



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*

How the ICC is encouraging greater civilian casualties

By Evelyn Gordon

March 16 was the deadline for filing briefs on whether the International Criminal Court should recognize Palestine as a state. But important though that

Commentary...

Coronavirus and the Palestinians By Pinhas Inbari

Alongside the dramatic health and political developments in Israel, there have also been developments on the Palestinian side, that while not as dramatic are worth watching. The coronavirus scare has captured Palestinian public opinion.

Aside from obvious anxiety about the spread of the virus, according to sources in Ramallah there are also political concerns related to Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas's health. The octogenarian is in the highest risk group due to his age and the fact that he receives treatment that weakens his immune system.

According to the sources, Abbas is not granting audiences and his meetings are being conducted via telephone. Fatah institutions are also not convening, and their power, coherence and connection with the district offices is growing weaker. The Jenin Municipality, for example, refused to receive a delegation from Ramallah to coordinate the popular struggle against the U.S. "Peace to Prosperity" plan. The entire "Popular Struggle" program is reportedly crashing, including the active participation of Europeans in Friday marches.

On the Temple Mount, the coronavirus is also playing a role in a theological debate. According to sources in eastern Jerusalem, Hizb ut-Tahrir (the Islamic Liberation Party), an anti-Jordanian radical party that also opposes the Palestinian Authority, planned to send a delegation to meet Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (and possibly the king) to request that Saudi Arabia replace Jordan as the "guardian" of the Al-Aqsa compound (Temple Mount).

Hizb ut-Tahrir is considered to be robust, with strong influence among many of the mosques' activists. It became clear to Jordan that among the members of the delegation were also Waqf personnel. The kingdom threatened that it would immediately stop their salaries if such a delegation visit took place. Several heads of the Waqf rushed to Jordan to wash their hands of the expedition. Then the coronavirus story broke, and the matter was frozen.

Following the publication of the new Saudi Arabian curriculum, according to which the mosque compound on the Temple Mount is the responsibility of Saudi Arabia, and the most recent initiative of the Hizb ut-Tahrir, it is clear to the Jordanians that Saudi Arabia is setting its sights on the Mount. The Jordanians suspect that this is happening in coordination with Israel.

Hizb ut-Tahrir showed its cards during the last Ramadan holiday when it announced the beginning and the end of the fasting according to the lunar calculations of Saudi Arabia, and not those of the P.A. and Jordan. The dispute led to fights in Hebron.

The rift between Yahya Sinwar, the leader of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and Ismail Haniyeh, who left Gaza to try to establish himself as the Hamas leader on the "outside," continues to grow. Sinwar is the leader of the organization's religious Shura Council in Gaza, versus the secular Hamas Politburo outside of Gaza. Khaled Mashal, despite his resignation from the Politburo in 2017, is still the strongest man, though, according to our sources in Ramallah, he has heart disease that restricts his activity.

Haniyeh has a problem. He and Sinwar differ about finding some kind of resolution with Israel. Sinwar promotes reconciliatory steps, while Haniyeh opposes them. Qatar, a supporter of Hamas and Gaza reconstruction, agreed to host Haniyeh after he left Gaza, but stands with Sinwar. Qatar has made its position very clear to Haniyeh.

Haniyeh may have to set himself up in Turkey or Iran. In Turkey, the Hamas office is headed by Salah Aruri. As for Iran, that will not be an easy decision for Haniyeh. The Hamas leader defied Egypt when he left Gaza to deliver a eulogy for slain Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in Tehran. If Haniyeh moves to Lebanon, he will have to express support for Hezbollah, at a time when Lebanon is experiencing internal turmoil, and that, too, will not be an easy decision for the Hamas official. (JNS Mar 18)

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question is, the ICC prosecutor's decision to open a criminal investigation against Israel poses a much bigger problem: Contrary to the court's stated mission of trying to reduce the harm caused by war, it may well result in even higher casualties and more extensive property damage.

Like all Western countries, Israel makes great efforts to uphold customary laws of war, including by trying to minimize civilian casualties. As a group of high-ranking Western military experts wrote in a report on the Hamas-Israel war of 2014, Israel "met and in some respects exceeded the highest standards we set for our own nations' militaries." In fact, Israel has historically caused fewer civilian casualties and less property damage than other Western armies.

