

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

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

By **As'ad AbuKhalil**

Special to Consortium News



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

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

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

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

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

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

Acceptable Extremism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unacceptable Candor

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

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

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

The endorsement of BDS by two members of Congress bestows

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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THE ANGRY ARAB: Camp David and the Ongoing Crisis of Palestine

Recently published book by Carter official says the president was initially hostile to Sadat's initiative toward Israel because Carter saw it as "the end of any hope of a comprehensive peace," says As'ad AbuKhalil in this review.

Carter Worried Bilateral Israel-Egypt

Deal Would Undermine Regional Peace

By [As'ad AbuKhalil](#)

Special to Consortium News



One would think there isn't anything new to be said about the Camp David negotiations of 1978. There are enough books about the accords and about Egyptian-Israeli peace to fill a book case.

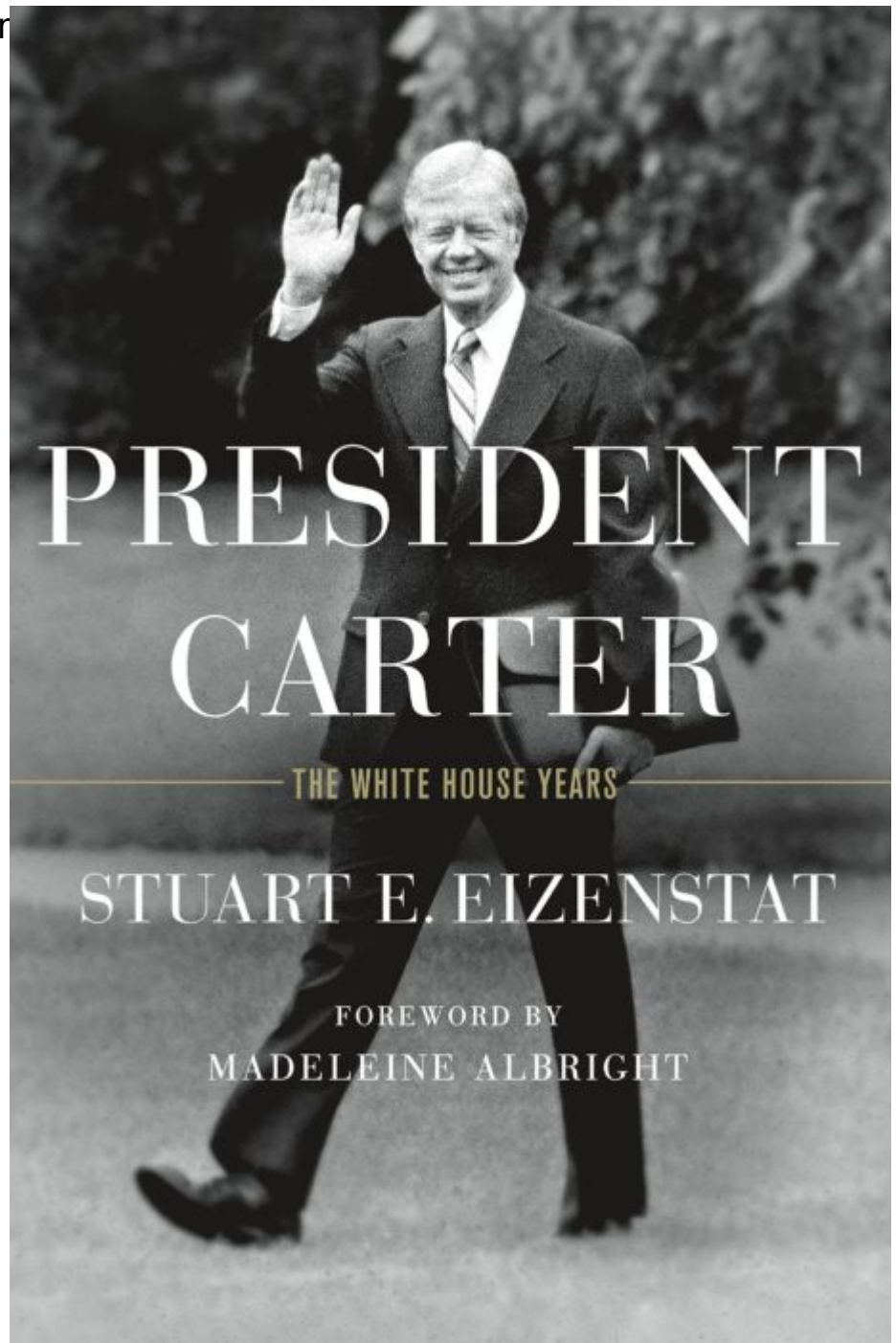
But the recent book by Stuart Eizenstat, *President Carter: the White House Years* (Thomas Dunne Books, 2018), adds information and insights to the plethora of works on the subject. It's clear Eizenstat, a domestic policy advisor to Jimmy Carter, kept copious notes (as detailed as the notes of H. R. Haldeman in Nixon's White House) during his years

of service. And he supplemented his account by conducting interviews with Carter and other U.S. and foreign officials.

