



Events...

Tuesday May 15, 8pm

IsrPundit's Ted Belman speaks on "The Jordan Option: The Ultimate Alternate Solution for the Arab/Israeli conflict" at Aish Thornhill.

Commentary...

Trump's Iran Deal Decision Was a Masterstroke By Caroline Glick
Opponents of President Donald Trump claim that President Donald Trump's decision to leave the Iran deal blocks any chance of a new agreement with Tehran and wrecks U.S. credibility with its allies. Trump's supporters, for their part, argue that the president opened up the possibility of negotiating a better deal with the ayatollahs by abandoning his predecessor's lopsided nuclear pact.

Both sides are wrong. And, more to the point, they miss the larger picture.

For more than twenty years, successive U.S. administrations have been vexed by the challenge of Iran's illicit pursuit of nuclear weapons. And from the time the problem first emerged during Bill Clinton's tenure at the White House, there have only been two viable means to block Iran's path to the bomb.

The first path is the path of regime change. This option requires the U.S. to precipitate Iran's economic and social collapse through crippling economic sanctions and active support for the Iranian people as they rise up against their theocratic overlords.

The second path is to destroy Iran's nuclear installations and assets through limited covert and overt strikes.

Parallel to these two options, over the years, U.S. policymakers — first and foremost President Barack Obama — created two imaginary options for contending with Iran's nuclear program. Obama and his advisors framed the public discourse around their nuclear negotiations as a contest between them.

First, they said, is the option of all-out war. The U.S. could lead an invasion of Iran, along the lines of the U.S.-led invasion of Iran in 2003. In the course of a massive war, the U.S. goal would be to overthrow the Iranian regime and forcibly end its nuclear program.

The other option, they insisted, was to cut a deal with Iran under which Iran would voluntarily give up its nuclear program in exchange for trade deals, and for international acceptance of Iran's other malign behavior — from its sponsorship of terrorism and regional aggression, to its development of ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear warheads.

The purpose of the Obama administration's propaganda war on behalf of the nuclear deal was to delegitimize criticism of the content of the deal by claiming that everyone that opposed the policy was a warmonger (or, conversely, making "common cause" with hard-liners in the Iranian regime that wanted war against the U.S.).

In the event, both of the options were imaginary. No one in the U.S. or the international community has ever proposed a massive U.S.-led invasion of Iran. It was never considered. It is a policy that exists nowhere and is advocated by nobody.

As for the notion that Iran could be convinced to concede its nuclear program voluntarily in exchange for international legitimacy, planeloads of cash, and a blind eye to its other bad behavior, this, too, was a fantasy.

Obama's nuclear deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), did not involve Iran agreeing to give up its nuclear program. The deal simply required Iran to work on certain aspects of its nuclear program — advanced centrifuge development and ballistic missile development, for instance — while limiting others, like certain uranium enrichment activities, for the duration of the deal.

In other words, to prevent the imaginary possibility of a U.S. led ground invasion of Iran, the Obama administration financed Iran's regional aggression and sponsorship of terrorism to the tune of \$150 billion dollars in sanctions relief. It legitimized Iran's ballistic missile program and guaranteed Tehran's eventual acquisition of a nuclear arsenal.

ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

While doing all of that, Obama's nuclear diplomacy weakened the America's ability to implement either of the two actual options for blocking Iran's path to a nuclear arsenal.

The JCPOA required the U.S. and its partners to abrogate the crippling nuclear sanctions which were spurring

the Iranian people to rise up against the regime.

As for the option of limited strikes, the JCPOA rendered them politically impossible. How could the U.S. sabotage or destroy its diplomatic partner's nuclear installations?

All of that changed on Tuesday.

By abandoning the JCPOA and reinstating U.S. sanctions that were suspended in 2016, Trump resuscitated both actual options for blocking Iran's path to the bomb.

The sanctions option, which he implemented right after he concluded his remarks, will destabilize the regime by drying up its financial flows.

The downstream impact of the sanctions is twofold. First, they will diminish Iran's ability to sponsor terror and carry out regional aggression in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Gaza, Afghanistan, and beyond. Second, by reinstating crippling sanctions on Iran's economy, the U.S. will weaken the regime's hold on power.