Many Israelis actually resent this, arguing that the restrictions imposed on the army's use of force put Israel's own soldiers and civilians at greater risk. And the Israel Defense Forces' vehement denials can't necessarily be taken at face value since it would hardly admit to putting Israelis at risk. Yet even assuming these denials are truthful, the fact that many Israelis believe otherwise means that the army is under constant pressure to be less stringent about using force.

Until now, however, it has had a strong counter-argument: These restrictions aren't so onerous as to make effective military action impossible, and obeying them keeps our soldiers and politicians out of international legal trouble. Consequently, it's worth the effort.

But now, ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda has declared that all the IDF's efforts were worthless: In her view, it committed prima facie war crimes both during the 2014 war and in subsequent military operations in the Gaza Strip. In other words, meeting or even exceeding the West's "highest standards" is no longer enough to keep you out of legal trouble.

The court's supporters have a facile response to this: Israel must simply meet even higher standards, and then it will be fine. But in reality, as previous ICC decisions have made clear, the court considers virtually any civilian casualties unacceptable.

That's precisely why its pretrial chamber of judges has twice demanded that Bensouda reconsider her decision not to prosecute Israel over its 2010 raid on a flotilla to Gaza. The soldiers were enforcing a blockade that even the United Nations deemed legal, and as Bensouda noted in her decision to dismiss the case, they opened fire solely in self-defense after nine of them were seriously wounded when passengers aboard one ship attacked them with knives, chains, wooden clubs, iron rods and slingshots. But the pretrial chamber dismissed this context as completely irrelevant, insisting that the resultant 10 deaths were a criminal massacre.

Nor is the ICC alone. Zero civilian casualties is also the standard increasingly promulgated by other self-appointed custodians of the laws of war. The International Committee of the Red Cross, for instance, has declared that attacking a "populated village" is forbidden under any circumstances, even if the enemy is hiding there.

Bensouda fought the pretrial chamber over the flotilla case for years because do otherwise would be to abdicate her own prosecutorial independence and grant the chamber the right to dictate her decisions. But it's hardly surprising that she preferred to avoid another exhausting battle with the chamber over Israel. It was much easier to simply adopt its "no civilian casualties ever" standard and prosecute Israel for its Gaza operations.

Yet zero or near-zero civilian casualties are an impossible standard when, for instance, Palestinians routinely launch rockets from populated areas at Israeli civilians, or bring babies and grandmothers to violent protests where other "demonstrators" are throwing bombs and Molotov cocktails at soldiers in an effort to breach the border. The only way any country could avoid civilian casualties in such situations would be to refrain from military action at all—or in other words, to let the enemy breach its border and attack its own soldiers and civilians while doing nothing to try to stop it. Indeed, near-zero civilian casualties isn't a standard any military in any conflict has ever been able to meet.

Thus by saying that even compliance with the highest Western standards isn't enough to protect Israel from prosecution, the ICC has

essentially said there's no point in even trying to uphold the laws of war, because as the ICC interprets them, they are incompatible with the most basic requirements of self-defense. Unless Israel is willing to sit with folded hands while Palestinian terrorists attack it—which it will never do—it has no hope of escaping the ICC's clutches. And if so, why bother adhering to stringent restrictions that expose its own soldiers and civilians to greater risk?

Moreover, as I've explained before, activist courts always seek to obtain widely applicable precedents by going after "easy" targets first, and for the ICC, Israel is obviously an easier target than, say, America or France. Thus assuming the court upholds Bensouda's position on Gaza—which, given its proven anti-Israel bias, it's certain to do—this precedent could and would be used against every other Western country that engages in military operations since other Western armies use the same tactics and the same precautions that Israel does. This could lead other Western militaries to conclude that efforts to abide by the laws of war have become pointless.

In short, by going after Israel despite its adherence to the West's "highest standards," the ICC could end up reversing more than a century of efforts to reduce the collateral damage of military action. That would lead to even higher civilian casualties, the antithesis of its purpose.

All law is based on two fundamental principles: that compliance is possible without leaving yourself or your country vulnerable to destruction; and that compliance protects you from legal trouble. If those two criteria aren't met, nobody would have any reason to obey the law.