This book could emerge as one of the definitive accounts (in over a 1000 pages) of the Carter White House years, as far as the Middle East is concerned. Eizenstat was heavily involved in Mideast policy making though he wasn't a specialist in foreign policy. But the administration relied on him as a liaison with U.S. Jewish organizations and as a back channel to the Israeli government.

Eizenstat admits "there is no other issue in American foreign policy where domestic politics intrudes more directly than the Middle East" (p. 409). While Eizenstat has a record of staunch support for Israel and hostility to its enemies—whenever they are—he does offer a few criticisms of

the Israeli lobby ar



At a time when Rep. Ilhan Omar has been accused of anti-Semitism merely for suggesting that AIPAC uses its financial muscle to promote its congressional agenda, Eizenstat's statements in this regard would have been characterized as anti-Semitic if articulated by Omar or her other fellow Muslim representative, Rashida Tlaib.

He says he helped draft a speech on Arab-Israeli issues to

be delivered in "New Jersey," he wrote, "because it would be crucial to Jews in key northeastern states, as well as Florida and California" (p. 412). Of course, one can't today speak of a "Jewish lobby." It could be perceived as anti-Semitic. It's also inaccurate because the pro-Israeli lobby extends far beyond the Jewish community.

Evangelical Christians, on the whole, appear to be more fanatical supporters of Israel than Jewish Americans. On the subject of Israel, there is more diversity of opinion inside the Jewish community than there is among Southern Baptists.

Carter Camp Divisions

The book explains clearly that the administration was divided between two camps: National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. Vance was motivated more by human rights while Brzezinski spoke for a less pro-Israeli foreign policy, largely from the standpoint of securing Arab support against the USSR.

Domestic policy advisors were solidly in support of the traditional pro-Israel line because they feared the impact on Carter's prospects for re-election. Carter wavered between the two groups, Eisenstat writes. But he eventually surrendered to Israeli dictates in the negotiations. Even that wasn't sufficient politically: Carter was perceived as hostile to Israeli interests and his support among Jewish voters, according to the author, plummeted to 40 percent in 1980.

Eisenstat reveals that Carter was initially hostile to Sadat's initiative toward Israel in November 1977 because the president saw it as "the end of any hope of a

comprehensive peace and will result only at best in a bilateral agreement between Egypt and Israel.” (p. 472). Carter was right but he went along with the initiative anyway.

Eizenstat’s account reflects the typical American bias of favoring pro-U.S. despots over despots who are not aligned with the U.S. Egyptian dictator, Anwar Sadat, receives glowing treatment by the author—who bizarrely insists on referring to him as “general” (p. 430) when Sadat never commanded troops in his life and his military role in his youth was rather minimal. It is possible that Eizenstat was deceived by Sadat’s fancy and elaborate military uniform, which was designed for him by Pierre Cardin.

Worse, he glosses over, or ignores, the anti-Semitism of Sadat, who referred to the Israeli lobby as “US Jews lobby” (p. 482), and who designed his overture toward Israel purely out of his “perception of the political influence of American Jews.” (p. 471) But what is disturbing is that Eizenstat justifies Sadat’s famous admiration for Hitler by maintaining that it was “less for his violent anti-Semitism than his opposition to the British.” (p. 430).

But that lame excuse could apply to the meeting between Hajj Amin Husseini (leader of the Palestinian national movement prior to the founding of the state of Israel) and Hitler, which has been used for decades to discredit the Palestinian national movement and to frame it as anti-Semitic. If the opposition to the British was the motive for Sadat’s admiration for Hitler, could that factor not also apply to Hajj Amin too? Surely, Hajj Amin could not admire the Nazi ideology where Arabs were perceived as an inferior race,

described by Hitler as “painted half-apes.” And if the author describes Hafidh Al-Asad of Syria as a “brutal dictator”—which he was—he should have used the same term for Sadat.

