

THE ANGRY ARAB: How Arabs Watch Israeli Elections

The view is no different from how South African blacks regarded elections of whites in apartheid South Africa, writes As'ad AbuKhalil.

By **As'ad AbuKhalil**

Special to Consortium News



Israeli elections are treated by U.S. media as an American affair. It was only after I came to the U.S. in 1983 that I realized the extent to which the American political establishment invests in Israeli elections. And with every election, the U.S. media and dominant political class pretend that if only this side wins (or that side), peace will be at hand and that a historic compromise would be achieved if only the Palestinians show some pragmatism.

U.S. administrations stay neutral toward Israeli candidates (they love them all equally) although some U.S. presidents favored some over others (Clinton favored the Labor Party and Obama favored anyone other than Benjamin Netanyahu – not that he treated Netanyahu's government with anything but the fawning and generous treatment that Israeli leaders are accustomed to receiving from U.S. presidents).

U.S. media purposefully cover Israeli elections to excess, partly to contribute to the myth that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East region (Cyprus is possibly the one country which deserves that label). Lebanon has been holding elections long before Israel was (forcibly) created

but its elections are scantily covered by U.S. media.

In excessively covering Israeli elections, U.S. and Western media act out of racist preferences: Israel leaders have been exclusively European immigrants (or descendants of European immigrants) and the denigration and political marginalization of Sephardic Jews don't detract from the image of the "only democracy." That's not to mention the mistreatment of the Arab population, both inside the 1948 boundaries of the occupation state, as well as those who are in West Bank, Gaza or outside Palestine.

Israeli leaders visit Washington more than other Western leaders. The declared affinity and "shared values" myth between the two countries was invented to cover up the historical record of anti-Semitism inside the U.S., and to conceal U.S. complicity in the Western inaction toward the Holocaust.

Arabs' views of the Israeli elections are no different from how South African blacks regarded elections of whites in apartheid South Africa. Israel made sure to establish a state in which votes of non-Jews don't count and can't make a difference. You can't expel 82 percent of the native population of a country, and then call elections democratic in that country (after you rendered the natives into a small – albeit growing – segment of the voting population). The whole idea of declaring Israel as a "Jewish state" is a juridical commitment made by the State of Israel to its Jewish supremacist origin and purpose. It basically promises Jews of Israel that the state (through its military) won't allow the number of non-Jews to ever reach a point in which they can count or make a difference. Yet,

they still call that system a “democracy” in the West.

Treated as a Suspect Community

The Arabs, after being expelled from their homes, and after the land was forcibly stolen from the Palestinians, were treated as a suspect community which was put under direct military rule from 1948 to 1966 (when Israel was already being referred to as “the only democracy in the Middle East.”) Arabs needed permits to travel from one village to another and most had to register with the police station for their daily survival. And not a single Arab poet who rose in the 1950s and 1960s (from Tawfiq Zayyad, Samah Al-Qasim, to Mahmoud Darwish) managed to write Palestinian nationalistic poetry without having to serve time in jail and suffered state harassment for his/her literary production. That Israel is “the only democracy in the Middle East” was – and is – one of the most offensive Western political gimmicks in the eyes of Arabs.

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Some Arabs were drawn early on to communist groupings in the state, because Israeli communists were seen – not always justifiably – as the least racist within a fundamentally racist political spectrum. Some Arabs rose within the Israeli Communist Party but increasingly Arabs realized the fundamental limitations of a state officially founded on an apartheid doctrine. Arab voter turnout was always low, but Arabs managed in the 1970s to produce their own “Arab parties and lists” although divisions and splits marred their political emergence.

The Zionist movement from its inception sought to sow discord and divisions among the Arabs, and recently declassified Israeli documents from the Labor Party archives from the 1960s confirmed those Israeli plans. They not only speak of averting the “formation of an educated class” among the Arabs but also of creating divisions among them: “We should continue to exhaust all the possibilities [inherent in] the policy of communist divisiveness that bore fruit in the past and has succeeded in creating a barrier—even at times artificial—between certain segments of the Arab population.”

Participation as Propaganda

Palestinians in the diaspora and Arabs at large looked with contempt and deep suspicion at Arab participation in Israeli elections and opposed Arab representation in the Knesset. Arab critics rightly pointed out that Arab participation, while failing to achieve any meaningful results for the Arab minority, merely provided an added layer in Israeli political legitimacy and propaganda.

Propaganda booths of the Israeli embassy in the U.S. often feature Arab members of the Knesset without explaining that all of them have been subjected to severe and discriminatory treatment by the state: many are often prevented from speaking, or expelled from the halls of the Knesset, or expelled outright from the Knesset. Furthermore, political participation by Arabs in the Knesset weakens the Arab case against the very legitimacy of the Israeli occupation state.

While residents of the refugee camps never distinguished between Labor or Likud, because the bombs kept falling on

them whether the government belonged to the right, center, or left, PLO leadership often put too much stake in the results of the election.

By the 1970s and 1980s, the leadership of Yasser Arafat failed in mounting a successful armed resistance against Israel (because Arafat had such hopes in the U.S. "peace process," which excluded him from the start) and failed in ending the U.S. boycott of the PLO. In a confirmation of the bankruptcy of the leadership of the PLO, Mahmoud Abbas (who was an advisor to Arafat on Israeli affairs) persuaded Arafat that change would come from Israel provided the Labor Party stayed in power. PLO offices around the world (especially in Paris) used to open champagne bottles when Labor won over Likud. They had no other course of action except to rely on their enemy to deliver liberation for them.

Not much will change in Israel after this election. The racism, aggressiveness and contempt for the native population are beliefs that are shared across the Israeli political spectrum. It is not that there is new racism in Israel: the new racism is the old Labor Party racism but without the camouflage and layers of concealment.

The entire political spectrum of Israel keeps moving further to the right, but occupation and apartheid were planted by the Zionist left in Israel. The notion that Israel is changing (toward racism and exclusiveness) is a myth planted by those who believed all along that there was a "peace camp" in Israel. The political debate between Netanyahu and his opponents shows that both sides competed in demonstrating hostility and aggression toward Arabs. Gen.

[Benny Gantz](#), who ran against Netanyahu this time, bragged about the number of Palestinians he managed to kill in Gaza in 2014, when the overwhelming majority of the casualties were [civilians](#).

Israel will not change on its own, but will be forced to change with a change in the regional balance of forces and the steadfastness of the Palestinian population. More people are disqualified from voting in historic Palestine than those who are enfranchised (largely the Jewish population, including any Jewish person as soon as he or she comes to Israel from anywhere in the world). Palestinians who were born in 1948 Palestine and who left homes and orchards behind were shot at the border if they ever tried to return. The state that killed, displaced, and prevented the return of the natives can't be said to be democratic, even if the majority Jewish population are permitted to select who among them should lead the apartheid state.

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Israeli Politics Enter Grubby Realm of Reality TV

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

By Jonathan Cook

Jonathan-Cook.net



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

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

The police have recommended that he be charged over three separate allegations of bribery. By calling the election, Netanyahu has forced the attorney-general, Avichai Mendelblit, onto unfamiliar- and constitutionally tricky-terrain.

Mendelblit, an appointee of Netanyahu's, has indicated that

he will make a decision on whether to issue an indictment before the ballot, so that voters have the facts to make an informed choice.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Demanding Showdown

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Two of the three bribery cases he faces relate directly to

allegations that he offered favors—in one case captured on tape—to Israeli media moguls in return for better coverage in their publications.

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

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

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

Leftist Slur

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

able to determine their own fate, just like Israelis.

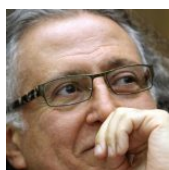
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The Legacy and Fallacies of Bernard Lewis

Bernard Lewis, seen by some in the West as a giant of Arab and Muslim scholarship, left behind a legacy of falsehoods and politically-motivated distortions, as As'ad AbuKhalil explains.

By As'ad AbuKhalil

Special to Consortium News



There is no question that Bernard Lewis was one of the most politically—not academically—influential Orientalists in modern times.

Lewis' career can be roughly divided into two phases: the British phase, when he was a professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, and the second phase, which began in 1974, when he moved to Princeton University and lasted until his death on May 19. His first phase was less overtly political, although the Israeli occupation army translated and published one of his books, and Gold Meir assigned articles by Lewis to her cabinet members.

Lewis knew where he stood politically but he only became a political activist in the second phase. His academic production in the first phase was rather historical (dealing with his own specialty and training) and his books were then thoroughly documented. The production of his second phase was political in nature and lacked solid documentation and citations.

In the second phase, Lewis wrote about topics (such as the contemporary Arab world) on which he was rather ignorant. The writings of his second phase were motivated by his political advocacy, while the writings of the first phase was a combination of his political biases and his academic interests.

Shortly upon moving into the U.S., Lewis met with Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson,

the dean of ardent Zionists in the U.S. Congress. He thus started his political career and his advocacy, which was often thinly hidden behind the titles of superficial books on the modern Arab world. Lewis not only mentored various neoconservatives, but he also elevated the status of Middle East natives that he approved of. For instance, he was behind the promotion of Fouad Ajami (he dedicated one of his books to him), just as he was behind introducing Ahmad Chalabi to the political elite in DC.