As for the option of direct strikes against Iran's nuclear installations, Trump did not put the option on the table on Tuesday, but he created the political space to consider them either separately or in conjunction with sanctions. Indeed, at his cabinet meeting Wednesday, Trump intimated that the prospect of just such strikes is under consideration when he warned Iran of "severe consequences" if it reinstates the nuclear activities it had limited under the JCPOA.

The salutary effects of Trump's move are not limited to the its positive implications on U.S.'s real options for contending with Iran's nuclear program. His announcement accomplished two related goals as well.

First, he took a major step towards restoring the democratic balance of power in the U.S.

The U.S. Constitution requires the President to bring international agreements to the Senate for ratification by two-thirds of its members. Treaties are broadly defined as significant foreign policy initiatives that bind the U.S. to other nations. The nuclear deal certainly was a significant foreign policy initiative. Indeed, it was a radical departure from 70 years of U.S. non-proliferation policy.

The JCPOA required the U.S. to enrich and empower an enemy state on a massive scale to achieve an end that advanced no discernable U.S. interest. The Europeans accrued far greater financial benefit from the deal than the U.S. did, for instance. And again, far from blocking Iran's path to the bomb, the deal ensured Iran's eventual acquisition of a nuclear arsenal.

The constitutional case for the Senate to treat the JCPOA as a treaty was self-evident.

Obama knew that not only did he lack the requisite support of two-thirds of Senators, but he also lacked the support of a bare majority of Senators for his radical deal. And so, rather than present the deal to the Senate, in accordance with his constitutional obligation, he turned to the UN to bypass the Senate. The day the JCPOA was concluded, then-U.S. ambassador to the UN Samantha Power submitted a Security Council resolution effectively "ratifying" the deal in lieu of Senate approval.

In other words, Obama used the UN to hamstring Congress and deny the public's representatives the ability to conduct congressional oversight over his foreign policy.

Tuesday Trump characterized Obama's deal as "a great embarrassment to me as a citizen, and to all citizens of the United States."

And he was right. For to secure Iranian acceptance of the JCPOA, Obama destroyed America's credibility as an adversary and an ally alike.

Iran's naval aggression against U.S. naval craft in the Straits of Hormuz, like its flamboyant exploitation of the funds it received from sanctions relief to ratchet up its terror sponsorship and regional aggression, were expressions of contempt for the U.S.

By the same token, to persuade the Iranian regime to accept a deal that gave them everything and gave the U.S. nothing, Obama betrayed and endangered America's Arab allies and Israel.

When Trump walked away from the nuclear deal on Tuesday, and reinstated the sanctions that were suspended under the deal, he signaled to U.S. friends and foes alike that America is back in the superpower business.

America is once again an enemy of its foes and a friend of its allies. When Trump says that Iran will face "severe consequences," the Iranians need to take him seriously in a manner they never took Obama seriously

when he said empty that "all options are on the table."

Trump's many critics in the media insist that his decision to abandon Obama's deal with Iran's mullahs sends the message that the U.S. cannot be trusted when it gives its word to the nations of the world. But the message he has sent – and that seems to have been picked up by North Korea, for instance – is that the U.S. will not maintain international agreements that harm its interests.

The deal the U.S. is willing to make with North Korea is not yet another appeasement agreement along the lines of Obama's Iran deal and Clinton's 1994 nuclear agreement with North Korea. When President Trump tells the North Korean regime that the only deal he will make is one that dismantles Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal, after he abandoned the JCPOA, the North Koreans know that it would be unwise to doubt him.

The fact that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo returned from North Korea with three American citizens who had been held hostage by Pyongyang in tow signals that North Korea is taking Trump seriously.

And so Trump's announcement that he is withdrawing from Obama's nuclear deal with Iran was a masterstroke. It was brilliant not because it paved the way for a new diplomatic initiative. It was a masterstroke because in one fell swoop he ended the farce that you can have a non-proliferation policy based on facilitating Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons.