The ICC's decision to prosecute Israel eviscerates both those principles. And as such, it's liable to destroy the very international law it was created to uphold. (JNS Mar 18)

Congress Members Misled into Signing Racist Letter on Israel

By Stephen M. Flatow

Did you hear the shocking news? Sixty Congress members just signed a letter demanding that the federal government stop dismantling illegally built homes belonging to whites, though they didn't object to the dismantling of illegal homes built by African-Americans.

Oops, wait! Sorry, I got that mixed up.

The 60 Congress members demanded that the Israeli government stop dismantling any illegally built homes that have been built by Arabs. But they did not object to Israel's continuing policy of dismantling of illegally built Jewish homes.

Who would have thought that in this day and age, members of Congress would stoop so low as to make policy recommendations based on the idea that one specific ethnic group should be targeted?

We were supposed to have given up the old practice of making policies based on the color of people's skin, rather than the content of their character. Images of George Wallace standing in that schoolhouse door were supposed to be just a bad memory. Yet here we are, in 2020, with 60 Democrats signing a letter that echoes the attitudes of those dark times.

J Street played a major role in organizing the congressional letter. In a Dec. 10 press release, the group announced that "J Street supporters across the country are contacting the offices of their members of Congress and urging them to sign on to this important and timely letter."

The letter was sent to U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo on March 16, bearing the signatures of 60 members of Congress, all Democrats. They urged the U.S. government to prevent Israel from using American-made equipment in "the ongoing home demolitions and forcible transfer of Palestinian civilians in the West Bank."

The letter's reference to "Palestinian civilians" indicates that J Street misled the members of Congress. Evidently, the J Streeters did not explain to potential signatories that house demolitions in Israel are not based on the race, religion or ethnicity of the homeowners.

Israeli courts authorize dismantling illegally built homes on the basis of whether the homes were built illegally. The Israeli government does not have a policy of demolishing Palestinian homes. If it did, it would be doing quite a poor job of it, since 99.9 percent of Palestinian homes are still standing!

Clearly, J Street never informed Congress whom it contacted that the Israeli government has been demolishing illegally built Jewish homes, too.

On Oct. 24, Israeli bulldozers destroyed two housing structures in the unauthorized Jewish community of Shevah Ha'arezt, near the town of Yitzhar. On Nov. 26, the government sent tractors to level a Jewish

housing structure near the community of Bat Ayin and to plow over an adjacent olive grove that had been planted by Israeli Jews and their Christian Zionist supporters. On Jan. 15, the bulldozers were active in Yitzhar, destroying two more Jewish homes that were built illegally.

So why didn't the congressional letter ask Secretary Pompeo to make sure that no American-made bulldozers were used to smash those Jewish homes?

There are two possible answers.

One would be that those members of Congress are a bunch of racists who care only about the demolition of homes owned by one ethnic group and don't care about the ones owned by another ethnic group.

But I don't believe that. I believe that the signatories, except for a few diehard Israel-haters such as Michigan Rep. Rashida Tlaib, are simply unaware of the reality on the ground in Judea and Samaria. They are unaware because J Street misled them. J Street led them to think that the Israeli government has a racist policy of targeting Arab houses. If J Street had fully informed these 60 congress members about the situation, then the entire premise of the anti-Israel letter would have collapsed.

Racism has no place on Capitol Hill. There should be no discrimination between houses owned by Arabs or Jews, whites or blacks, or any other racial or ethnic groups.

J Street, the so-called "pro-Israel, pro-peace" lobby, should be ashamed of itself. (JNS Mar 17)

A Right to Vote But not to Dismantle the State

By Jonathan S. Tobin

It seems like a devastating argument. If Israeli Jews are willing to accept life-saving treatment from Arab doctors, why won't they give their representatives in the Knesset a seat in the country's government?

That's the point The New York Times' Jerusalem bureau chief David Halbfinger made last week both on Twitter and in an article that made the same point. It's been echoed elsewhere in features in the Israeli press.

But the premise is false. The idea that objections to giving anti-Zionist Arab parties a role in the government of Israel is racist is more than a cheap shot aimed at Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his supporters. The attempt to use the coronavirus pandemic as a way of chipping away at the legitimacy of a Jewish state demonstrates that Israel's critics consider the catastrophic spread of a deadly disease as merely just another opportunity to take pot shots at Zionism.