Furthermore, Lewis was also behind the invitation of Syrian academic Sadiq Al-Azm to Princeton in the early 1990s (as Edward Said told me at the time) because Lewis always relished Al-Azm's critique of Said's *Orientalism*. Sep. 11 only elevated the status of Lewis and brought him close to the centers of power: he advised George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and other senior members of the administration.

In the lead-up to the Iraq war, he assured Cheney (relying on the authority of Ajami) that not only Iraqis, but all Arabs, would joyously greet invading American troops. And he argued to Cheney before the war, using the dreaded Zionist and colonial cliché, that Arabs only understand the language of force. (Lewis would later distort his own history and claim that he was not a champion of the Iraq invasion although the record is clear).

Lewis was not only close to the higher echelons of the U.S. government, but in addition to his long-standing ties to Israeli leaders, he was close to Jordanian King Husayn and his brother, Hasan (although Lewis would mock what he considered a Jordanian habit of eating without forks and knives, as he wrote in *Notes on a Century: Reflections of a Middle East Historian*, on page 217).

Lewis was also close to the Shah's government, and to the military dictatorship in Turkey in the 1980s. Kenan Evren, the Turkish general who led the 1980 military coup, had a tete-a-tete with Lewis during one of his visits to D.C. Lewis had contacts with the Sadat government, and Sadat's spokesperson, Tahasin Bashir, in 1971 sent a message through Lewis to the Israeli government regarding Sadat's interest in peace between the two countries.

Distorted View of Islam

There are many features of Lewis's works, but foremost is what French historian Maxime Rodinson called "theologocentrism", or the Western school of thought which attribute all observable phenomena among Muslims to matters of Islamic theology.

For Lewis, Islam is the only tool which can explain the odd political behavior of Arabs and Muslims. Lewis used Islam to refer not only to religion, but also

the collection of Muslim people, governments ruling in the name of Islam, Shari`ah, Islamic civilization, languages spoken by Muslims, geographic areas in which Muslims predominate, and Arab governments. A review of his titles show his fixation with Islam. But what does it mean for Lewis to refer to Islam as being "the whole of life" for Muslims, as he does in *Islam and the West*?

Lewis also began the trendy Islamophobic, Western obsession with Shari`ah when he wrote years ago in the same book that for Muslims religion is "inconceivable without Islamic law." There are hundreds of millions of Muslims in the world who live under governments which don't subscribe to Shari`ah. No Muslim, for example, questions the Islamic credentials of Muslims who live in Western countries under secular law. Lewis even notes this fact, but it confuses him. In *Islam and the West* he states in bewilderment: "There is no [legal] precedent in Islamic history, no previous discussion in Islamic legal literature."

Lewis could have benefited from reading James Piscatori's book, *Islam in a World of Nation States*, which shows that Shari`ah is not the only source of laws even in countries where Islam is supposedly the only source of law. But Lewis was stuck in the past, he could only interpret the present through references to the original works of classical Islam.

His hostility and contempt for Arabs and Muslims was revealed in his writings even during the British phase of his career, when he was politically more restrained. He was influenced by the idea of his mentor, Scottish historian Hamilton Gibb, regarding what they both called "the atomism" of the Arab mind. The evidence for their theory is that the classical Arabic poem of *Jahiliyyah* and early Islam was not organically and thematically unified, but that each line of poetry was independent of the other.

I remember back in 1993 when I discussed the matter with Muhsin Mahdi, a professor of Islamic philosophy at Harvard University, when I was reading the private papers of Gibb at the Widener Library. Mahdi said that their ideas are completely out of date and that recent scholarship about the classical Arabic poem refuted that thesis. (Lewis would resurrect the notion about the "atomism" of the Arab mind in his later *Islam and the West*).

Other writings of Lewis became obsolete academically. In his *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* he recycles the view that Muslims had no curiosity about the West because it was the land of infidelity and that they suffered from a superiority complex. A series of new scholarly books have undermined this thesis by Lewis largely by scholars looking into Indian and Iranian archives. The Palestinian academic, Nabil Mater, in his books *Britain and the Islamic World, 1558-1713*, *Europe Through Arab Eyes, 1578-1727*, and *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*, paints a very different—and far more documented—picture

of the subject that Lewis spent a career distorting.

Relished in Disparaging Arabs

In addition, the tone of Lewis' writings on Arabs and Muslims was often sarcastic and contemptuous. Lewis did the work of the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), which was started in 1998 by a former Israeli intelligence agent and an Israeli political scientist, before MEMRI existed: he relished finding outlandish views of individual Muslims and popularizing them to stereotype all Arabs and all Muslims.

In the early editions of *Arabs in History*, Lewis remarked that none of the philosophers of the Arab/Islamic civilization were Arab in ethnic extraction (except Al-Kindi). What was Lewis's point except to denigrate the Arab character and even genetic makeup? In the same book he cites an Ismaili document but then quickly adds that it "is probably not genuine." But if it is "probably not genuine" why bother to cite it except for his fondness for bizarre tidbits about Arabs and Muslims?

The Orientalism of Lewis was not representative of classical Orientalism with all its flaws and shortcomings and political biases. He harbored more of an ideology of hostility against Arabs and Muslims. This ideology shares features with anti-Semitism, namely that the whole (Muslims in this case) form a monolithic group and that they pose a civilizational danger to the world, or are plotting to take it over, and that the behavior or testimony of one represents the total group (Islamic Ummah).

In writing about contemporary Islam, Lewis spent years recycling his 1976 *Commentary* magazine article titled, "The Return of Islam." What he doesn't answer is, "return" from where? Where was Islam prior? In this article, Lewis exhibits his adherence to the most discredited forms of classical Orientalist dogmas by invoking such terms as "the modern Western mind." He thereby resurrected the idea of epistemological distinctions between "our" mind and "theirs", as articulated by the 1976 racist book, *The Arab Mind* by Israeli anthropologist, Raphael Patai. (This last book would witness a resurrection in U.S. military indoctrination after Sep. 11, as Seymour Hersh reported).

An Obsession with Etymology

For Lewis, the Muslim mind never seems to change. Every Muslim, regardless of geography or time, is representative of any or all Muslims. Thus, a quotation from an obscure medieval source is sufficient to explain present-day behavior. Lewis even traces Yaser Arafat's *nom de guerre* (Abu `Ammar) to early Islamic history and to the names of the Prophet Muhammad's companions, though `Arafat

himself had explained that the name derives from the root `amr (a reference to `Arafat's construction work in Kuwait prior to his ascension to the leadership of the PLO).

Because `Arafat literally embraced Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran when he first met him, Lewis finds evidence of a universal Muslim bond in the picture. But when Lewis revised his book years later, he took note in passing of the deep rift which later developed between `Arafat and Khomeini and said simply: "later they parted company." So much for the theory of the Islamic bond between them. Lewis must not have heard of wars among Muslims, like the Iran-Iraq war.

Lewis read the book *Philosophy of Revolution* by the foremost political champion of Arab nationalism, Nasser of Egypt, as containing Islamic themes. He must have been the only reader to come to that conclusion.

Another feature in Lewis's writings is his obsession with etymology. To compensate for his ignorance of modern Arab reality, Lewis would often return to the etymology of political terms among Muslims. His book, *The Political Language of Islam*, which is probably his worst book, is an example of his attempt to Islamize and standardize the political behavior of all Muslims. His conclusions from his etymological endeavors are often comical: he assumes that freedom is alien to the Arabs because the historical meaning of the word in an ancient Arabic dictionary merely connoted the absence of slavery. This is like assuming that a Westerner never engaged in sex before the word was popularized. He complains that some contemporary political terms, like *dawlah* (state), lost some of their original meanings, as if this is a problem peculiar to the Arabic language.

In his early years, Lewis was close to the classical Orientalists: he wrote in a beautiful style and his erudition and language skills showed through the pages. His early works were fun to read, while his later works were dreary and dull. But Lewis was unlike those few classical Orientalists who managed to mix knowledge about history of the Middle East and Islam with knowledge of the contemporary Arab world (scholars like Rodinson, Philip Hitti and Jacques Berque). Lewis's ignorance about the contemporary Arab world was especially evident in his production during the U.S. phase of his long career. His book on the *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, which was one of the first to rely on the Ottoman archives, was probably one of his best books. There is real scholarship in the book, unlike many of his later observational and impressionable works.

In his later best-selling books, *What Went Wrong?* and *The Crisis of Islam*, one reads the same passages and anecdotes twice. Lewis, for example, relishes recounting that syphilis was imported into the Middle East from the new world. His discussion of Napoleon in Egypt appears in both books, almost verbatim. The

second book contains calls for (mostly military) action. In *The Crisis of Islam*, Lewis asserts: "The West must defend itself by whatever means." The book reveals a lot about his outlook of hostility towards Muslims.

Misunderstood Bin Laden

One is astonished to read some of his observations on Muslim and Arab sentiments and opinions. He is deeply convinced that Muslims are "pained" by the absence of the caliphate, as if this constitutes a serious demand or goal even for Muslim fundamentalist organizations. One never see crowds of Muslims in the streets of Cairo or Islamabad calling for the restoration of the caliphate as a pressing need.

But then again: this is the man who treated Usamah Bin Laden as some kind of influential Muslim theologian who is followed by world Muslims. Lewis does not treat Bin Laden as the terrorist fanatic that he is, but as some kind of al-Ghazzali, in the tradition of classical Islamic theologians. Furthermore, Lewis insists that terrorism by individual Muslims should be considered Islamic terrorism, while terrorism by individual Jews or Christians is never considered Jewish or Christian terrorism.