At the same time, Trump strengthened America's real options for preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. He restored the balance of powers in America's constitutional order. And he restored U.S. credibility internationally with America's friends and foes alike. (Breitbart May 10)

Netanyahu defeated the pundits By Amnon Lord

Israel is the only country that felt the negative ramifications of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, in the form of Syria. Iran's encroachment into Syria and its establishment of a threatening foothold there are a direct result of the deal. Many in Israel's defense establishment claimed that the Iranians were in complete compliance with the agreement. They chose to ignore the results: billions of dollars funneled into Iran, international legitimacy, removal of international pressure on Iran, and Iran rushing to worm its way into other Middle East nations from Yemen to Syria and Lebanon.

The U.S. withdrawal from the deal, which was coordinated with Israel, puts the pressure back on Iran, which now needs to decide how to conduct itself in the face of renewed hefty sanctions against it and under the clear threats U.S. President Donald Trump voiced. It appears that Iran will opt to continue to abide by the agreement. It may try to use Russia, China and Europe to cut off the United States, but the U.S. will bring Europe over to its side.

Israel played a very important role here. In contrast to the opinions of the various talking heads, former head of the National Security Council Brig. Gen. Yaakov Nagel said Tuesday that the information from the Iranian nuclear archive that Israel made public last week proves that Iran did violate at least two clauses of the nuclear pact. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's move changes Israel's traditional policies. Rather than groveling or acting under the old refrain of "quietly, safely," Netanyahu chose to make noise. He did this to force the international community to take action, after unmaking it as having signed a deal based on lies. He created international legitimacy for a preventative war in slow motion. The effective strikes against Iranian targets in Syria in the past few months, attributed to Israel, dealt Iran some serious blows. The diplomatic attack and the exposure of the Iranian nuclear documents put Iran on the defensive.

The reason why Israel's defense and political leadership previously preferred to maintain quiet contact while declaring Iran to be a problem that should be addressed by the world rather than by Israel was the concern that high-profile diplomatic action could cause the world to take action against Israel's own nuclear option. Netanyahu has shut the door on this approach and proved that groveling, accepted in the past, is now anachronistic.

As a country with power in the international arena, Israel can demand what it deserves and say what it has to say loudly and clearly.

Israel's centrality in the new Middle East game can be seen in the prime minister's visit to Moscow Wednesday. He was invited to participate in a parade marking the victory over Nazi Germany, as well as meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin. At the beginning of Trump's term, many noted that Netanyahu was in a unique position that could allow him to mediate between the U.S. and Russia. This is not something that is being openly discussed, because it is not a position Israel wants to be in. But maybe some ideas will be raised that could make Russia a positive force in the Middle East. Israel's positions carry more weight now that the missile stockpiles in Syria have been destroyed. The Iranians are more aware than ever that Israel is indeed capable of taking out their nuclear facilities.

In the U.S., Trump supporters are comparing his decision to pull out of the nuclear deal to President Ronald Reagan's leaving the nuclear disarmament talks with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in Reykjavik in 1986. They believe Regan's escalation of the arms race caused the Soviet Union to collapse some three years later. This may be Trump and Netanyahu's goal when it comes to Iran. If the pressure on Iran leads to a new agreement that fixes the problems in the existing deal and can check

Iranian advancement in Syria, it will be an immense achievement. (Israel Hayom May 9)

Don't Threaten Us with War By Eyal Zisser

A day does not pass without someone trying to frighten the Israel public with doomsday prophecies of impending war with Iran.

Thus, United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres warns of a regional conflagration if U.S. President Donald Trump withdraws from the nuclear deal. Thus, former senior officials and media pundits in Israel warn that the ongoing fight against Iran's presence in Syria and its race to a nuclear bomb could spark a regional war at a very heavy cost to Israel.

These threats are utterly baseless and lack credibility. They are simply a scare campaign, which at best stems from a fixed thought process and adherence to the status quo, even at the cost of mortgaging our future, and at worst is motivated by political or personal considerations.

The warnings are rooted in a false and even naive assumption that the regional bully can do anything he wants, and that imposing boundaries on him is a mistake because it will only make him angry and cause him to respond violently. However, experience teaches us that setting red lines and backing them up is the only way to deter bullies and cause them to change their behavior.

We must keep in mind that Iran does not want war and is not prepared for one. Its power has always lain in waging campaigns via proxies who spill their own blood on its behalf. The Iranians are far more careful with their own blood.