It's important to separate two arguments being made here. One is about the yearlong standoff between Netanyahu and his political opponents as the two sides continue to battle over who will lead the country's next government, and whether the votes of Knesset members who support Israel's enemies should be the deciding factor. The other is a more fundamental question about whether Israel can be both a state devoted to protecting the national rights of the Jewish people while granting equal rights to non-Jewish citizens.

Of course, Jews gratefully accept treatment from Arab doctors and nurses working in the country's hospitals. Arabs—both those who are citizens of Israel and residents of the territories—also accept the care they got from the far larger number of Jewish doctors and nurses that work in the same medical facilities. It should also be pointed out that even the families of hostile Palestinian terror groups based in Gaza or the West Bank have been admitted to Israeli hospitals, where they are treated with the same scrupulous devotion that any Jew gets.

So when Dr. Ahmad Tibi, a physician who also serves as a Knesset member of the Joint Arab List, which won 15 seats in the Knesset earlier this month, claims that Jews who would accept his services as a doctor, but don't want him deciding who will be prime minister, are racists and hypocrites, he isn't being honest.

Israel's founding fathers agreed that the Jewish state they were striving to create would offer equal rights to the country's Arab inhabitants. That was the position of the two ideological opponents who led the factions from which Israel's current political parties draw their origins. David Ben-Gurion, the country's first prime minister and leader of the left-wing Labor Zionist movement, believed that Israel should be both a Jewish state and a democracy. The same was true of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, who created the movement from which today's Likud stemmed.

Jabotinsky even theorized that the government of the Jewish state should make room for those who represented the Arabs. He even went as far as to say that if the prime minister was Jewish, then the vice premier of the country should be an Arab.

That vision of equality, however, rested on the assumption that Arab citizens would accept that the country's basic purpose was to be the national home of the Jewish people. The rights of the non-Jewish minority were to be protected. These leaders did not accept the idea that the Arab minority would be permitted to use democracy to try to eliminate the Jewish state.

Yet that is exactly what those who are branding as racist the objections voiced by Netanyahu and his supporters about the Joint Arab List being either an active or silent partner in the creation of a new Israeli government are essentially enabling.

The Joint List won't be able to legislate the Jewish state out of existence, even if it were an active part of a new government formed by Blue and White Party leader Benny Gantz. Still, depending on their 15 votes to get power and keep it would give them a potential veto over any measure of Israeli self-defense against Palestinian terror movements that the members of the Joint List cheer on from the sidelines.

The four parties that make up the Joint List have different ideologies. One is avowedly Communist. One seeks to make Israel into an Islamist state along the lines advocated by Hamas. Another wants it to become a secular, Palestinian Arab-dominated state. The fourth doesn't want an independent Palestine, though wants it to be part of a Pan Arab state encompassing the entire region. All oppose the existence of Israel as a Jewish state within any borders.

Israel's Arab citizens have every right to elect anyone they like to represent them. And those Knesset members should have the same rights as those who were chosen by the Zionist parties. But to say that keeping them out of the government denigrates and disenfranchises Arab citizens is to declare that the destruction of the Jewish state is a legitimate Arab aspiration. Indeed, the unwillingness of Israeli Arabs to give up on the failed century-long war against Zionism is the single greatest obstacle to ensuring an equitable society for all of Israel's citizens.

It's hard to say if the end of the long tussle between Netanyahu and his foes is in sight. The animus towards the prime minister is such that it has caused some of those who share many of his beliefs to be willing to legitimize the Joint List in order to be rid of him.

Yet opposing the Joint List has nothing to do with denying equality to Arabs—let alone denigrating the work of Arab medical personnel at a time of crisis. Those who say that it is racist to want to keep the Joint List out of government are, in effect, buying into the old anti-Semitic meme that Zionism is racism. That Netanyahu's critics and those of Israel are using the coronavirus outbreak as an excuse to revive such a canard aren't merely wrong. They're despicable. (JNS Mar 17)

Gantz Has No Government, and He Knows It By Mati Tuchfeld

Blue and White Party leader Benny Gantz doesn't need the bills his faction presented on Monday to render Benjamin Netanyahu ineligible to continue to serve as Israel's prime minister. Having received the mandate to form a government from Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, all Gantz needs to do is assemble a coalition. This would push Netanyahu out of office and see him replaced by Gantz.