In his retirement years, his disdain for the Palestinian people became unmasked. Although in his book *The Crisis of Islam* he lists acts of violence by PLO groups—only ones, curiously, that are not directed against Israeli occupation soldiers. He lists not one act of Israeli violence against Palestinians and Arabs. To discredit the Palestinian national movement, he finds it necessary to tell yet again the story of Hajj Amin Al-Husayni's visit to Nazi Germany, apparently seeking to stigmatize all Palestinians.

He is so disdainful of the Palestinians that he finds their opposition to Britain during the mandate period inexplicable because he believes that Britain was, alas, opposed to Zionism. Lewis is so insistent in attributing Arab popular antipathy to the U.S. to Nazi influence and inspiration that he actually maintains that Arabs obtained their hostility to the U.S. from reading the likes of Otto Spengler, Friederich Georg Junger, and Martin Heidegger. But when did the Arabs find time to read those books when all they read were their holy book and Islamic religious texts—as one surmises from reading Lewis?

While he displays deep—albeit selective—knowledge when he talks about the Islamic past (where his documentation is usually thorough), his analysis is quite simplistic and superficial when addressing the present (where he often disregards documentation altogether). For instance, he sometimes produces quotations without endnotes to source them: In *Islam and the West* he quotes an unnamed Muslim calling for the right of Muslims to "practice polygamy under

Christian rule.” In another instance, he debates what he considers to be a common Muslim anti-Orientalist viewpoint, and the endnotes refer only to a letter to the editor in *The New York Times*.

Lewis once began a discussion by saying: “Recently I came across an article in a Kuwaiti newspaper discussing a Western historian,” without referring the reader to the name of the newspaper or the author. He also tells the story of an anti-Coptic rumor in Egypt in 1973 without telling the reader how he collects his rumors from the region. On another page, he identifies a source thus: “a young man in a shop where I went to make a purchase.”

Lewis was not shy about his biases in the British phase of his career, but he became an unabashed racist in his later years. In *Notes on a Century*, he did not mind citing approvingly the opinion of a friend who compared Arabs to “neurotic children”, unlike Israelis who are “rational adults.” And his knowledge of Arabs seems to decrease over time: he would frequently tell (unfunny) jokes related to Arabs and then add that jokes are the only indicator of Arab public opinion because he did not seem to know about public opinion surveys of Arabs. He also informs his readers that “chairs are not part of Middle Eastern tradition or culture.” He showers praise on his friend, Teddy Kollek (former occupation mayor of Jerusalem) because he set up a “refreshment counter” for Christians one day.

The political influence of Lewis, who lent Samuel Huntington his term, if not the theme, of “the clash of civilization”, has been significant. But it would be inaccurate to maintain that he was a policy maker. In the East and the West, rulers rely on the opinions and writings of intellectuals when they find that this reliance is useful for their propaganda purposes. Lewis and his books were timely when the U.S. was preparing to invade Muslim countries. But the legacy of Lewis won’t survive future scholarly scrutiny: his writings will increasingly lose their academic relevance and will be cited as examples of Orientalist overreach.

Readers who would like more specific sourcing from Lewis’s books can contact the author at AAbukhalil@csustan.edu

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After Gaza Massacre, Israeli Leaders Should Be Prosecuted for War Crimes

After its soldiers conducted a massacre against unarmed protesters in Gaza, Israeli leaders should be prosecuted by the International Criminal Court, argues Marjorie Cohn.

By Marjorie Cohn



On March 30, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers shot 773 unarmed Palestinian protesters in Gaza, killing 17 and wounding 1,400. Twenty remain in critical condition. The protesters were marching to demand the internationally mandated right of return of refugees to their cities and villages in what now constitutes Israel.

The Israeli leaders who ordered the massacre were in clear violation of international law. They should be prosecuted for war crimes.

Premeditated Force Against Peaceful Protestors

The use of deadly force against the peaceful protesters was premeditated. The IDF deployed 100 snipers to the border fence between Gaza and Israel, where 30,000 to 40,000 Palestinians had gathered for the Great March of Return. In a damning tweet, later deleted, the IDF wrote, “Nothing was carried out uncontrolled; everything was accurate and measured, and we know where every bullet landed.”

Jihad al-Juaidi, director of the ICU at the al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza, told Al Jazeera that all of the injured people who came to the hospital were shot in the head, pelvic joints or knee joints. “This shows that Israeli forces were shooting-to-kill, or to cause disabilities,” al-Juaidi stated.

B’Tselem, a Jerusalem-based human rights organization, characterized the military orders as “shoot-to-kill unarmed Palestinians taking part in these demonstrations.”

“Israeli soldiers were not merely using excessive force, but were apparently acting on orders that all but ensured a bloody military response to the Palestinian demonstrations,” Eric Goldstein, deputy director of Human Rights Watch’s (HRW) Middle East and Africa division, stated.

Senior IDF officers told Haaretz before the protest that a large number of casualties was “a price we would be willing to pay to prevent a breach” of the fence at the border.

Israeli leaders fostered the false narrative that Hamas was sponsoring the protest. Jason Greenblatt, US envoy to Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, followed suit, tweeting, “Hamas is encouraging a hostile march on the Israel-Gaza border” and accused Hamas of “inciting violence against Israel.”

But the demonstration was actually organized by several Palestinian civil society organizations. “No Palestinian faction, organization or group can claim this march as its own. Hamas was simply riding the wave,” Jamil Khader wrote on Mondoweiss. Palestinian flags, not factional ones, were visible.

Conflating civilians with terrorists and framing the planned response as protection against a security risk, Israeli authorities referred to Gaza as a “combat zone.”

Lethal Force Legal Only in Imminent Threat to Life

It is illegal to shoot unarmed civilians under international humanitarian law. Some protesters

threw rocks and burned tires near the border fence. But HRW found “no evidence of any protester using firearms or any IDF claim of threatened firearm use at the demonstrations.” No Israeli soldiers were killed and “the army did not report any injuries to soldiers.”

“Even if a Palestinian was throwing a stone, the chances that under these conditions such an act could cause an imminent threat to life – the only situation that would justify the use of lethal force under international law – are infinitesimal,” Yousef Munayyer, executive director of the US Campaign for Palestinian Rights, wrote on HuffPost. “Indeed, even if Palestinians were trying to climb the fence, that would not give Israel the right to use lethal force.”

Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East and North Africa director of HRW, concurred, stating, “Israeli allegations of violence by some protesters do not change the fact that using lethal force is banned by international law except to meet an imminent threat to life.”

Indeed, the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement specifies, “intentional lethal use of firearms may only be made when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.”

“Senior Israeli leaders who unlawfully called for the use of live ammunition

against Palestinian demonstrators who posed no imminent threat to life bear responsibility” for the deaths and injuries, HRW asserted in a statement. That includes Israel’s prime minister, defense minister and chief of staff.

B’Tselem, which has called for Israeli soldiers to disobey patently illegal orders, described the legal duty to disobey unlawful orders: “It is also a criminal offense to obey patently illegal orders. Therefore, as long as soldiers in the field continue to receive orders to use live fire against unarmed civilians, they are duty-bound to refuse to comply.”

Israeli Leaders Should be Prosecuted by the ICC

Israeli leaders responsible for the deaths and injuries on March 30 should be prosecuted in the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Under the Fourth Geneva Convention, an occupying power has a legal duty to protect the occupied. Grave breaches of the convention constitute war crimes. They include willful killing; willfully causing great suffering or serious injury; intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population; and intentionally launching attacks with knowledge they will cause incidental loss of life or injury to civilians. The IDF committed all of these grave breaches on March 30.

Furthermore, under international humanitarian law, the IDF failed to comply with the principles of distinction and proportionality. *Distinction* requires parties to a conflict to direct their attacks only against people taking part in the hostilities. *Proportionality* prohibits an attack if the damage to the civilian population will be greater than the military advantage anticipated from the attack. The IDF violated both of those principles on March 30.



An independent commission of inquiry convened by the UN Human Rights Council to investigate Israel’s 2014 massacre in Gaza documented the deaths of 2,251 Palestinians, which included 1,462 civilian deaths and the injuring of 11,231 Palestinians. Six civilians and 67 soldiers were killed and 1,600 injured on the Israeli side. The commission concluded

that Israel, and to a lesser extent, Palestinian armed groups, had likely committed violations of international humanitarian law and international human

rights law, some constituting war crimes.

Currently, ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda is conducting a preliminary examination into the 2014 massacre. She should expand her inquiry to include the events of March 30, 2018.

U.S. Vetoes Call for Investigation

UN Secretary-General António Guterres and European Union diplomatic chief Federica Mogherini advocated independent investigations into the use of deadly force by the IDF at the border fence on March 30. But the day after the massacre, the United States vetoed a Security Council resolution that called for an “independent and transparent investigation” and affirmed the right of Palestinians to peaceful protest.

Avigdor Lieberman, Israel’s defense minister, said the IDF soldiers “deserve a medal” for protecting the border. “As for a commission of inquiry – there won’t be one,” he declared on Israeli Army Radio.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu praised his troops for “guarding the country’s borders” and permitting “Israeli citizens to celebrate the [Passover] holiday peacefully,” adding, “Well done to our soldiers.”