Iran is also mired in economic difficulties at home, and the Iranian public is not hiding its objections to expensive and bloody adventures far from its borders. Even among Iran's leaders, President Hassan Rouhani and his supporters are spearheading opposition to the country's military entanglements in Yemen, Iraq and Syria. The Iranian public will not forgive those who drag them into another war that only serves the interests of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, whose entire reason for existence is to establish an Iranian presence throughout the Middle East.

Aside from this, Iran is weak militarily as well as economically, and its presence in Syria is still limited, thanks in large part to Israel's airstrikes in Syria. The threats by Iranian leaders to destroy Israel should not be taken lightly, but at the same time they should not pose a deterrent. Shimon Peres, the architect of Israel's nuclear program, said that Iran is incapable of destroying Israel, but that through its hollow threats it exposes itself to an existential threat it cannot counter.

None of this is to say that Iran will be deterred by the unfolding poker game with the American president over the Iranian nuclear program, and with Israel over the Iranian presence in Syria. Iranian retaliation for the alleged Israeli airstrikes will eventually come, but it will not be in the form of all-out war; it will consist of precise, if painful, blows, in the form of terrorist attacks.

What remains to be seen is who among the players will blink first. Throughout the 70 years of its existence, Israel has already gained experience in "poker games" such as these – against Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1950s, and against the PLO and Hezbollah in Lebanon – and for the most part it has emerged with the upper hand. If Israel aspires to survive in the Middle East, it cannot be deterred and retreat.

Indeed, in the Middle East wars often erupt organically and unpredictably without anyone planning or initiating them. Misunderstandings, miscalculations and unforeseen events could lead to war. Caution, alertness and readiness are necessary, certainly among those in charge. However, there is quite a bit of distance from this to an atmosphere of public hysteria and panic about a possible war this summer. There is a difference between rational concern that breeds caution and panic that breeds political and military paralysis and will exact a price in the long run.

History teaches us that the fear of antagonizing an enemy and appeasement attempts do not pay. Ultimately, not only do these fail to deter the adversary, they actually encourage it to advance to the next stage of its plan. At that point, confronting the enemy can be far more complicated and daunting. (Israel Hayom May 7)

Towards Political Extinction By Yigal Carmon

These days, the Palestinian national movement is descending, before our very eyes, into an internecine struggle over the right to represent the Palestinians – a struggle that is bereft of any political meaning in terms of resolving the conflict with Israel. The octogenarian leader of this movement is completely losing his touch, spewing gutter anti-Semitism blaming the Jews for the Holocaust (see MEMRI Special Dispatch No. 7452, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas: Holocaust, Massacres Of European Jews Due To Their Function In Society As Usurers; Hitler Struck A Deal With The Jews, May 2, 2018) and bringing international condemnation upon himself.

How did we get to this point?

In 1993 in Oslo, after nearly a century of armed struggle, the PLO,

then the representative of the Palestinian national movement, endorsed the political process. But the change was only tactical, for it was unaccompanied by an ideological transformation, without which the political process is a framework void of content. What ideological change would have made the political process a genuine road towards peaceful solution? The answer is simple: the renunciation of the "right of return."

It took 25 years for the truth to emerge, crystal clear: The Palestinians are not ready to give up the "right of return."

MEMRI's research showed, from the day of its establishment on February 7, 1998, that the Palestinians are unwilling to forgo the "right of return." [1] In fact, it showed much more: the Palestinian duplicity and doublespeak (inciting jihad in Arabic while negotiating with Israel), the PLO's involvement in terror attacks, and Arafat's unwillingness to move from the role of revolutionary to the role of a peace maker and statesman. But the one most important revelation, more important than anything else, was the PLO's insistence on the right of return, which doomed the whole process.

In all these years, only one figure in the Palestinian elite agreed to the trade-off: foregoing the right of return in exchange for full Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders. That figure was Professor Sari Nusseibeh, who formed a joint movement together with an Israeli counterpart. The movement numbered a few thousand Israelis and a handful of Palestinians. Nusseibeh was ostracized in his own camp and eventually left politics.

