on terror" and warrant our assistance. Likewise, those who openly or clandestinely support these religious fanatics are opponents of a central U.S. national interest, and their relationship with the United States should at least be open to review.

Then came the shocker: Who has been and continues to actively oppose these al-Qaeda derivatives with soldiers on the ground? It turns out to be, among others – Iran, Hezbollah and Bashar al-Assad's Syrian government. And, who are clandestinely aiding the Al-Qaeda affiliates, the enemies of Washington? It turns out to be Israel and Saudi Arabia.

As I explain in my original analysis, this latter development has much to do with the fact that both the Israelis and the Saudis have decided that regime change in Syria is a high priority, even if it means ISIS and al-Nusra end up taking over Syria and, as Robert Parry puts it in a Consortiumnews.com [article](#), ISIS "chopping off the heads of Christians, Alawites, Shiites and other 'heretics' and/or Al Qaeda having a major Mideast capital from which to plot more attacks on the West."

Has the U.S. government, or for that matter the U.S. media, brought this anomalous situation to the attention of the general public? No. Has Washington altered its policies in the region so as to ally with the actual anti-al-Qaeda forces? Not at all. Why not? These are questions we will address below, but



first we must look at a recent complicating factor.

### **Russia to the Rescue**

This screwball situation has now taken yet another turn. The Russian government, which also sees Al Qaeda and its affiliates as a growing threat, has decided that the U.S. will not meaningfully act against the religious fanatics now threatening Syria – a country with which it, Russia, has strong ties. Having come to this conclusion, Moscow has decided to take the initiative and increase its military assistance to Damascus.

According to a *New York Times* article of Sept. 5, this includes bringing into Syria as many as a thousand military advisers and support staff. Russia already has a naval base at the port city of Tartus. Now it is establishing a presence at the main airbase outside the city of Latakia.

All of this has raised alarms in Washington. Secretary of State John Kerry, who has met several times with Russian officials about the Syrian civil war, was reported by the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on Sept. 10 to have called his Russian counterpart, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, to tell him that the Russian moves will only increase the level of violence rather than help promote a negotiated settlement.

If this report is accurate, Kerry must have come across as rather lame. After over four years of protracted internecine slaughter, over 4 million refugees, and numerous failed attempts at a negotiated a settlement, all one has as a result is the growth of rampaging religious fanatics who now control much of Syria and part of Iraq as well.

It might just be the case that Moscow has come to the conclusion that a negotiated settlement is not possible, and what one really needs is a military victory that destroys organizations such as ISIS and al-Nusra. Oddly, the U.S. government seems to be alarmed at this prospect. No doubt this is because Moscow sees no reason to displace its ally, Bashar al-Assad, while “regime change” is a cause celebre for U.S. and Israeli leaders.

Washington has gone so far as to request NATO-affiliated countries to deny Russian transport planes permission to overfly their territory on their way to Syria. At least one such country, Bulgaria, has done just that. Fortunately, this does not really hamper the Russian effort. Iran, another enemy of Al Qaeda, has granted permission for the over-flights, thus opening up a convenient and more or less direct route for the Russian supply line.

The goal of destroying Al-Qaeda-like organizations is, supposedly, what the “war on terror” is all about. Nonetheless, the U.S. government’s policies in this

regard are inconsistent. Does the U.S. want to destroy Al Qaeda and its affiliates or not? The answer is, mostly, yes. However, something often holds the government back – something that the Russians don't have to contend with.

That something breaks down into three parts: (1) longstanding, conservative Washington-based special interest lobbies, the most powerful of which is sponsored by Israel; (2) the pro-war neoconservative elements within American society that often cooperate with these lobbies; and (3) an American military bureaucracy parts of which are committed to maintaining a system of land, air and naval bases situated mostly in dictatorial Middle East states hostile to both Russia and Syria. It is this combination of forces that prevents meaningful changes even as evolving realities would seem to demand them.

In other words, while Israel and Saudi Arabia can act in ways they consider to be in their national interests, their agents and allies in Washington exercise enough influence to discourage U.S. policymakers from doing the same thing when it comes to the Middle East. That is why Washington is not pointing up the fact that two close “allies” are helping the same sort of people who attacked the World Trade Center, while simultaneously chastising the Russians for actually acting forcefully against those same terrorists.