Rabbi Alissa Wise, deputy director of Jewish Voice for Peace, noted in a statement, “The Israeli military evidently believes that any time Palestinians assert their basic rights in any way, they will be considered violent, and met with deadly violence.”

Meanwhile, the Palestinian protests are slated to last until May 15, the day Palestinians commemorate the *Nakba*, or the “great catastrophe” of 1948-9, when Israel expelled 800,000 Palestinians from their lands to create Israel. Approximately 70 percent of the 1.3 million Gazans are refugees.

“I think the only way truly forward is to recognize that there is a root cause: 70 years of *Nakba*,” Wise said.

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Marjorie Cohn is professor emerita at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, former president of the National Lawyers Guild, deputy secretary general of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers, an advisory board member of Veterans for Peace and a member of Jewish Voice for Peace. The second, updated edition of her book, [Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral, and Geopolitical Issues](#), was published in November. Visit her website: [MarjorieCohn.com](#). Follow

her on Twitter: [@MarjorieCohn](#).

The Arab Struggle Against Bigotry

For decades, Arabs in the United States have been the focus of bigotry that spikes after incidents of violence and its exploitation by politicians, including President Trump, writes Marjorie Cohn at Truthdig.

By Marjorie Cohn

President Donald Trump has twice tried to institute a travel ban on all refugees from six or seven Muslim-majority countries. During the presidential campaign, [Trump called for](#) a “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States,” slated to last “until our country’s representatives can figure out what is going on.” His Muslim ban has been [struck down](#) by two courts of appeals and may be headed to the Supreme Court.

With his mean-spirited bans, Trump aimed to capitalize on fear of Muslims fueled by the 9/11 terrorist attacks and exacerbated since by the U.S. government and the corporate media.

This anti-Muslim sentiment is a continuation of long-standing prejudice against Arabs that reached its zenith during the last third of the 20th century. In her provocative book, *The Rise of the Arab American Left: Activists, Allies, and Their Fight Against Imperialism and Racism, 1960s-1980s*, Pamela Pennock traces the trajectory of Arab-American leftist activism in the United States over a series of key decades.

Pennock writes about the enduring portrayal of “Arabs as variously exotic, erotic, savage, uncivilized, and incapable of autonomy.”

Indeed, media critic Jack Shaheen’s book and 2007 film, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, document negative stereotypes of Arabs depicted in American movies. “All aspects of our culture project the Arab as villain,” Shaheen says in the film.

He includes lyrics from the opening music of the Disney film “Aladdin”: “Oh, I come from a land, from a faraway place, where the caravan camels grow, where they cut off your ear if they don’t like your face. It’s barbaric, but hey, it’s home.” “Aladdin” has been seen by millions of children around the world.

Anti-Arab prejudice has also been fueled by Hollywood’s depictions of Arab women

as “highly sexualized belly dancer[s] ... inspired by early images of the Orient as the place of exoticism, intrigue and passion,” Shaheen notes. More recently, however, “this image has dramatically changed: The Arab woman is now projected as a bomber, a terrorist.”

Politicized Arab-Americans

These stereotypes are racist, sexist and patently false. Many Arabs came to the United States to study. Once here, they were moved to activism primarily by Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians.

As Pennock observes, the single biggest factor that galvanized Arab-Americans was the dispossession of Palestinian Arabs occasioned by the creation of the state of Israel and its occupation of Palestinian territories.

In order to establish Israel as a Jewish state in 1948, nearly 700,000 Palestinian Arabs were expelled from their homes and their land. They call it the *Nakba*, which means “catastrophe” in Arabic.

A second catalyzing event occurred in June 1967, 50 years ago this month. Israel, with help from the United States, invaded Egypt, Jordan and Syria and seized the Palestinian territories in the West Bank, Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula.

Later that year, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 242, which refers to “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war” and calls for “withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict.” Nevertheless, Israel continues to occupy Palestinian territories it acquired in 1967.

In addition, the 1967 war stoked anti-Arab sentiment in the United States. “While anti-Arab prejudice became especially pervasive and damaging after September 11, 2001, the stigmatization heightened in the aftermath of the 1967 war when many Americans increasingly grouped people of Arab heritage together, regardless of their citizenship or whether they resided in Arab nations or in the United States, and viewed them as threatening and suspicious,” Pennock writes.

One event intensified anti-Arab prejudice in the United States and made it difficult for Arab Americans to “dissociate from stereotypes of terrorists,” according to Pennock: the 1968 assassination of Robert F. Kennedy by Palestinian-American Sirhan Sirhan.

Sirhan was 4 years old when he and his family were forced by the Israeli military to flee their home in Jerusalem. That trauma informed his perception of

Israel. Sirhan was disturbed by U.S. support for Israeli policies. During the presidential campaign, Kennedy vociferously backed Israel. For the 24-year-old Sirhan, who suffered from mental illness, Kennedy's words intensified his pain.

Attorney Abdeen Jabara, a member of Sirhan's defense team, told Pennock that this confluence of events supported a diminished-capacity defense to the murder charge. Sirhan ultimately was convicted of murdering Kennedy and condemned to death. His sentence was later converted to life without possibility of parole when the law changed in California.

Munich Olympics murders

Four years later, in an attempt to free Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails, the Black September faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization murdered Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics.

As a result of the 1972 massacre, the Nixon administration increased surveillance and investigation of Arab-Americans, in a program called "Operation Boulder."

"[B]ecause the Arab visa checks and investigations of Arab Americans were publicized in the American media as constituting the U.S. government's reaction to the Munich massacre," Pennock observes, "the government had in effect stigmatized all Arabs as suspect in the public's mind."

But the investigations "never detected a single case of terrorist or espionage activity among Arabs living in the United States," she reports. Operation Boulder, which officially ended in 1975, lasted only two years. But the U.S. government continued to monitor Arab-Americans for many years thereafter.

Many leaders in the Arab-American community thought the real aim of Operation Boulder was "to suppress Arab Americans' legal political expression, particularly their pro-Palestinian activism ... it was a program of political intimidation" that "also sought to 'divide and conquer' Arab American communities by making them suspicious of one another," Pennock writes.

Jabara, one of those investigated during Operation Boulder, later wrote that the program could "only be understood against the background of the definite pressure that [has] been brought to bear by Israel and its supporters in the U.S."

Jabara told Truthdig, "The matrix of the prejudice was part and parcel of the 'unswerving commitment' by the U.S. and its allies to Israel despite its gross violation of Palestinian rights. In short, there was an organic connection between the prejudice that was promoted in American popular culture as a support

mechanism to a foreign policy that enabled Israeli aggression and colonization. Both the Americans and Israelis wanted to crush any resistance, regardless of what forms it took.”

In the wake of 9/11, in another racist operation, the George W. Bush administration rounded up and incarcerated hundreds of Arab-Americans who had committed no crime. Bush also instituted his Terrorist Surveillance Program to spy on people without judicial review. That program was codified by Congress and continued during the Obama administration.

In 2011, Wired uncovered FBI training materials that described how agents were taught to consider “mainstream” Muslims as supporters of terrorism.

The Intercept reported in 2014 that documents leaked by whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed that the FBI and the National Security Agency covertly read emails of prominent Muslim-Americans, including lawyers, academics, civil rights activists and a political candidate.

Arab-American Activism

Jabara was a founder and past president of the Association of Arab American University Graduates (AAUG), the first national organization of Arab-American peace and civil rights activists. Founded in 1967, AAUG was the most visible and active Arab-American organization in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It had chapters in most U.S. cities and universities.

AAUG was “a select group of Arab Americans [college graduates] who formulated a sense of ethnic identity, fostered community solidarity, and practiced progressive and transnational politics,” Pennock writes.

This group was committed “to an anti-racist, anti-imperialist analysis of Arab world problems” and was ideologically aligned with the global left. It aimed to demonstrate to Americans that “Zionism was a form of colonialism rather than a legitimate expression of Jewish nationalism.”

Significantly, AAUG “helped elevate the Palestinian struggle to the status of a premier universal human rights issue,” AAUG member Ghada Hasem Talhami later observed.

AAUG’s scholarly analysis, published in the Arab Studies Quarterly and other papers and monographs, “was usually critical not only of Israel and U.S. policy in the Middle East but also of conservative Arab states,” Pennock notes. Following the 1967 war, Egypt and Syria had “demonstrably retreated from their commitment to pan-Arabism and Palestinian independence,” she adds.

Thus, Jabara notes, AAUG provided a forum for Arab intellectuals, artists, activists and political figures who may not have had such opportunities to meet in their home countries.

Jabara saw a natural alliance between the issues facing Arab-Americans and the struggles of “Black Americans, Chicanos, Oriental Americans, young people and civil libertarians,” all of whom were “excluded from any meaningful participation in the American decision process.”

Most in the African-American community had traditionally formed alliances with Jews. But by the 1980s, many became increasingly critical of Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians, which they equated with South African apartheid.

The most significant factor driving U.S. foreign policy, according to Jabara, was not the Zionist lobby, but rather “America’s definition and pursuit of its economic interests in the region.”

Arab students, many of them members of the Organization of Arab Students (OAS), likened the struggle of the Palestinians to the Vietnamese fight for self-determination.