The Saudi Peace Plan of 2002 could have furnished a basis for a partition-based solution, because in its original version, it did not include the "right of return." However, after the Arab League amended it and grafted the "right of return" onto it, it became a non-starter (see MEMRI TV Clip No. 6031, Former Lebanese President Émile Lahoud Reveals How The Right Of Return Was Forced Into The Saudi Peace Plan In The 2002 Arab Summit (Archival), December 11, 2014 to May 22, 2017; see also Professor Itamar Rabinovich's analysis of that summit, *The Warped Saudi Initiative*, Haaretz.com, April 7, 2002).

During the 25 years since Oslo, the conflict deteriorated further as Israelis of goodwill bought into the Palestinian political process tactic – void of the concrete political requisites for peace. Israel even deluded itself that postponing discussion of the "right of return" would cause the problem to fade away. But the very opposite occurred: the Palestinians interpreted this as tacit acceptance that the "right of return" would eventually be granted, an idea that no Israeli leadership ever entertained.

In recent years, by rejecting the proposals by Israeli prime ministers Barak and Olmert for an Israeli withdrawal from nearly all the occupied territories, and by failing, in the past year and a half, to even return to the negotiating table, the Palestinians have brought themselves back to square one: to their situation in 1947.

For the Zionist leadership, the test has always been the readiness to accept partition – and it has repeatedly passed this test. For the Palestinian leadership, the test was foregoing the "right of return" – and it has repeatedly failed the test.

True, a large portion of the Israeli public was antagonistic to partition, but those representing the majority of Israel's population were prepared to accept it. By clinging to the "right of return," the Palestinians spared Israel the need to go through with this choice, with all its potentially destructive internal repercussions.

The Palestinian insistence on the "right of return," and Israel's rejection of it – a rejection shared by nearly all parts of the Israeli political spectrum, from right to left – constitutes the real tragedy of the conflict. The overwhelming majority of Western countries do not expect Israel to agree to the "right of return." The problem of the settlements, which many place in the spotlight, is a problem that could be resolved in a variety of ways, but the insistence on the "right of return" dooms the two-state solution from the outset.

The Zionist path to statehood was characterized by readiness for compromise and pragmatism. This was not always the case in Jewish history. In the years 67-135 AD, the Jews believed they could make mincemeat of the Roman legionnaires and send them back to Rome – like Hamas today believes it can send the Jews back from whence they came. But instead, it was the Jews who were packed off to face two millennia of exile and annihilation. This catastrophic outcome was etched deeply into the psyche of most Jews, and induced most of the Zionist leadership to accept nearly any partition out of a "refusal to refuse" mentality. At the time when the British Royal Navy was turning away Jewish refugees and sending them back to die in Europe, Ben Gurion exhorted the Hebrew youth to enlist in the British army that was perpetrating this atrocity.

Where is the Palestinian national movement headed today?

Lacking the components vital for a political solution, and unable to persevere even in a sham political process, this movement may revert to armed struggle. For the moment, it has not done so. Even Hamas is endorsing – for now – a strategy of "popular struggle" rather than launching missile attacks on Israel.

An alternate scenario is for the Palestinian national movement to seek its future in Jordan. Admittedly, such a solution is not on the horizon. But given Jordan's Palestinian majority, for the long run this demographic imperative cannot be totally dismissed.

A third scenario would see the Palestinian public integrate, albeit reluctantly and out of lack of choice, into Israel (the so-called one-state solution) while constantly fighting for all the rights it can get, both civil and national. This scenario is not materializing either.

Therefore, the only current development is further descent into decay and political extinction.

Given the Palestinian inability to renounce the "right of return," some would ask: Were there ever potential exit points from the conflict?

Two hypothetical scenarios come to mind:

Had King Hussein accepted a peace treaty in return for an Israeli withdrawal immediately after the 1967 war, the "right of return" issue might have faded, gradually but significantly.

Had Israel persisted in its principled refusal to recognize the PLO, the standard-bearer of the "right of return," and attempted to reach a gradual solution with a local Palestinian leadership, a more realistic, albeit bloody, process, could have commenced. This could have received significant political backing from Egypt, had Sadat survived.

But all this is both hypothetical and moot.

As long as the Palestinians fail to make an historical ideological change and forego the "right of return" component of their national identity and struggle, they have no prospect of actualizing any real national goal.

One hopes, for the Palestinians' sake, that it will not take them two millennia – as it took the Jews – to accept the need for moderation and pragmatism. 'Abbas's and the PLO's conviction that Israel is a colonialist project that is inexorably doomed will only prolong their suffering.