Theoretically, it could happen by tomorrow morning. Nothing prevents Gantz from striking a deal with members of the left-wing bloc, who number 61 Knesset members now that Geshet Party head Orly Levy-Abekasis has dropped out, to establish a coalition.

But Gantz knows he doesn't really have a government, and not only because Blue and White Knesset members Zvi Hauser and Yoaz Hendel aren't with him—meaning he has lost his majority—but also because most of the public isn't with him.

While a number of media outlets and some enthusiastic tweeters would be prepared to see him form a government even with Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah if it meant ousting Netanyahu, the dismay everyone else feels at the sight of three former Israel Defense Forces chiefs courting the Joint Arab List, most of whom support terrorists and reject Israel as a state of the Jewish people, is beyond description.

It seems Gantz knows that joining forces with the Joint List would be unforgivable and would see him kicked out of politics faster than he entered it, but the damage has already been done. Now he's desperate and will apparently do anything to avoid returning the mandate to Rivlin after he again fails to assemble a government.

This is why he is spearheading the bills against Netanyahu. But they, too, are legally problematic and it's not clear whether they could be applied retroactively even if they were to pass. So he wants to oust Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein as well, even though the law appears to be on Edelstein's side, hoping it will help him put off trying to form a government.

All this is unfolding alongside super-secret negotiations that have been underway since Sunday to form a unity government with the Likud. They are kept secret to prevent them being thwarted despite efforts by Gantz and his cohort to blow them up. They have a right to use leverage against Netanyahu, just like the other side can apply leverage, but a decision will soon have to be made.

The Joint List won't like to hear that the person they recommended to Rivlin with the purpose of ousting Netanyahu is actually working with him, and Gantz will have to decide which path to take. (JNS Mar 17)

The Struggle for Israel's Jewish Soul

By Efraim Karsh and Gershon Hachohen

From its outset, the Zionist movement was committed to full civil and religious equality for the non-Jewish minority in the future Jewish state (as stipulated in the 1917 Balfour Declaration and the League of Nations mandate).

According to the prospective Jewish state's draft constitution, prepared by Ze'ev Jabotinsky in 1934, Arabs and Jews were to share all rights and duties, including military and civil service; Hebrew and Arabic were to enjoy the same legal standing; and "in every cabinet where the prime minister is a Jew, the vice-premiership shall be offered to an Arab and vice versa."

Echoing this vision, about a decade later David Ben-Gurion avowed that "one should not even contemplate a Jewish state that lacks full and absolute equality, political, civil, and national, for all of its residents and citizens In a Jewish state, an Arab could be elected prime minister or president, if suitable for the post."

Manifested inter alia by Israel's Proclamation of Independence (May 14, 1948), which granted "complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex" and urged the nascent state's Arab citizens "to participate in the upbuilding of the state on the basis of full and equal citizenship," this ultra-liberal and inclusive outlook was predicated on the assumption—underpinning all nation-states—of its citizens' acceptance of its legitimacy and their abidance by its laws, rules and regulations.

In the case of the Arab-Jewish conflict this meant the acquiescence of Israel's Arab citizens to their minority status in Israel; that is, in the national home of the Jewish people as postulated by the 1922 mandate of the League of Nations—the United Nations' predecessor as representative of the will of the international community—which tasked Britain with facilitating the establishment of this national home. In Ben-Gurion's words: "A Jewish state does not only mean Jewish majority in that state—it also concerns the state's purpose: it will be a state not only of and for its citizens, but a state whose mission is to ingather the exiles and to concentrate and ensconce them in the homeland."

By way of attaining this goal, Israel passed the Law of Return, which grants Jews, wherever they are, the right to citizenship should they choose to make Israel their home, as well as specific legislation aimed at safeguarding Israel's Jewish character, notably Basic Law: The Knesset (Article 7A). This law stipulates that:

"A candidates' list shall not participate in elections to the Knesset, and a person shall not be a candidate for election to the Knesset, if the objects or actions of the list or the actions of the person, expressly or by implication, include one of the following: 1) Negation of the existence of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state; 2) Incitement to racism; 3) Support of armed struggle, by a hostile state or a terrorist organization, against the State of Israel."