By the 1980s, the Muslim Student Organization supplanted OAS as the leading organization of Arab-American students, who were increasingly becoming Muslims.

In 1980, Jabara helped form the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) with former Sen. James Abourezk and Arab American Institute founder James Zogby. Jabara also served as president of ADC, which is still a significant organization.

Jabara told Truthdig that the 1973 oil embargo by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries led to an “uptick” in prejudice against Arab Americans. “That led to the creation of the ADC in 1980,” he added.

The National Lawyers Guild (NLG), the nation’s oldest and largest progressive bar association, was the first in the United States to be racially integrated. From the late 1960s through the mid-1970s, Jabara played the central role in convincing NLG to take up the issue of Palestine and the rights of Palestinians to self-determination. No issue has ever been as divisive in NLG. Some Jewish members left the organization, but it continues to oppose the Israeli occupation.

In 1977, Jabara led the first NLG delegation to Israel, Palestine, Syria and Jordan, and contributed to the delegation’s groundbreaking 1977 report on conditions in the occupied territories. That report was widely circulated within the then-young human rights network and is largely credited with paving the way

for other organizations to break with the pro-Israeli orthodoxy and issue their own reports critical of Israeli human rights abuses.

Jabara was also a key participant in the lawsuit filed by NLG and the Center for Constitutional Rights against the FBI and the Anti-Defamation League of the B'nai B'rith for spying on NLG and other Arab-American and progressive groups.

Anti-Zionism vs. Anti-Semitism

In 1975, the U.N. General Assembly, by a 2-to-1 margin, passed a resolution equating Zionism with racism. It drew parallels between Israeli Zionism and apartheid South Africa. The United States voted against the resolution.

Beginning in the mid-to-late 1960s, people critical of Israel's policies were accused of anti-Semitism, a characterization that persists to this day. Indeed, those who support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement are often labeled anti-Semitic.

Following in the tradition of the Arab-American call for the United Auto Workers to divest its Israeli bonds in the early 1970s, the BDS movement was launched by representatives of Palestinian civil society in 2005. They appealed to "international civil society organizations and people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era ... [including] embargoes and sanctions against Israel."

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

Students for Justice in Palestine, which focuses predominantly on the BDS movement, has been tarred as anti-Semitic by Zionist groups on campuses throughout the country.

But Rafeef Ziadah, a spokesperson for the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee, says, "The BDS movement is opposed, as a matter of principle, to all forms of discrimination, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia."

In 2014, Palestinian human rights activist Omar Barghouti wrote in The New York Times, "Arguing that boycotting Israel is intrinsically anti-Semitic is not only

false, but it also presumes that Israel and ‘the Jews’ are one and the same. This is as absurd and bigoted as claiming that a boycott of a self-defined Islamic state like Saudi Arabia, say, because of its horrific human rights record, would of necessity be Islamophobic.”

Any criticism of Israeli policy is labeled anti-Semitism, even though many Jews – including members of Jewish Voice for Peace, Jewish Center for Nonviolence and IfNotNow – oppose the occupation.

Israel has invaded Gaza three times in the last seven years, killing thousands of Palestinians, including large numbers of women and children. The Black Lives Matter movement sees similarities between the police killings of African-Americans in the U.S. and Israel’s oppression of Palestinians, particularly in Gaza.

As the struggle against the Israeli occupation continues, Pennock’s compelling book is a must-read for progressives and all interested in a comprehensive history of Arab-American activism. The parallels it draws with current events will inform today’s activists in our struggles for freedom and equality.

Marjorie Cohn is professor emerita at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, former president of the National Lawyers Guild, and a member of Jewish Voice for Peace. Her most recent book is *Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral, and Geopolitical Issues*. Visit her website at <http://marjoriecohn.com/> and follow her on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/marjoriecohn>. [This story originally appeared at Truthdig at http://www.truthdig.com/arts_culture/item/the_arab_american_left_and_palestine_the_untold_story_20170605]

Trump’s Unrealistic Foreign Policy ‘Realism’

President Trump fancies himself a “principled realist,” but the reality is that there are very few principles and very little reality attached to his foreign policy, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

In his [speech](#) in Riyadh, President Trump said his administration was adopting “Principled Realism” – capitalized in the official White House version of the speech, as if to make a statement that there is a distinct doctrine being

followed, one worthy of the term *realism*.

Some commentaries seem to have taken him at his word, with the main reference point being a contrast with the two previous U.S. administrations, which, in very different ways, placed greater importance than Trump does on the extent to which liberal democratic values prevail abroad. The contrast is based more broadly on Trump's overall lack of concern for human rights overseas.

But slapping away any interest in democracy and human rights does not define realism. And we certainly have enough experience now with Trump to realize that his declaring he is doing something may have little relationship to what he actually is doing.

One basis for realism is derivable from the etymology of the term itself. Realists regard the world realistically, as it really exists rather than as we might like to remake it or as we would like others to believe it looks like. In this respect, realism is the antipodes of Trump's world, which is filled with falsehoods and where what Trump would like others to believe is more influential than external reality.

This is most obviously the case with domestic affairs but also affects foreign relations, where in Trump's world China is depressing its currency even though it really is doing the opposite, and something awful happened in Sweden last night even though Swedes really slept soundly.

In addition to a basic respect for truth and reality, realism as an approach to foreign policy is centered on the concept of all states constantly competing for influence and pursuing interests that partly conflict with, and partly parallel, one's own interests.

What Is 'Realism'?

Realists strive to harness the interests of others to advance their own nation's interests. Realists utilize alliances while playing this game of nations but avoid being side-tracked by any fixed images of good versus bad or virtue versus evil, or by traditional habits of affinity or repulsion.

Trump may seem to be practicing this facet of realism when he denigrates America's most traditional circle of friendship and affinity, the North Atlantic alliance of Western liberal democracies. We saw this pattern at Trump's recent meetings in Europe, with his refusal to reiterate the Article Five commitment of the North Atlantic Treaty, his physically shoving aside the prime minister of the newest NATO member (Montenegro), and his statement in a multilateral meeting that "the Germans are bad, very bad."

But far from practicing the realist discipline of eschewing good-versus-evil side-taking and being willing to do business with anyone in order to uphold and advance one's own nation's interests, Trump already has sunk deeply into such side-taking, as he did at earlier stops on his trip. In Riyadh his visit was all about going all in with the Saudis, declaring that he was doing so as a matter of good confronting evil, and totally taking the Sunni side against Shia and the Arab side against Persians while ruling out doing any business with the other side.

In Israel, where he made no mention of a Palestinian state or the effects of Israeli colonization of occupied territory, there was barely a hint of dispassionately following U.S. interests rather than succumbing to the passions of his hosts.

Trump has exhibited a general preference for authoritarians over democrats, and that preference already has had impact on his foreign policy. Such an inclination has no more to do with realism than does a general preference for democrats over authoritarians.

Realists see foreign relations as a continuous effort to utilize the self-interest of other states in advancing the interests of one's own state. Transactions and understandings thus are mutually beneficial, and necessarily so. Trump's mindset, evidently developed during his predatory real estate career, of thinking in terms of discrete deals with "winners" and "losers" is antithetical to this realist concept.

As for the issues of democracy and human rights, realism is indeed different from neoconservatism and liberal internationalism in not taking the degree to which democratic and human rights values prevail as a scorecard for measuring the success or failure of one's foreign policy. Neither do realists believe that with enough effort and cleverness the United States can make those values prevail to a much greater extent than they do now.

An Incoherence

But dissing, in the manner of Trump, concerns for human rights is not part of what defines realism. Issues of democracy and human rights exist, they are part of the real world, and realists understand that they can affect the state-to-state relations that are the main currency of realist thought.

A realist would not overlook how giving a green light to Sunni monarchs to crack down on Shia dissidents would encourage them to do exactly that, as in Bahrain, with implications for the stability and future of the U.S. military presence there. A realist would not overlook how the continued absence of democracy and

self-determination for Palestinians has major consequences for state-to-state relations in the Middle East, however much some customary friends wish that were not so.

A realist would understand how Recep Tayyip Erdogan's lurch toward authoritarianism diminishes what otherwise could have been a more positive role for Turkey in the international relations of the Middle East, and a realist would have seen no reason to congratulate Erdogan on the referendum result that has facilitated the lurch.

It is not clear yet whether Donald Trump's foreign policy has enough coherence to merit the label of any "ism", with or without capital letters. But it certainly isn't realism.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is author most recently of *Why America Misunderstands the World*. (This article first appeared as a blog post at The National Interest's Web site. Reprinted with author's permission.)

Government Smearing of Israel's Critics

Israel's pressure to conflate criticism of its treatment of Palestinians with the evils of anti-Semitism has stifled a needed debate in Western societies, as Lawrence Davidson explains.

By Lawrence Davidson

"Back in the day," which in this case was Feb. 8, 2007, the U.S. State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism adopted a "working definition" of anti-Semitism which included the following point: It is anti-Semitic to "deny the Jewish people their right to self-determination (e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor)."

The whole definition, including the quoted sentence, was not original with the State Department. It was originally "written collaboratively by a small group of non-governmental organizations" which remained unnamed.

This "working definition" has proved to have staying power. Thus, the U.S. Congress has used the State Department document in devising its Anti-Semitism Awareness Act of 2016, and in December of 2016, the British government adopted an almost identical "working definition," which listed the same alleged act of

denial – the one that links the Jewish people’s “right of self-determination” with the “claim that the existence of Israel is a racist endeavor” as an example of “contemporary anti-Semitism.”