[1] See: [Washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1998/02/07/on-fire-with-hate/ccaf6175-e047-40fb-a8ad-d9e450b7309d/?utm_term=.79fcd5f44afa](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1998/02/07/on-fire-with-hate/ccaf6175-e047-40fb-a8ad-d9e450b7309d/?utm_term=.79fcd5f44afa), February 7, 1998; [Washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1998/01/23/where-the-talk-is-of-hate/1ec1bc8b-2c23-4368-9384-b420c761ecaa/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1998/01/23/where-the-talk-is-of-hate/1ec1bc8b-2c23-4368-9384-b420c761ecaa/), January 23, 1998.

The writer is Founder and President of MEMRI. (MEMRI May 4)

Helpless in the Face of Primitive Kites By Boaz Haetzni

The Israeli response to the attempts to breach the Israeli-Gaza Strip border in Hamas' "Great March of Return" has been effective and has thwarted the possibility of masses of Gazans erasing the border and flooding into the Negev. The killings and woundings of rioters in the latest incident cut down the number of those actively trying to break through the border fence, and took the wind out of the sails of their friends who wanted to get in on the action.

Hamas has adopted simple, efficient methods. It started with an ecological terrorist attack in which thousands of tires were set on fire in the hope that the thick smoke would disguise the attempts to breach the border. The smoke attracted media attention, but the infiltration itself was stopped. Now, Hamas is using the natural wind from the west to maneuver kites fitted with firebombs up and over the border. Although these kites are a primitive weapon, they cause fires in fields and woods, wreaking enormous havoc.

The government is standing by, helpless to stop this new tactic, because obviously Israel cannot shoot the "children" who operate these kites – and the Hamas murderers dream of presenting us as killers of children. So Israel is paralyzed and allowing the enemy to burn its fields. On Sunday, we were informed that the IDF will have developed technology to combat the kites within two weeks. If it weren't so personal, we might laugh.

Where did the idea of a proportional response come from? During Operation Protective Edge in 2014, Israel mostly allowed itself to respond to the attempts to murder its civilians merely by shooting down the missiles, wasting hundreds of millions of dollars in sophisticated Iron Dome missiles to take down Hamas' primitive tin can explosives. The response did not put an end to the rocket fire. It was only toward the end of the operation, possibly because there were not enough defensive missiles, that the IDF started bringing down buildings in Gaza – and that did deter the enemy.

Back in 2002, Operation Defensive Shield in the West Bank – in which the IDF reoccupied the territory that had been ceded to our Fatah "partners" under the Oslo Accords – started even before 130 Israelis lost their lives to terrorist attacks in a single month (March 2002), and after a year and a half of terrorist suicide bombings and shootings that had killed nearly 1,000 people.

It is not children who are burning our fields; it is Hamas and its backers. Treating the kites as an isolated problem is self-delusion and a way of avoiding the real issue. Israel should aim its response to the kites at the entity that controls Gaza. Hamas needs to pay a price.

We could hurt the Gaza economy as a response to the attacks on our property. But it would be better first to put an end to the absurdity of Israel supplying electricity, water and aid to Gaza while people there are trying to murder our citizens, breach our border, and burn our fields.

While all this is happening, Israeli captives and the bodies of two fallen soldiers are still being held in Gaza, and yet we continue to keep their power and water running. This insanity must stop. Why do we

always take such pleasure in torturing ourselves before we start defending ourselves? (Israel Hayom May 8)

The Left Only Cares About Palestinians When It Can Blame Israel

By Elizabeth Tsurkov

For the past two weeks, horrifying images of Palestinians being murdered have surfaced on social media. Jets have dropped bombs, sending flames and black smoke into the air, followed by helicopters dropping improvised and unguided barrel bombs. On the ground, in the besieged Palestinian camp, buildings collapsed burying civilians alive underneath them.

Those who have attempted to flee the camp have been arrested. No food or medicine has been allowed into the camp since July 2013. About 200 residents have starved to death or died due to lack of medicine. The airstrikes and shelling have not stopped for two weeks, preventing rescuers from retrieving the rotting corpses.