The inability to adjust to changing realities is a sure sign of decline, particularly for a “great power.” And, unfortunately that seems to be the situation for the U.S. At least at this point, one can only conclude that the Obama administration's ability to secure the Iran nuclear agreement is an isolated example of realism.

Current U.S. policy toward Syria shows that Washington has not made the turnaround leading to a permanent clear-sighted ability to assess national interests in the Middle East.

**Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest*; *America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood*; and *Islamic Fundamentalism*.**

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## In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories from August focused on the failure of the mainstream media to question prevailing “group thinks” on almost any topic, the bitter fight over the Iran nuclear deal, the hidden reality of U.S. allies aiding Al

Qaeda in Syria, and the surprising surge of anti-Establishment candidates.

["The 'Two Minutes Hate' of Tom Brady"](#) by Robert Parry, Aug. 1, 2015

["Nuclear War's Unlearned Lessons"](#) by Robert Dodge, Aug. 1, 2015

["The Soft Power Hoax"](#) by Mike Lofgren, Aug. 2, 2015

["Reporter Wins Fifth Amendment Case"](#) by Marcy Wheeler, Aug. 3, 2015

["Confronting a Very Dark Chapter"](#) by Gary G. Kohls, Aug. 3, 2015

["How US Allies Aid Al Qaeda in Syria"](#) by Daniel Lazare, Aug. 4, 2015

["Why Many Muslims Hate the US"](#) by William R. Polk, Aug. 5, 2015

["Obama's Pragmatic Appeal for Iran Peace"](#) by Robert Parry, Aug. 5, 2015

["'Paint-balling' the Presidents"](#) by Sam Hussein, Aug. 7, 2015

["Christianity and the Nagasaki Crime"](#) by Gary G. Kohls, Aug. 9, 2015

["Exposing Nixon's Vietnam Lies"](#) by James DiEugenio, Aug. 10, 2015

["Gauging the Violent 'Fox Effect'"](#) by Mike Lofgren, Aug. 11, 2015

["Rectifying Israel's Crimes"](#) by Lawrence Davidson, Aug. 11, 2015

["Pope Francis' Appeal for the Future"](#) by Daniel C. Maguire, Aug. 12, 2015

["Congress' Test of Allegiance: US or Israel?"](#) by John V. Whitbeck, Aug. 12, 2015

["Escalating the Anti-Iran Propaganda"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Aug. 13, 2015

["The Saudi Royals, Unchained"](#) by Joe Lauria, Aug. 14, 2015

["Neocons to Americans: Trust Us Again"](#) by Robert Parry, Aug. 16, 2015

["Reviving the 'Successful Surge' Myth"](#) by Robert Parry, Aug. 16, 2015

["Propaganda, Intelligence, and MH-17"](#) by Ray McGovern, Aug. 17, 2015

["Explaining the Trump Phenomenon"](#) by Lawrence Davidson, Aug. 17, 2015

["Assange and Democracy's Future"](#) by Norman Solomon, Aug. 18, 2015

["Pentagon Manual Calls Some Reporters Spies"](#) by Don North, Aug. 19, 2015

["The Honduran Coup's Ugly Aftermath"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Aug. 19, 2015

["Why US Police Are Out of Control"](#) by Daniel Lazare, Aug. 20, 2015

["The Riddle of Obama's Foreign Policy"](#) by Robert Parry, Aug. 21, 2015

["The Case for Pragmatism"](#) by Robert Parry, Aug. 24, 2015

["American Jews Split from Netanyahu"](#) by Lawrence Davidson, Aug. 24, 2015

["The Trump/Sanders Phenomena"](#) by Robert Parry, Aug. 26, 2015

["Sanders's Screwed Mideast Strategy"](#) by Sam Hussein, Aug. 27, 2015

["Will Peace Find a 2016 Advocate?"](#) by Robert Parry, Aug. 27, 2015

["Pushing the Edge on Nuclear War"](#) by William R. Polk, Aug. 28, 2015

["America's Short-sighted 'Grand Strategy'"](#) by Franklin Spinney, Aug. 31, 2015

["Schumer's Troubling Mideast Record"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Aug. 31, 2015