There is something not quite right about this aspect of the “working definition.” The two parts of the quoted sentence don’t really go together logically. Thus, labeling Israel as it presently exists as a “racist endeavor” does not “deny the Jewish people their right of self-determination.” It only asserts that self-determination carried forth in a racist manner, by Jews or anyone else, is illegitimate.

Although neither the State Department’s nor the U.K. government’s taking up of this “working definition” are not legally binding on non-governmental individuals or organizations (a fact not widely publicized), it has allowed both U.S. and British Zionists to label critics of Israel as anti-Semites in what appears to be a semi-official way, and this has opened the floodgates for a growing number of actions by colleges, universities, civic groups and the like to ban conferences, student organizations and speakers who would condemn Israeli behavior and support Palestinian rights.

Subsequently, the respected British jurist Hugh Tomlinson has come out with an opinion on this “working definition” which finds it flawed, and the U.K. government’s assertion of it legally unenforceable.

A Flawed Assumption

The assertion that criticism of Israel is an act of anti-Semitism relies on the assumption that, because Israel describes itself as “a Jewish state,” it represents all Jews. This exaggeration, in turn, seems reasonable due to a broader tendency, most prevalent in the democratic West, to confuse governments and the people they *claim* authority over.



Americans and most Europeans live in democracies and vote for their governments in relatively honest elections. So, aren't they in some way to be identified with the policies of their governments? The claim can be no more than partially true. Maybe an argument can be made for those who actually voted for the policymakers in a politically aware fashion. But what of those who did not vote for them? Or how about those who did not vote at all? How about those who do not reside within the country that claims them?

It is interesting to note that this identification of specific groups with specific governments is rarely made by those living in dictatorships and states with rigged elections. In those places the population knows that their wishes have no relation to policy. Often their assumption is that the same sort of disconnect is a really a worldwide phenomenon.

So, for instance, if you go to Iran, Iranians will usually tell you that they heartily dislike the U.S. government and, at the same time, really like the American people. No one believes that the two things, government and people, are really the same thing.

When it comes to populations that are spread out beyond one particular state, the exaggeration becomes even more obvious. Thus, can the Buddhist government of Sri Lanka claim the loyalty of Nepalese Buddhists for their horrible war against the Tamils? Should the ethnic Chinese living in San Francisco be expected to support the expansionist policies of the Chinese government in Tibet?

Common sense tells us that it is a gross exaggeration to identify specific ethnic or religious groups with the policies of specific governments, even democratic ones. Yet as we have seen above, in one ongoing case, that of the Jews and Israel, the argument is being pushed very strongly – to the point where laws are being considered to mandate just such an identification.

Israel De-Civilizes

Since the inception of the State of Israel, one Israeli government after the other has insisted that the Israeli state officially represents every last Jew on the planet – thus conflating nationality and religious identity. The fabricated nature of this claim has become more obvious as Israeli behavior and culture has grown ever more racist and the policies of its governments more blatantly in violation of international law and the norms of human and civil rights.

While much of the rest of the world has strived to increase diversity and tolerance, Israel and a small number of other states (such places as Myanmar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, etc.) go about practicing official discrimination,

segregation, and expulsion. As they do so, they inevitably produce cultures that those who support human and civil rights can only describe as ugly and deformed. As a consequence, more and more Jews have responded by disassociating themselves with Zionist Israel.

What then has been the response of the Israeli government? It is, essentially, to spit in the face of Jews supportive of human rights. The Israelis seek to force the issue by using their influence and that of Zionist lobby surrogates to push for new laws in key foreign lands, such as the U.S. and the U.K., to make criticism of the Israeli state legally synonymous with anti-Semitism. The U.S. and British adoption of the suspect portion of the “working definition” of anti-Semitism cited here is a step in this direction, and a consequence of Zionist pressure.

It should be noted that Israel and its supporters, being the “deep thinkers” they aren’t, have created a *reductio ad absurdum* situation. To wit, anyone who publicly condemns Israeli human rights violations (that is Israeli racist acts) must be anti-Semitic (racist) – even if they happen to be Jewish. That is what you get when you pursue particularistic expediency over the general logic of tolerance and humanitarianism.

One can ask how it is that American and British, as well as other politicians and lawmakers, who are themselves part of cultures that are even now seeking to overcome racism, can buy into such an illogical argument?

Their doing so seems to be an expression of the electoral marketplace. Politicians need money to survive in their chosen career. As long as it does not cost them an overwhelming number of votes, they will sell their support to high bidders. And, no one bids higher than the Zionists.

This means that democratic politics is most often not a principled activity. It can be idealized, of course, but as long as it is dependent on incessant fund-raising, it will be corrupt in practice. That is why the Zionists can easily arrange for most Western politicians to selectively suppress free speech in their own countries and support racism in 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*. He blogs at www.tothepointanalyses.com.

Netanyahu's No-Way to a Peace Deal

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu tried to sound reasonable in his first meeting with President Trump, but he will never agree to a reasonable peace deal with the Palestinians, says Alon Ben-Meir.

By Alon Ben-Meir

President Trump should not be swayed by Netanyahu's duplicitous argument, however convincing it might sound, that he is committed to a two-state solution when in fact he has opposed and will continue to reject in principle the creation of an independent Palestinian state under any circumstances.

Netanyahu's repeated assertions that he is ready to negotiate with the Palestinians unconditionally is hollow because he knows that Palestinian President Abbas will not enter into negotiations unless Israel suspends the continuing expansion of settlements and the creeping annexation of Palestinian land, which prevents the Palestinians from establishing their own viable state.

To establish Netanyahu's lack of commitment, one has to simply observe his actions in the occupied territories and listen to his public narrative, which squarely contradicts his presumed willingness to negotiate an end to the conflict. Netanyahu's objections in words and deeds to the creation of a Palestinian state are undisputedly manifested in the following:

First, Netanyahu's insistence that he is ready to negotiate unconditionally is in and of itself a precondition. Suppose President Abbas agrees to negotiate on that basis – there is simply no avoiding the requirement to first agree on rules of engagement, including the venue, makeup of the negotiating teams, their mandate, etc. Most importantly, they must agree on which of the main conflicting issues to tackle first that could facilitate negotiations on other critical issues.

Netanyahu has all along refused to commence negotiations by first meeting the Palestinians' demand to establish the contours of their future state. Instead, he kept insisting that Israel must first negotiate the mechanism that would ensure its national security. The fact, however, that he always sought "secure borders" would have made it reasonable and practical to negotiate borders first.

This would not only establish what constitutes (from his perspective) secure borders, but it would have also met the Palestinians' demands and given them the confidence that a future state will eventually be created. In conjunction with that, the future of many of the settlements could have also been settled.

Netanyahu's insistence, however, on negotiating national security first was nothing but a ploy designed to play for time as previous negotiations have clearly shown.

Second, Netanyahu presides over a coalition government that includes, other than his own right-of-center Likud party, two other extremely right-wing parties – Yisrael Beiteinu and Jewish Home, led by Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman and Education Minister Naftali Bennett, respectively, who are both committed and subservient to the settlement movement. Bennett in particular openly calls for the annexation of much of the West Bank, especially Area C, which constitutes 61 percent of the Palestinian territory.

Political Impossibility

If Netanyahu were to embark in earnest on negotiating a two-state solution, this would immediately unravel his government, as these two parties (along with many members of his own Likud party) have threatened to leave the government if he were to take such a step. Thus, as long as he maintains the present make-up of the current government, there is absolutely no prospect of reaching a peace agreement that would grant the Palestinians a state of their own.

Following his 2015 campaign for reelection, Netanyahu clearly stated "I think that anyone who moves to establish a Palestinian state today, and evacuate areas, is giving radical Islam an area from which to attack the State of Israel. The left has buried its head in the sand time and after time and ignores this..." When asked whether a Palestinian state would not be created under his leadership, the prime minister said "Indeed." What he said then he still means today; anything he says to the contrary is for show.

Third, the unabated expansion of existing settlements and the passage of the recent law that authorizes the government to retroactively legalize scores of illegal settlements unambiguously suggests that he has no intention whatsoever of allowing the Palestinians to establish a state of their own. This systematic annexation of Palestinian land makes it impossible for them to maintain land contiguity.

To suggest, as he claims, that the settlements are not an obstacle to peace is disingenuous at best and he knows it. Under Netanyahu's watch, the government has built a major network of roads crisscrossing the West Bank exclusively designated for the settlers, while confining the Palestinians to cantons with the intention of making the current status quo permanent.

Fourth, his objective is to settle at least one million Israelis throughout the West Bank and create irreversible facts on the ground. Currently, there are

nearly 650,000 settlers in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, making the removal of any significant number of settlers simply impossible. The lesson that Netanyahu's father, Benzion Netanyahu, who was a staunch revisionist Zionist, ingrained in his son was the belief that all of the biblical "land of Israel" belongs to the Jews in perpetuity.

In a 2009 interview, Benzion stated "The two-state solution doesn't exist. ...There is no Palestinian people, so you don't create a state for an imaginary nation." That lesson was not lost on Netanyahu.