And yet, despite these horrors, no significant protests took place anywhere in the West or Arab world. The traditional champions of the Palestinian cause — those same people who have protested Israeli attacks on Gaza — have remained silent as the Palestinian Yarmouk refugee camp near Damascus in Syria was shelled by Russian and Syrian air forces, while militias loyal to the Assad regime enforced a brutal siege.

The silence surrounding the brutalization of an entire Palestinian population exposes something few have spoken about: that pro-Palestinian sentiment is often just anti-Israel or anti-American sentiment dressed up in disguise. And when it comes to Syria's starving, dying Palestinian population, the pro-Palestine left is nowhere to be seen.

It's a glaring double-standard: When Palestinians in Gaza endure Israeli airstrikes and a decade-long blockade, their suffering galvanizes mass protests in Western capitals. When Palestinians in Syria and Syrians are being bombed and starved, the anti-Imperialist Left either goes silent, or even worse, stands on the side of the oppressor.

"There are no 'Pro-Palestine' people. They don't exist," a Palestinian Syrian from Daraa, whose family was displaced from Haifa during the 1948 war, told me. "We Palestinians of Syria have been killed, tortured, bombed, and displaced by the Assad regime and we've had no support from the so-called 'pro-Palestine activists' whatsoever," he said. "We happen to be the wrong Palestinians!"

The civil war in Syria decimated the Syrian-Palestinian community. The Assad regime and allied militias destroyed most of the Palestinian refugee camps in the country and laid siege to several of them. According to statistics compiled by the Action Group for Palestinians of Syria, at least 3,708 Palestinians have been killed throughout the war, and 1,673 are held in Assad regime detention facilities. 477 Palestinian-Syrians have been tortured to death in those facilities since 2011.

And yet, somehow, neither these statistics, nor the shocking images of emaciated Palestinians in the Yarmouk camp, led to mass mobilization of the Western "pro-Palestine" Left.

The end of the siege of the Yarmouk camp is close at hand. In April, the Syrian Army and allied militias launched an assault on the Yarmouk camp, now under the control of ISIS, utilizing indiscriminate weapons such as barrel bombs thrown out of helicopters and surface-to-surface "elephant" rockets. The operation has caused massive destruction to civilian homes and infrastructure and destroyed the last functioning hospital in the camp.

The regime continues to restrict the entry of aid into Babila, the nearby rebel-held town to which civilians from Yarmouk previously fled. Palestinians who fled to Babila are thus forced to sleep in the streets and beg for medicine from residents of a town that has been under a partial regime blockade for years.

Why is the "Pro-Palestine" Left silent about this? How did the anti-imperialist and anti-war Left lose so much of its credibility in Syria?

Worse, it has aligned itself with Russia. The leader of the U.S. Green Party, Jill Stein, for example, attended a conference in Moscow organized by Russia Today and has adopted conspiracy theories about the war in Syria and the Russian invasion of the Ukraine.

And the Deputy Chair of the UK-based Stop the War Coalition, which is quick to protest any Western action against Assad's chemical weapons facilities, explained that protesting against Russian war crimes in Syria would "contribute to increasing the hysteria and the jingoism that is being whipped up at the minute to go against Russia" by politicians and the media.

Why has the Left aligned itself with Russia, a country engaged in a military intervention in further its influence in the Middle East, an intervention that resulted in the death of thousands of Syrian civilians?

During the Cold War, the Arab and Western Far-Left became accustomed to defending Communist and socialist regimes that perpetrated mass atrocities, including the starvation of millions in the Ukraine and "the Great Terror" under Stalin's rule, persecution of homosexuals in Cuba and the disastrous "Great Leap Forward" of the Chinese regime. The collapse of the Soviet Union and repeated failure to establish successful socialist or communist models, reduced the Far-Left to a reactionary mode, embracing actors based on whether they were opposed to U.S. and "Imperialist"

interest. The nature of the "anti-Imperialist" actors does not appear to matter, whether they were the genocidal right-wing Milosevic regime in Serbia, or repressive Islamist militias such as Hamas and Hezbollah.