["Ron Paul and Lost Lessons of War"](#) by Todd E. Pierce, Aug. 31, 2015

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## Israel's Bitter Anti-Iran Fight

Israeli leaders put on a full-court press to coerce U.S. lawmakers to line up behind Prime Minister Netanyahu instead of President Obama on the Iran nuclear deal. The Israel ploy appears to not only have failed but to have exposed deep divisions in the Jewish community, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

The insistence that Israel is somehow [the national embodiment of the Jewish](#)

people has always been dangerous. This is so because it tied a diverse group spread over the globe to the apron strings of a single political entity and its ideology (Zionism). Thus identified, the Jews were allegedly what a bunch of Zionist ideologues said they were – and were also supposedly exemplified by the consistently unsavory practices of the Israeli state.

The Zionists tried to force the Jews into this Procrustean bed through the monopolization of elite Jewish organizations and the emotional blackmail of those who might have dissenting views. The mantra here was that if a Jewish person had disagreements with Israel, he or she should express them behind closed doors and never in public.

Behind closed doors the dissenter could be contained. However, if he or she went public with their differences, they undercut the myth of Jewish community solidarity with Israel. To go public in this fashion was a mortal sin, and one risked being shamed within one's community. Those who persisted were labeled "self-hating" traitors.

It is a long-standing effort at censorship. Some people might get upset with those who publicly accuse Charles Schumer of having dual loyalties involving Israel, but no one seemed to get equally upset with those Zionists who have accused thousands of Jews worldwide of being "self-haters" because they publicly came out against Israel's atrocious treatment of the Palestinians.

### **On "Verge of Fratricide"**

It was inevitable that the Zionist requirement of public silence would get harder to enforce the more outrageous the behavior of Israel's political leadership became.

On the American scene, the combination of the brazen intrusion of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu into U.S. politics (particularly his March 3, 2015 address to Congress) and the warmongering position on Iran taken by Jewish organizations openly allied to Israel seems to have been the tipping point. The combined adamantness of this Zionist front has forced American Jewish members of Congress to make a choice, and do so publicly. Those who have chosen, against the wishes of the Israeli government, to support the Iran nuclear agreement as reflecting the long-term interests of the United States (and Israel) are now treated to the same degree of defamation as those Jews called "self-haters."

A national window on what Greg Rosenbaum, chairman of the National Jewish Democratic Council, calls "the verge of fratricide in the Jewish community" was opened by a front-page article in the Aug. 29 issue of the *New York Times*, entitled "Debate on Iran Fiercely Splits American Jews."

The *Times*' main example of this near-fratricidal behavior is the case of Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-New York, who, like the state's senior senator, Charles Schumer, has spent his entire political career supporting Israel. The only difference between the two is that unlike Schumer, Nadler has come out in support of the Iran agreement. But that is all it took to make him a target.

According to an interview with Nadler in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* and reprinted in the Aug. 25 edition of the *Forward*, the New York representative was hit by "vociferous attacks" labeling him a "traitor," one who wants to "abandon the Jewish people." According to the *Times*' piece, he has also been called a Kapo (the name given to Jewish collaborators with the Nazis), and a "facilitator of Obama's Holocaust."

New York State Assemblyman Dov Hikind, a Zionist stalwart, has sworn to work for Nadler's defeat come the representative's next primary election and has been harassing him in various ways ever since he announced his support for the Iran deal.

This sort of thing has been going on across the nation where American Jewry interfaces with national politics. It is interesting that the one who is trying to bring civility back into this internecine debate is a Gentile: Barack Obama.

Again, according to the *Times*' article, Obama, speaking on "a webcast for major Jewish organizations," called the treatment of Nadler "appalling" and then, ignoring a fast unraveling political status quo, said "we're all pro-Israel, and we're family." Nonetheless, he concluded that "It's better to air these things out even if it is uncomfortable, as long as the tone is civil." Alas, President Obama sounds like a marriage counselor who comes too late to the party.

### **Persistent Incivility**

The truth is that the tone of the edicts coming out of Israel both past and present, and then transmitted by elite Jewish-Zionist organizations down the line to the synagogues and community centers in the United States, has never been civil. Israel's self-righteous position has always been that it has an unquestionable right to tell American Jewry when to support or not support their own (that is U.S.) national interests.