Not surprisingly, whenever Israel's Supreme Court orders the removal of a certain illegal settlement built on private Palestinian land, such as the recent dismantling of Amona with roughly 250 settlers, Netanyahu immediately announces plans to build new units. He is determined that the number of settlers continues to grow to reach the milestone of one million, regardless of what the Israeli courts decide or the international community demands – including the U.S., Israel's closest ally.

Fifth, if Netanyahu were to truly opt to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of a two-state solution, he could disband his current and establish a new coalition government composed of several centrist and left-of-center parties, including the Zionist Union, Yesh Atid, Kulanu, Meretz, and Netanyahu's own Likud party, which would provide him a decisive majority of 80 out of 120 seats in the parliament, versus the current government of Likud, Kulanu, Shas, Jewish Home, Yisrael Beiteinu, and UTJ, a very slim majority of 67 out of 120 seats. Although some members of his own party will defect, he will still have a significant majority that reflects the aspiration of the Israelis who want to end the conflict. It should be noted that with a new government, the 13 members of the Arab List would support any initiative towards a two-state solution.

Such a coalition can certainly agree on an equitable peace with the Palestinians that would entail some land swaps if only Netanyahu wills it. Sadly, however, Netanyahu simply will not entertain such a peace agreement because he is ideologically committed to control in perpetuity all of what he terms the "Land of Israel," while accusing the Palestinians of wanting to destroy rather than make peace with Israel.

To be sure, Netanyahu is not and has never been a proponent of creating a Palestinian state. Hence, President Trump will be wise not to engage him in a futile discussion searching for an agreement based on a two-state solution. This outcome cannot and will not happen as long as Netanyahu is in power.

If Trump is serious about his desire to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for Israel's own sake, he must demand that Netanyahu commit himself to create a

Palestinian state not by simply stating so, but by taking concrete steps to form a new government composed of the left, center, and his own party, hold a new election, or resign.

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Israel's Above-the-Law Behavior

Despite stern warnings from the U.N. and even the U.S., Israel continues its steady march toward becoming an apartheid state that relies on anti-Arab racism to justify its behavior, as Lawrence Davidson describes.

By Lawrence Davidson

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu threw a temper tantrum on Dec. 24 after the U.S. failed to veto United Nations Security Council Resolution 2234 condemning Zionist settlements on Palestinian territory.

Netanyahu called the resolution "shameful." He went so far as to tell the foreign secretary of New Zealand, one of the countries that brought the resolution forward for a vote, that this action was the equivalent of "an act of war." He then started recalling Israeli ambassadors from the Security Council states that backed the resolution. Finally, Netanyahu said Israel would "not abide by it [the resolution]." All in all it was quite a performance.

In order to put the prime minister's outrage in context, let's look at what, in part, the resolution actually says. It "reaffirms the obligation of Israel, the occupying Power, to abide scrupulously by its legal obligations and responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War ... and recalling the advisory opinion rendered on 9 July 2004 by the International Court of Justice, condemning all measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, including, inter alia, the construction and expansion of settlements, transfer of Israeli settlers, confiscation of land, demolition of homes and displacement of Palestinian civilians, in violation of international humanitarian law and relevant resolutions..."

In other words, UNSC Resolution 2234 told the Israeli government that it is

obliged to follow the rule of law – in this case international law. Mr. Netanyahu's response was to repudiate that law. Thus, the Israeli prime minister ran from the law – something outlaws do.

This is nothing new. Israel has been acting in a criminal fashion in (among other areas) the West Bank of Palestine for the past 50 years – and doing so with impunity. "Impunity" is the key word here. The prime minister's response was, in part, to the unexpected refusal of the United States to continue its half-century practice of protecting the Zionist state from any consequences for its illegal behavior.

Inadequate Responses

The response to Israel's response has been telling. The European leaders have been very low-key in their reaction even though Netanyahu has bad-mouthed and snubbed many of them. The White House position is that Washington has always regarded settlements as "an impediment to peace" and a threat to a two-state solution, so their abstention on the resolution should be seen as consistent and appropriate.

On the other hand, Republicans in Congress sided with Israel. Take for instance the baffling assertion of Sen. John McCain that "Today's passage of an ill-conceived resolution on Israeli settlements marks another shameful chapter in the bizarre anti-Israel history of the United Nations." No mention here of the Israeli Prime Minister's "bizarre" behavior.

However, and this is the important point, what is missing from these responses to Netanyahu's tantrum is any public recognition of the main point of Resolution 2234. That is the fact that Israel stands in violation of the rule of law. And by doing so for decades, the Zionist state has eroded the force of international law generally. No state leader, including those who directly voted for the resolution at the U.N., has deigned to follow up on this point publicly.

Just to make things very clear, many aspects of civilized society are made possible by the rule of law. It's the way all of us seek to maintain a tolerable level of order and strive to administer humane justice. However, such efforts can be fragile. There are problems:

– In practice, both laws and justice are traditionally defined by culture. Thus, it is possible that what is legal in one community is illegal in another, and that what is justice in one place might appear to be injustice in another. This is obviously an aspect of Israel's problem. Israeli governments have seen things through the lens of a culturally determined and racist ideology, which precludes justice for those who have been subjected to ethnic and religious

discrimination. Yet history has proven that such practices are a threat to everyone because of the dangerous precedents they set in a world of growing diversity. In such a world, laws assuring humane intergroup relations should be consistent across national and ethnic lines.

–In a world of nation-states, the concept of national sovereignty has often served as protection against outside interference even in the face of criminal state behavior. For instance, a national government can claim that its laws oppressing minority groups reflect national security needs. Israel is not the first state to take just such a position.

Outside states have traditionally been reluctant to interfere lest their own national sovereignty be eroded by the precedent of open intervention. On the other hand, surreptitiously, Western powers have been avid practitioners of selective “regime change.” Hypocrisy is rampant. In such conditions the rule of law and the notion of justice are allowed to remain provincial and, at an extreme, indistinguishable from criminality.

It was in response to these problems that, starting in the Nineteenth Century, efforts began to create international treaties and organizations that promulgated international law – law that seeks to move the concept of justice beyond culture and alleged national interest by giving it universal application. Such efforts were actually attempts to take civilization to a higher level. The horrors that spurred on such efforts, ranging from war crimes to genocide, proved to be strong motivators.

There have been some successes in this effort, notably the series of treaties arrived at in Geneva, Switzerland. Notable here are the Geneva Conventions of 1949, which updated previous agreements in the wake of crimes committed during World War II. Of these, the Fourth Geneva Convention provided protections for civilians in time of war. Resolution 2234 cites this Convention.

Trouble with the Law

The development of international law has always posed a problem for states that are warlike, expansionist or driven by intergroup hatreds. Israel certainly fits this description and the fact, so often brought up by Zionists, that there are other states which also fit the bill, should not be allowed to confuse the issue.

Indeed, Israel has made strenuous efforts to deflect blame and suborn the foreign policies of other states through the use of special interest allies and agents wielding such sophistic arguments. However, such lobbying efforts are starting to bring diminishing returns.

It is the hard reality of Israel's stubborn refusal to conclude a just peace with the Palestinians, while concurrently stealing their land, that has made the country so notorious – notorious enough that most of the world's nations are now willing to declare that the Zionist state is in open violation of international law.

Unfortunately, there are no policemen to apprehend criminals of Benjamin Netanyahu's stature. Even the International Criminal Court will probably not attempt to do so. But that does not mean the Zionist state will continue to escape the consequences of its criminal behavior. Step by step Israel has become a pariah state that lives in increasing social, cultural and economic isolation. It is to be fervently hoped that Netanyahu's recent tantrum will speed up this process.

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Kerry's Belated Israel Truth-telling

After four years of getting "played" by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, Secretary of State Kerry told some truths about Israel-Palestine that raised hackles among Netanyahu's acolytes, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar describes.

By Paul R. Pillar

Secretary of State John Kerry's [speech](#) last week on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an excellent statement of the realities that are inescapable aspects of this conflict and that anyone who claims to deal with the dispute seriously must understand.

Most of those realities the secretary described with admirable clarity and directness. A few others, at least as important, come through between the lines, although the hand of political correctness on matters involving Israel still weighs so heavily that even a Secretary of State with less than a month to go before becoming a private citizen does not feel free to state them directly.

Important points that the Secretary made explicitly, and that should be takeaways from the speech for everyone, include these:

For U.S. policymakers dealing with this conflict, U.S. interests must come first. The United States should not, any more than any other outside party claiming to want to resolve the conflict, act as lawyer for one side or the other. U.S. presidents and secretaries of state are paid to advance the interests of their own country, not those of any foreign government or entity.

As Kerry put it near the outset of his speech, “My job, above all, is to defend the United States of America – to stand up for and defend our values and our interests in the world. And if we were to stand idly by and know that in doing so we are allowing a dangerous dynamic to take hold which promises greater conflict and instability to a region in which we have vital interests, we would be derelict in our own responsibilities.”

A two-state solution, notwithstanding how much out of reach it seems to become each day, is still the only outcome that can provide lasting peace and enable Israel to be a Jewish and democratic state. For the Palestinians, indefinite denial of their own nation-state means indefinite denial of the aspirations for self-determination felt by any other people, and indefinite subjugation, discontent and the inevitable violence that results from such denial. For Israelis, the basic demographic and geographic facts that frame the national choice remain the same as they have always been with regard to being a Jewish state, being democratic, and being in control of all the land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. Israel can be any two of those things, but it is impossible to be all three.