The uprising in Syria posed a dilemma to the Western and Arab Left: the Assad regime presents itself as "anti-imperialist" force and aligned itself with the "Resistance Axis" of Iran and Hezbollah. But the initial peaceful uprising was overwhelmingly led by the working class and stemmed, in large part, from the regime's neo-liberal reforms that increased inequality in Syria. Leftist parties and groups adopted varying positions on Syria, but as the opposition radicalized, Leftist groups, such as the Communist Party USA and Socialist Action, increasingly sided with the regime or the Syrian affiliate of the leftist Kurdish militant group that operates in Turkey, the PKK.

As Russia under Putin became increasingly antagonistic toward the West, many on the Left aligned themselves with Russia and became direct beneficiaries of Moscow's growing influence operation in the West, spearheaded by Russia Today (RT) and Sputnik News, which are happy to host and employ members of the far-left and far-right and conspiracy theorists of all shades.

These channels, and other lesser-known Kremlin-run Internet outlets such as In The Now and Redfish spread misinformation on behalf of the Kremlin and their content is in turn amplified by Russian bots and members of the far-left and far-right on social media.

High on the agenda of Russia's misinformation operation is the ongoing war in Syria. Russia has provided diplomatic, financial and military assistance to the Assad regime, a long-time ally, since the start of the uprising in 2011. Russia's military intervened in the war directly in September 2015, tilting the balance of power in the war in favor of the Damascus regime. Russian jets have bombed tent camps of displaced civilians, markets and hospitals and deployed incendiary munitions and cluster bombs on densely populated area, in violation of international law. Kremlin outlets do not report on these crimes. Instead, they seek to sow confusion and undermine the credibility of Syrians documenting these crimes.

A case in point is the recent misinformation campaign regarding the chemical attack in Douma. Previous reports of the UN's chemical weapons watchdog, the OPCW, found that the Assad regime has repeatedly targeted rebel-held communities in Syria with sarin and chlorine gas. Any reasonable person would reject the claim promoted by Russia that it is the rebels who keep gassing themselves, their neighbors and relatives, as part of "false flag" operations.

Hours after the attack, the third largest rebel groups in Syria, the Islam Army, agreed to surrender Douma to the regime following five years of siege. Thousands of Islam Army fighters, their relatives and opposition activists, were forcibly displaced from the city to rebel-held northern Syria. Medical personnel still in Douma and those who have been displaced told me, the Washington Post, the Guardian and Bild, that doctors and nurses who stayed behind faced an intimidation campaign from the regime and the Russian military, coercing them to appear on RT, Sputnik and regime television and assert that no chemical attack took place. A few days later, Russia claimed to have uncovered a chemical weapons lab of the rebels in Douma. Assad regime officials have also maintained that the attack did not happen and at the same time, that the rebels carried out the attack.

The conspiracy theories promoted by Russian outlets do not need to be particularly believable to serve their purpose. The ambiguity that Russian and Assad regime misinformation injects into the discourse provides a way out for individuals who do not want to appear to be siding with a murderous dictatorship but at the same time inclined to support any "anti-imperialist" force. This misinformation allows Far-Leftists to argue that the situation is complicated, unclear and that all sides deserve condemnation.

Thus, during a recent interview, the head of Israel's Communist Hadash Party, Ayman Odeh, refused to condemn the regime's chemical weapons attack on Douma, stating that "You will not get me to say that Assad did this. There are many war crimes happening in Syria. Any harm to civilians must be condemned, you can see ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra [jihadist groups]." The leader of the British Labor Party, Jeremy Corbyn, also suggested that it is possible that parties other than the Assad regime were responsible for the chemical attack on Douma.

The Western and Arab Far-Left embrace and amplify findings about Israeli crimes against the Palestinians, but when it comes to Russian and Assad regime atrocities, they ignore and even question the findings of independent investigations by multiple UN bodies and human rights NGOs that have accused the Assad regime of "extermination, murder and rape" in detention facilities, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The tragedy in Syria exposed the impetus driving much of the anti-war and pro-Palestine Left in the West and the Arab world, and concern for the human rights in general or Palestinians more narrowly, is clearly not the top priority. Unable to formulate a clear vision after the collapse of Communism, the Far-Left drifted to embracing whatever actors challenge the United States and Israel, whether it is Putin's repressive and homophobic kleptocracy, or Assad's brutal dictatorship. (Forward May 4)