And if you don't follow the Israeli lead, you will be accused of betraying "your people." This persistent incivility has just been below the U.S.'s public radar until now. We can all thank Netanyahu and his Likudniks for the fact that that is no longer the case.

So what does this mean for the future of U.S.- Israeli relations? Well, according to the *Times*, some are predicting "long-term damage to Jewish

organizations and possibly to American-Israeli relations." One thing is for sure, the abrasive Zionist modus operandi will not change. It is built in to the historical character of both their ideology and Israeli culture.

The real questions lie on the American side of the equation. For instance, will American politicians who have belatedly become uneasy with Israeli behavior come to understand that what they face is a fundamental difference in worldview?

Jeremy Ben-Ami, the head of JStreet, in a rare moment of clarity, was cited in the *Times'* article as having spoken of "a fundamental break between Democratic Party leaders inclined toward diplomacy and the worldview of a conservative Israeli government which has more in common with Dick Cheney." Ben-Ami is surely correct here, even though he shortsightedly confines the problem to the current Israeli government.

A corresponding question is will American Jews who disagree with Israeli policies come to realize that this is more than a family squabble? It is a fundamental break between those who favor humanitarian values and sensible diplomacy, and those who favor the ways of war and ethno-religious discrimination.

In truth, American Jews who support civil and human rights have no more in common with Israel and its culture than they do with xenophobic fanatics of the Republican Right. They just have to accept that fact and, on the basis of that awareness, take a public stand.

It is probably accurate to describe current events as doing lasting damage to American Jewish organizations. It is not the case that "names can never hurt you," and there has been a lot of harsh name-calling within these groups. From the anti-Zionist perspective this is all for the good. These organizations had long ago turned into fronts for Israel and have been hurting, not helping, American Jews.

As for the future of the U.S.-Israeli relationship, it is hard to know if the storm that has blown up over the nuclear agreement with Iran has delivered a lasting blow. The Zionist lobby still has a lot of financial power and an increasingly firm alliance with the Republican Right. And, who knows, we might someday see those barbarians back in the White House.

On the other hand, that evolving alliance will continue to alienate more liberal Jews and Democratic politicians. The safest prediction to make is that while recent events might not spell the end of America's "special relationship" with Israel, they are surely a big step in the right direction.

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## American Jews Split from Netanyahu

Major Jewish organizations and donors are pressing the U.S. Congress to get in lockstep behind Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's opposition to the Iran nuclear deal, but they are out of step with most American Jews who support the accord, reports Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

On Aug. 13, The New York Times carried a front-page article entitled "Donors Descend on Schumer and Others in Debate on Iran." The article opened a window on the activities of big money donors in the Congress of the United States.

According to the Times story, Sen. Charles Schumer, D-New York, had been consulting with John Shapiro, a wealthy financier and "longtime benefactor" of the senator and other Democratic politicians. Shapiro is also the head of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), an organization that claims 100,000 members and that, since 2009, has described itself as "a center for Jewish and Israel global advocacy," thereby misleadingly tying these two interests – Jewish advocacy and Israeli advocacy – together.

Shapiro's position with AJC also means that, when it comes to Middle East foreign policy, there is no real difference between his position and that of the Israeli government. This identification is reflected in the AJC's "unity pledge" concerning the Zionist state.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that Shapiro told Schumer what Israeli-inspired analyses to read before he made his decision on the nuclear deal. According to the Times, Shapiro also informed the senator that the Egyptian "president" Abdel Fattah el-Sisi felt sure that the deal would "increase regional terrorism." It can be assumed that Shapiro failed to mention that this was an opinion that differed from the public position taken by the Egyptian foreign minister.

Soon thereafter Schumer announced that he would oppose President Barack Obama's negotiated nuclear agreement with Iran. One can find multiple critiques on the web of Schumer's reasons for taking this position, so we won't go into it here. For our purpose the important point is that Shapiro wasn't the only Jewish donor trying to pressure legislators and, in fact, many were urging not rejection but



acceptance of the Iran deal.