Indeed, when in 1965 Israel's Central Elections Committee disqualified the Arab Socialist List organized by the irredentist al-Ard movement, which rejected Israel's very existence, from running for the Knesset, the Supreme Court ratified that measure under the doctrine of "defensive democracy." As the court stated in a majority opinion: "There can be no doubt that the State of Israel is not only a sovereign, independent state, which cherishes freedom and is characterized by the rule of the people—but also that it was established 'as a Jewish state in the Land of Israel.'"

Since then, and especially after the launch of the Oslo “peace process” in 1993, Israel’s Arab parties have undergone massive radicalization. Ignoring legislation forbidding unauthorized visits by Israelis to enemy states, Azmi Bishara, founding leader of the ultra-nationalist Balad Party (with seats in the Israeli parliament since 1999), traveled to Damascus to commemorate the death of Syrian dictator Hafez Assad, one of Israel’s most implacable enemies, from where he implored the Arab states to enable anti-Israel “resistance activities,” expressed admiration for Hezbollah and urged Israeli Arabs to celebrate the terrorist organization’s achievements and internalize its operational lessons.

His Knesset peer Ahmad Tibi was beside himself with joy on meeting the deceased tyrant’s son, Bashar Assad (in January 2009), who would soon go on to slaughter hundreds of thousands of his own citizens. “Heads of state are begging to shake Assad’s hand, crawling to shake his hand,” he gloated at an Israeli Arab election gathering. “Yet what they fail to obtain despite their crawling, others get.”

The following year, Tibi traveled to Libya with a delegation of Israeli Arab parliamentarians to meet the long-reigning (and soon-to-be-deposed) dictator Muammar Qaddafi, whom he lauded as “King of the Arabs” and who was praised by one of Tibi’s peers as “a man of peace who treats his people in the best possible way.” Confronted with scathing Knesset criticism upon their return, Knesset member Taleb Sana was unrepentant. “Israel’s enemy is Israel itself,” he said. “As Qaddafi said during the visit, they have no problem with Jews but only with Zionism. Perhaps you’ll learn and understand some time—that is: abolish the Jewish state of Israel.”

By this time, open calls for Israel’s destruction had substituted for the 1990s’ euphemistic advocacy of this goal. Bishara, whose Balad Party was predicated on making Israel “a state of all its citizens” (the standard euphemism for its transformation into an Arab state in which Jews would be reduced to a permanent minority), became increasingly outspoken after his 2006 flight from the country to avoid arrest and prosecution for treason, having allegedly assisted Hezbollah during its war with Israel in the summer of that year, predicting the Jewish state’s fate to be identical to that of the Crusader kingdom. (Ten years later, Balad and the communist party Hadash would condemn the Arab League’s designation of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization as serving Israel’s interests.)

His successor, Jamal Zahalka, preferred a more contemporary metaphor, claiming that just as South Africa’s apartheid had been emasculated, so its Zionist counterpart had to be destroyed, while the “national committee of the heads of local Arab municipalities in Israel,” the effective leadership of the Israeli Arabs, issued a lengthy document outlining its “Future Vision for the Palestinian Arabs in Israel.” The document derided Israel as “a product of colonialist action initiated by the Jewish-Zionist elites in Europe and the West,” which, it charged, had pursued “domestic colonialist policy against its Palestinian Arab citizens.” The document then rejected Israel’s continued existence as a Jewish state and demanded its replacement by a system that would ensure Arab “national, historic and civil rights at both the individual and collective levels.”

As this steady ultra-nationalist surge was met by corresponding reluctance on the part of the legal system to enforce legislation designed to ensure Israel’s Jewish character (before the February 2009 and April 2019 elections, for instance, the Supreme Court overturned the Central Elections Committee’s disqualification of Balad and vetoed the disqualification of Arab Knesset members who have expressed “support of armed struggle, by a hostile state or a terrorist organization, against the State of Israel”), Israeli Arab politicians’ rejection of Israel’s Jewish nature has become ever more pronounced.