3-Way Special Relationship

The author does not shy away from underlining the role of the Israeli lobby. He refers to the “special triangular relationship among Israel, the American Jewish leadership, and the Congress in effectively applying pressure on the presidency to modify U.S. policy to Israel’s benefit.” (p. 437). If Ilhan Omar or another Arab member of Congress were to offer such an explanation of the role of the lobby there would have been a hue and cry and calls for resignation. And Eisenstat was wrong in referring exclusively to the Jewish leadership in this regard when Evangelical Christians have become the guardians of Likud interests in the Republican Party.

Eisenstat, however, does not shy away from expressing outrage at Israeli interference in U.S. domestic politics; he writes about Moshe Dayan’s offer to help Carter with his domestic problems, “This was an amazing intrusion into domestic politics by a foreign minister, even from a friendly country,” Eisenstat writes (p. 466).

The author reinforces the view that then Israeli prime minister, Menachem Begin fiercely defended the interests of the occupation state during the Camp David negotiations, while Sadat was casual about the whole process and disregarded his own advisors when they tried to defend Egyptian interests and sovereignty.

It also becomes clear that the PLO's stance against Sadat and the talks was correct and that neither Sadat nor Begin were serious about offering meaningful sovereignty to the Palestinian people. While Carter initially sought to offer political rights to the Palestinians, he quickly abandoned the goal once he saw that Sadat and Begin were only interested in a bilateral agreement.

Eisenstat confirms that Begin did indeed lie to Carter: that he initially offered a settlement freeze for 5 years not for 3 months—as Begin later claimed. The author says that Carter took this lie as a personal insult and it affected his view of Israel, although he never spoke about that while president. What is disturbing about this book is that Eisenstat confirms what we have known all along: that the idea of a Holocaust museum (which came out of the office of Eisenstat during Carter's administration) was not motivated by a desire to inform Americans of the horrific tragedy, but was instead a cynical manipulation of "Jewish American voters" who were disenchanted with Carter(p. 487).

This book underlines the devastation that the Camp David accords afflicted on the Middle East region. The U.S. secured the withdrawal of Egypt and its army from the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to permit Israel to commit more aggression and occupation against a variety of Arab territories without worrying about retribution from the Egyptian army. Far from being proud of his peace achievement, Carter should be ashamed of his role in brokering an expensive bilateral treaty—against the wishes of the Egyptian people, and contrary to the vision of a Palestinian "homeland"—which Carter had promised back in

March 1977.

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

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Newly Elected Progressives Face Palestine Taboo

After they won their primaries, some young progressives curbed their pro-Palestine rhetoric. Now they are in Washington getting oriented. Next up: early test votes in the new year sponsored by the pro-Israel lobby, writes As'ad AbuKhalil.

Newly-Elected Progressives Confront AIPAC Test

By As'ad AbuKhalil

Special to Consortium News



People in the pro-Palestinian community worldwide will be watching to see if any of the new left-wing progressives elected in the midterms will dare speak out—and vote against—the wishes of the Israel lobby.

The answer will likely come early next year, in test votes sponsored by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, or AIPAC, after the 116th Congress convenes. If the past is any guide, Democratic leaders will insist on strict subservience from newcomers to the party's foreign policy priorities, which include U.S. sponsorship and defense of the Israeli occupation and war crimes.

Some members-elect voiced remarkable criticism of Israel in the primaries. Rashida Tlaib, from Michigan, may have gone the furthest, by calling for one state in Palestine. Ilhan Omar, from Minnesota, referred to Israel's "evil doings" and condemned apartheid in Israel. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, from New York, spoke against the occupation of Palestine.

After the primaries, however, Tlaib, Omar and Ocasio-Cortez softened their rhetoric. In a post-victory interview, Tlaib said that both sides (occupiers and occupied?) have "so much more in common." Ocasio-Cortez was quoted as favoring a two-state solution and believing "absolutely in Israel's right to exist" (as an apartheid occupation state?). She has expressed faith in U.S. legitimacy as "a force of good" in the world and shrugged off any serious understanding of the Middle East.

Antonio Delgado, who upset a GOP incumbent in upstate New York, caught heat during the general campaign for his

positions on Israel. When he rejected the “democratic” label for Israel, his comment was widely described by news media as a regrettable gaffe.

The one Palestinian-American male candidate, Ammar Campa-Najjar, a Democrat who campaigned in San Diego, was the least critical of Israel and the only one who lost. He went to lengths to ingratiate himself with the Israel lobby, having changed his religion and name in the past. He even condemned his grandfather, Abu Yusuf An-Najjar, a PLO diplomat killed by Israeli terrorists in Beirut in 1973, as a “murderer.”