### **American Jewish Support for Iran Deal**

The Times article identifies several wealthy Jewish donors who were lobbying in support of the Iran agreement but doesn't tell us if they have been as successful as Shapiro. These include the billionaire entrepreneur S. Daniel Abraham, TV producer Norman Lear (founder of People for the American Way), and the famous billionaire George Soros.

There are several additional points that can be added to this aspect of the Times story:

–There are a good number of Israeli intelligence professionals (to say nothing of their American counterparts) who “have very positive views of the nuclear agreement.” Despite efforts by the Netanyahu government to silence them, their positions are now coming out in the media.

–Hundreds of prominent American Jews have publicly supported the agreement in a Times ad and open letter to Congress.

–Recent polls show that most American Jews support the deal with Iran. According to a poll conducted by the LA Jewish Journal Survey, “by a wide margin, American Jews support the recently concluded agreement with Iran.” Indeed, according to this poll, even a majority (51 percent) of those who described themselves as “very attached emotionally to Israel want Congress to approve the deal.”

All this information undermines the myth that Israel (or worse yet, Benjamin Netanyahu) speaks for the Jews. This has always been untrue, yet Israel's persistent insistence that it is true constitutes a typical “big lie” which, repeated over and over again, takes hold in the popular mind and comes to appear as a reflection of reality.

It is the resulting pseudo-truth that helps men like John Shapiro be so persuasive. Along with all the money he can bring to the table, he can claim that he speaks simultaneously for Israel and American Jewry. His political benefactors will believe this because it is consistent with an established myth.

That is why it is important to point out, at every opportunity, instances that undermine the myth. The case of the Iran nuclear agreement is just such an instance.

### **An Organizational Approach**

There is one other lesson to be learned from the Times story. Lobbyists like Shapiro have an advantage because unlike most of the Jewish donors who support

the nuclear agreement, they can approach Congress as the leaders of focused organizations that have a relatively large membership with deep pockets.

The Jewish donors out there who may want to defy Israel and its claim to speak for the Jews must also approach the U.S. government in a focused organizational fashion if they are to compete with Mr. Shapiro and other groups such as AIPAC. There are, of course, smaller Jewish groups that are defiant of Israel and its practices, groups such as Jewish Voices for Peace. But such organizations, while giving the lie to the Israeli claim to represent all Jews, haven't the numbers or the money to successfully compete for influence in Congress.

One might also mention JStreet, which really doesn't qualify here, because nine times out of ten it offers a resolutely Zionist analysis.

When all is said and done, the opposition forces in Congress probably will be unable to destroy the nuclear agreement with Iran. Will this achievement encourage the Jewish donors who favored the deal to come together and form a single Jewish organization outspokenly independent of Israel and its camp followers in the U.S.? One would hope so, because this is really what is needed if we are to liberate the U.S. Congress and political parties from the myth of a unified Jewry in support of Israel.

In the meantime there is an even bigger job to make the same case to rest of the world. Be it in Europe or the Arab world, the myth is growing and shaping people's thinking. As a consequence, to the extent that a person is hostile to Israel's policies and practices they run the risk of becoming hostile to "Jews," which opens the way to stark anti-Semitism.

This process can only aid and abet the ambitions of the Zionists. So let us strive for clear thinking on this matter and popularize the fact that Jews are quite diverse in their views and a growing number of them are not supporters of Israel or its practices. In this way we can undercut the myth that falsely connects them to Israel.

**Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest*; *America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood*; and *Islamic Fundamentalism*.**

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## Explaining the Trump Phenomenon

Since the days of Richard Nixon's "Southern Strategy," the Republican Party has

played to the grievances of angry white men (and some women), in effect creating a ready audience for a hot-headed and quick-witted showman like Donald Trump, a classic case of reaping what is sown, as Lawrence Davidson explains.

By Lawrence Davidson

It is really not too hard to figure out Donald Trump. The man is having fun.

What we have witnessed so far is a demonstration of how a billionaire megalomaniac and narcissist has fun: having secured a national stage, he runs around and says whatever he pleases, even if it is blatantly obnoxious. If he gets positive feedback, he does it all the louder. If he gets negative feedback, he turns into a bully, which he also sees as fun.