Thus we have Tibi telling President Reuven Rivlin during the September 2019 parliamentary consultations that “we are the owners of this land ... we did not immigrate here, we were born here, we are a native population.” Six months later, after another round of national elections brought the Joint List’s Knesset representation to an unprecedented tally of 15 MKs, Tibi was far more brazen. “‘The Land of Israel’ is a colonialist phrase,” he stated in a radio interview. “I contemptuously reject the term ‘Judea and Samaria.’ This is the Palestinian bank, the occupied Palestinian territories.”

Of course the Land of Israel was known as such millennia before the advent of European colonialism, or even before the Roman colonialists renamed it Syria Palaestina precisely to obliterate the Jewish connection to this land. The biblical areas of Judea and Samaria were known by this name since biblical times, thousands of years before they were renamed the West Bank (of the Hashemite Kingdom) in 1950 by Jordan’s King Abdullah ibn Hussein. The League of

Nations mandate for Palestine delineated the country’s borders according to its interpretation of the biblical term “from Dan to Beersheba,” while Mandatory Palestine included a substantial Samaritan district comprising much of the would-be “West Bank.”

It is hardly surprising that Tibi and his fellow Joint List members remain impervious to historical truth. Theirs is the agenda of rewriting the story of the “Nakba”—the Palestinian misnomer for their wholly unnecessary, self-inflicted 1947-48 “disaster” when, rather than accept the United Nations partition resolution, they tried to destroy the State of Israel at birth—and nothing would be allowed to stand in the way of this (self-destructive) agenda. As the Joint List’s leader Ayman Odeh told President Rivlin on March 15: “We are not solely interested in full civil equality. We are a national group that deserves full national equality.” In other words: ending Israel’s existence as a Jewish state.

But what about the three former Israel Defense Forces chiefs of staff heading the Blue and White Party? Don’t they realize they are but “useful idiots” for the Joint List’s ultimate goal (as candidly revealed by Odeh, who described collaboration with the party as a stepping stone to “toppling the Netanyahu-led right-wing rule” en route to ending “the Zionist hegemony”)? Has their hatred of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu blinded them to the point of forgetting the values and ideals for which they fought for decades and putting Israel’s future at risk? (JNS Apr 16)

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Gantz has Already Caved to Balad’s Demands By Amnon Lord

On Tuesday, we saw what a ridiculous position President Reuven Rivlin had placed Benny Gantz in by his decision to tap him to form the next government. Gantz reached out to Deputy Health Minister Yakov Litzman and then to Defense Minister Naftali Bennett and asked for meetings. They both let him know they weren’t interested.

Gantz was given the mandate because it suits the Joint Arab List to keep the political impasse in Israel going and making things hard for the Israeli leadership. Because he aligned himself with Balad MKs, Gantz secured 61 recommendations, and Rivlin exercised his judgment. Balad has openly declared its intention to “wage a battle to turn the state of Israel into a democracy of all its citizens, regardless of national or ethnic identity.”

In the past, Balad members described Gantz as someone who suffers from Zionist ideology, and is therefore unacceptable. On Tuesday, in another one of his speeches following his receipt of the mandate to form a government, he used the term “patriotic government.” Some would interpret this as forgoing the term that has been accepted since Herzl – “Zionist.”

Not everyone in the Arab street likes the support for Gantz. Balad’s response: “Removing Netanyahu from power is the No. 1 priority.” Balad also issued a statement pointing out what it had secured in negotiations with Gantz: “The first and most important [achievement] – recognition of the principle that no unilateral steps will be taken on annexation of areas of the West Bank; upholding the status quo at Al-Aqsa Mosque; and a stop to the demolition of illegally built homes.”

With these “achievements” in place, Gantz launching negotiations for a “unity” government with the Right is a recipe for time wasted on pointless talks that will ultimately result in a fourth election.

Right now, we have a prime minister who is handling the coronavirus outbreak, one of the worst crises in the history of Israel, excellently. Next to him, Gantz looks like a sideshow attraction. Still, Gantz is doing everything so that the work to establish a government winds up undermining the prime minister. The natural, right thing to do – what former Labor party voters wanted – is a unity government under Netanyahu.

Netanyahu has legitimacy that is based on broad popular support and the Right’s electoral victory. Gantz, on the other hand, is supposed to form a unity government to which those who recommended him object. (Israel Hayom Mar 17)