The nature of U.S. public attitude towards Israel is changing. A few decades ago, isolationist conservative Republicans were the most likely to be detractors. That role has shifted to liberals in big cities. These days, southern Baptists and conservative Republicans in rural America are providing Israel some of the staunchest support.

Automatic Support for Israel

But this change doesn't mean much in Congress. On Middle East issues, Democrats and Republicans remain ardent and automatic supporters of Israel.

Despite the War Powers Act of 1973, designed to check the president's power to commit the country to an armed conflict, the president retains quasi-imperial powers of foreign policy making. Given voters' worship of the military, representatives are often afraid to reject wars and interventions that presidents seek. To be accused of “failing to support the troops” is fatal to candidates from both parties. California Rep. Barbara Lee famously cast the

lone vote against the authorization of military force following Sept. 11, 2001.

The two ruling parties, meanwhile, muzzle democratic discussion of their foreign policy agenda. Through the nominating process, the big wigs of the Democratic Party are able to sideline dissent. The Republican primaries, meanwhile, can seem like contests for the greatest show of fanaticism in supporting Israel. Even in local elections—for mayors and city council—defiance of AIPAC can kill off contenders' chances. Some members of the Congressional Black Caucus, dominated by Democrats, break with AIPAC influence on votes, but the caucus leadership is closely aligned with the pro-Israel lobby.

The internal Democratic split (between its leadership and the liberal base) on Israel is comparable with that of liberal European political parties. The Socialist Party of France, for instance, pursues a traditional pro-Israeli agenda despite pro-Palestine sympathy within its ranks. The same had been true of the Labour Party in the U.K., until the rise of Jeremy Corbyn as leader. The United States has come to insist on a pro-Israeli plank from its European allies. In the 1970s, European nations often held positions on the PLO and on Palestinian self-determination that broke with U.S. doctrine. Since then, however, European disagreement with the U.S. on the Arab-Israeli question has diminished.

AIPAC, and its unofficial research arm, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, have managed to establish themselves as the moral and authoritative sources of legislation and information on all matters related to the

Arab-Israeli conflict and the Middle East. The lobby has succeeded through intimidation, as detailed in "They Dare to Speak Out," a book by former Illinois Rep. Paul Findley, a Republican. One successful method has been conflating any criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. This tactic has been most effective in discouraging U.S. politicians from opposing Israel.

Not a 'Jewish Lobby'

It must be stressed that AIPAC is not a "Jewish lobby," but a pro-Israel lobby. Its champions are not exclusively Jewish. Anti-Semites wish to portray the lobby in classically bigoted terms, as a Jewish conspiracy. But some of its most ardent adherents have been non-Jewish U.S. presidents, members of Congress and administration officials.

On Palestine, Congress has changed substantially over the years. In the early 1980s, a few lawmakers, from both parties, still dared to challenge AIPAC, which was founded in 1963. In his 1985 [book](#), former Congressman Paul Findley, now 97, describes some of them. Back then, a wing of the Republican Party even stood for "even-handedness" in the Middle East.

By the end of the 1980s, few of these moderating voices on Israel were left. They'd either retired or lost their seats.

Since the 1990s, dissent on Israel is virtually absent in the upper house of Congress. The late Robert Byrd, from West Virginia, who died in 2010, was the last senator who dared to vote against legislation favored by AIPAC.

Sens. Patrick Leahy of Vermont and Diane Feinstein of California, both in their 80s, are mildly critical of Israel, but still vote with AIPAC most of the time. (Feinstein only recently started criticizing Israel perhaps because support in her state is secure). “Social Democrat” Sen. Bernie Sanders gets heralded for challenging Israel. But that only shows the depth of the general silence. In fact, Sanders usually criticizes Israel in the most restricted terms: (“I am not a fan of Netanyahu.”)

In the House, in recent years the number of members who—on rare occasions—vote to defy the Israeli agenda, has risen. But unlike in previous years, little is ever said about the rights of Palestinians or directly against AIPAC.

Dennis Kucinich, former member of Congress from Cleveland, and a former presidential candidate, may have been the last member to publicly champion the Palestinians. (He once told me that he made it a point to speak about Palestine weekly.) He lost his seat after redistricting in 2012.

The question now is whether some of those new faces in Congress, who carried the progressive torch in the campaigns, have the courage of a Kucinich on Israeli matters. Will any of them break the taboo against speaking for Palestine or against AIPAC? Their silence regarding the on-going Israeli assault on Gaza so far is deafening.

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