If his alliance with Fox "News" doesn't work out, maybe he will buy his own network. If the Republican Party spurns him, he will no doubt start his own political party. He can afford it and, again, it's a lot of fun. By the way, while Trump is having fun many of the rest of us don't find him funny at all. Indeed, it's a serious question whether Mr. Trump's good time will, in the end, encourage him to become a dangerous demagogue.

If explaining Donald Trump isn't all that difficult, explaining why millions of people applaud him is more of a challenge. And it is, after all, millions. There are roughly 219 million Americans who are qualified to vote, but only approximately 146 million are registered to do so. Of those registered, 29 percent are signed up as Republicans, or about 42 million people. According to a Aug. 4 CBS poll, Trump has a favorable rating among 24 percent of that number, or about 10 million people. We can assume that this is a low number, given it only counts presently registered Republicans and not independents.

There is a lot of speculation over why these people like Trump. Here are the typical reasons given:

,Trump has found support from Republican voters looking for a successful businessman to jumpstart an economic renaissance." This sort of sentiment is seconded by the opinion that, because he is a rich businessman, he must know how to "generate jobs." Of course, this is an illusion. Most businesspeople operate within economic pockets and know little about "the economy" as a whole. Many of them get rich not by creating jobs but by eliminating them through mergers and downsizing operations.

,He is not a Washington insider, he has never worked in Washington or been "stained by political life." This is a very questionable asset. Government is a bureaucratic system with well-established rules. The notion that Mr. Trump can

come into such a system and “revolutionize” it without causing chaos is fantasy.

,Trump “is a fighter” and “people want a fighter.” He tells it like it is and has no time for “political correctness,” of which most people are allegedly “deathly tired.” In other words, there is a subset of the population who don’t like minority groups or their demand for respect. They don’t like feminists and their concerns about women’s rights. They don’t like immigrants and the notion that the government should treat them like human beings. Trump has become their champion because he says what they believe, which, of course, passes for an assumed truth: all of this “political correctness” is an anti-American attack on traditional values.

Many of these Trump supporters are oblivious to the fact that they themselves are descended from both legal and illegal immigrants who had to fight the prejudiced sentiments of people just like them to become accepted citizens. That presents an almost laughable picture, except their sentiments are also very scary.

### **The Permanently Disaffected**

These sentiments are really the surface emanations of a crowd phenomenon that has deeper meaning and persistent historical roots. In all societies, one finds the chronically disaffected, frustrated and resentful. Their numbers may go up or down according to economic and social circumstances, but they never go to zero.

In the U.S., this statistically permanent set of disaffected citizens seems to find itself most comfortable amidst the ultra-conservative right, with its hatred of “big” government and its resentment of just about any taxation. All of this is melded to national chauvinism and exceptionalism. Of late this minority has become quasi-organized in what is known as the Tea Party movement.

A Gallup poll conducted in October 2014 suggested that 11 percent of voting-age Americans are “strong supporters” of the Tea Party movement. If we use the 219 million figure given above, that comes to 24 million Americans. There is certainly an overlap here with the 10 million avid followers of Donald Trump.

What this means is that Trump, in his narcissistic pursuit of recognition, has tapped into a subgroup of the population that includes the permanently dissatisfied. He can rally them and perhaps bring them together into a bigger movement of, say, 20 to 25 percent of the population. But he can never satisfy that element’s essentially nihilistic grumbling.

In other words, Trump is playing with fire and at some point he will have to wake up to just what sort of monster he has by the tail. Then he will have to decide: is he just out for fun or does he want to go the route of the demagogue?

The American people are not immune to demagoguery. In fact Fox "News," on the air 24/7, has made a lot of money showcasing demagogues of one sort or another. Bill O'Reilly might be the most well known of the lot.

These people have had their predecessors, particularly during the Great Depression, such as Father Charles Coughlin, a Detroit-based Catholic priest who ended up supporting fascist principles. His radio broadcasts had tens of millions of listeners. And then there is Joe McCarthy, etc.

Donald Trump certainly has the qualifications to join the long list of history's demagogues: good speech-making abilities, no problem with playing fast and loose with the facts, and an affinity for the crowd, which energizes him. For him it also seems to be a lot of fun. For the rest of us it is just another aspect of living under the old curse of interesting times.

**Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest; America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood; and Islamic Fundamentalism.**

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