To those inclined to discard the idea of a two-state solution right now and to speak of one state, Kerry asked this: “So if there is only one state, you would have millions of Palestinians permanently living in segregated enclaves in the middle of the West Bank, with no real political rights, separate legal, education, and transportation systems, vast income disparities, under a permanent military occupation that deprives them of the most basic freedoms. Separate and unequal is what you would have. And nobody can explain how that works. Would an Israeli accept living that way? Would an American accept living that way? Will the world accept it?”

Impediments to Peace

Israeli settlements are not the only impediment to a peace settlement, but they are one of the biggest impediments. Apologists for Israeli policies routinely argue in a monocausal way about troubles in the Middle East, saying that if X doesn't explain everything then we should behave as if it explains nothing. West Bank settlements have often been the X in this mode of argumentation. Kerry went into considerable detail in his speech with facts and figures about how the settlement program is, as a straightforward matter of geography, making a viable

Palestinian state less and less of a possibility.



He observed, "If more and more settlers are moving into the middle of Palestinian areas, it's going to be just that much harder to separate, that much harder to imagine transferring sovereignty, and that is exactly the outcome that some are purposefully accelerating."

Condoning expansion of some settlements but not others is not a solution. This is a favorite pseudo-solution to the settlements problem among those who want to appear reasonable while tilting heavily toward Israel and the settlement movement. The underlying presumption is that most of the biggest and oldest settlement blocs will become part of Israel in a final agreement, so we should be cool with new construction there and limit our displeasure to newer settlements that are even deeper in the West Bank.

Such a formula flouts the principle of international law that prohibits any colonization by the conqueror of militarily conquered territory. It also flouts the concept—repeatedly voiced at least as much by the Israeli government as by anyone else—that the terms of a final agreement should be determined in direct negotiations between the parties and not predetermined, including by outsiders.

Kerry aptly described the problem as being that "the decision of what constitutes a bloc is being made unilaterally by the Israeli Government, without consultation, without the consent of the Palestinians, and without granting the Palestinians a reciprocal right to build in what will be, by most accounts, part of Palestine."

Settlements do not contribute to Israeli security, and instead detract from it. Kerry noted how many settlements "actually increase the security burden on the Israeli Defense Forces." He also could have mentioned how prominently the Israeli occupation, including the colonization through settlements, has figured

as a *cause célèbre* for extremist violence.

Unsustainable Occupation

It's not only the colonization through settlements, but also other aspects of the occupation, that are unsustainable. They also are a form of oppression and denial of rights to an entire population. Kerry spoke of visiting West Bank communities where he "met Palestinians struggling for basic freedom and dignity amidst the occupation, passed by military checkpoints that can make even the most routine daily trips to work or school an ordeal, and heard from business leaders who could not get the permits that they needed to get their products to the market and families who have struggled to secure permission just to travel for needed medical care."

The position of the international community on the issue of the occupation has been one of overwhelming consensus (except for the United States and Israel) and consistency. The resolution passed by the Security Council last month was not a departure, despite contentions that it was. The distinction drawn between Israel and the territory it occupies is consistent with the consensus view that Israel is a full and legitimate member of the community of nations while its occupation of Palestinian territory is illegitimate.

Neither is there anything new in the resolution involving East Jerusalem – which is just as much a part of militarily conquered territory as the rest of the West Bank and just as much subject to negotiation to determine final status, rather than having that status determined by unilateral and expansive line-drawing by one of the parties.

The characteristics of a lasting and fair peace have been well known for some time. The terms still must be determined through negotiations between the parties, but this is not as if there were doubt about what the overall shape would have to be to constitute a lasting peace, or doubt about it being possible to construct a workable two-state solution – at least until and unless continued Israeli colonization through settlements extinguishes that possibility altogether. Kerry described the necessary characteristics by laying out six general principles for any agreement – principles that many different international statesmen could have expressed in very similar terms in previous years, and that many have in fact expressed.

In addition to these realities, the dedication of this Secretary of State, and the president under whom he serves, to work for outcomes that would serve the security and well-being of Israel as well as other concerned parties comes through strongly.

Thomas Friedman captures this well when he writes, “Barack Obama and John Kerry admire and want to preserve Israel as a Jewish and democratic state in the Land of Israel. I have covered this issue my entire adult life and have never met two U.S. leaders more committed to Israel as a Jewish democracy.”

President Obama bestowed on Israel the biggest aid package that the United States has ever given to anyone, and before last month he was the only U.S. president who, using the U.S. veto power, had never allowed the United Nations Security Council to pass any resolution critical of Israel. Against this background, the calumnies being thrown at Mr. Obama by the Israeli government and those who follow its lead are offensive and inexcusable.

Between the Lines

Secretary Kerry’s speech reflected some additional realities in a more subtle and indirect way, including the following.

The current Israeli government rejects a two-state solution. By now, not only the deeds but even the words of this government and its senior members have made obvious how much of a smokescreen have been Prime Minister Netanyahu’s occasional utterances, intended for international audiences, ostensibly accepting the idea of a Palestinian state. Power in Israel has moved toward members of the hard right who are unabashed about openly rejecting the concept of such a state and openly calling for annexation of occupied territory. It takes two negotiating partners to make a deal. Right now there is no such partner on the Israeli side. There will not be until and unless there is a major political redirection in Israel.

There is huge asymmetry in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Secretary Kerry – although striving to observe the usual convention about casting comparable blame on both sides, and devoting a significant part of his speech to offenses and shortcomings on the Palestinian side – touched on this lightly at a couple of points in his speech, such as in quoting the pertinent observation of Shimon Peres: “The original mandate gave the Palestinians 48 percent, now it’s down to 22 percent. I think 78 percent is enough for us.”

The asymmetry is patently huge regarding the instruments of power, including instruments to inflict armed violence. It is fundamentally huge in the sense that one side is the occupier and the other side is the occupied. It is within the power of an occupier, but not the occupied, to end an occupation.

This asymmetry sheds light on the attitudes of each side toward negotiations and who does or does not want to negotiate in good faith, a subject on which there have been many accusations with little regard for the historical record. One can

cut through the cloud of accusations by reflecting on what each side would have to gain from *not* negotiating in good faith.

Most Israelis currently don't have it all that bad with continuation of the status quo, and their rightist leaders evidently think they can keep a good thing going indefinitely despite the aforementioned demographic and geographic facts. The Palestinians, by contrast, are obviously the big losers in a continuation of the status quo: no state, no self-determination, no end to their subjugation, and no unilateral means to end any of this. They have ample reason to negotiate seriously, because they know a negotiated peace is the only way out of their current predicament.

The asymmetry also gives perspective to Israeli complaints, a crescendo of which followed last week's Security Council resolution, about being singled out for criticisms not directed at others. As a reading of this resolution suggests, if Israel receives criticism that others don't, it is because Israel is doing things that others don't.

There is no doubt that if Palestinians or other Arabs were colonizing land that they had seized through military force from Israel, such colonization would be every bit as much the target of critical Security Council resolutions. But Palestinians aren't colonizing seized land, and as Kerry noted, they are being kept from building even on land that is supposed to be theirs.

Different Interests

U.S. interests differ substantially from Israeli interests, especially as the latter are defined by the current Israeli government. A cottage industry has grown up over the past couple of years devoted to highlighting bad chemistry between Obama and Netanyahu, but personalities and chemistry between leaders have little to do with strain in U.S.-Israeli relations. Sure, dealing with the likes of Netanyahu tends to stimulate personal irritation, but that is hardly specific to Obama. It was Bill Clinton who, after his first meeting with the importunate Israeli prime minister, said with exasperation, "Who's the f***ing superpower here?"

The main strands of Israeli policy – and certainly almost everything having to do with the settlement program and occupation policies in general, which constitute a very large part of what Israeli policy is about – are not only incongruent with U.S. interests but directly opposed to them. This will be true as long as those policies continue, even if the prime minister were to get a personality transplant.

There is every reason to believe that the United States and Israel can be good

friends, especially when bearing in mind that the current right-wing government represents only one part of what is a spectrum of diverse views within Israel. And friends don't let friends drive drunk.

As Friedman observes, it's unfortunate that President-elect Trump is "passing Israel another bottle of wine." Or as Secretary Kerry put it, "Regrettably, some seem to believe that the U.S. friendship means the U.S. must accept any policy, regardless of our own interests, our own positions, our own words, our own principles – even after urging again and again that the policy must change. Friends need to tell each other the hard truths, and friendships require mutual respect."

Commentary often seen in the opinion pages that seems to assume a perfectly harmonious no-daylight-between-us relationship as what should be normal in U.S.-Israel relations, and that searches for missteps by the U.S. administration of the day as the reason the relationship is not perfectly harmonious, disregards the serious underlying conflict of interests. This conflict of interests routinely gets disguised with the term "ally" – a term that usually refers to mutually beneficial cooperation and commitment but in this case is applied to a one-way relationship in which enormous largesse in one direction is met in the other direction by such behavior as undermining the patron's foreign policy initiatives and interfering in its internal politics.

Netanyahu's government seems to go out of its way to poke a stick in the eye of its benefactor, with the settlement program one of its favorite sticks. Neither incorrect use of a term nor tweets about how harmony will break out on January 20 can hide such realities.

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