

Naftali Bennett's New Party Might Signal a Major Change in Israeli Politics

By Shmuel Rosner

jewishjournal.com

January 2, 2019

Moving beyond the religious-secular divide.

Election seasons are like black holes. They devour everything, eliminate all other topics of concern, take over conversations, dominate the agenda like nothing else — except wars. Election seasons fill our brains with political gossip, petty trickery, unnecessary trivia.

Like a horse race, it's interesting when the horses are running but feels somewhat hollow after the winner crosses the finish line. So much time spent, attention diverted, minds preoccupied, so little substance.

And yet, election seasons can be a beneficial time if we look not just at the fluctuation of polls (read about the polls on the almost-daily online updates of Rosner's Domain) but also at the underpinning trends that dominate the race. In Israel, these trends — in this election cycle — seem to suggest a paradox: On the one hand, we see fragmentation, or maybe it's more appropriate to call it atomization, of the political system. On the other hand, we see old divisions disappear, and a relative consensus emerges.

Take, as one example, what happened on the night of Dec. 28, when two ministers, two political leaders, announced that they were leaving their party, The Jewish Home, to establish their own party, The New Right. By doing this, Education Minister Naftali Bennett and Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked added another split to an already splintered political arena. They added another right-wing party to a crowded field of such parties. And yet — here lies the paradox — they also declared the end of an era, or at least attempted to make such declaration. They declared an end to the era of religious-secular sectarianism.

Once Naftali Bennett and Ayelet Shaked realized that The Jewish Home Party limited their horizon, the two leaders jumped ship.

Let me explain: The Jewish Home, the party that made Bennett and Shaked, is the historical vehicle of religious-Zionism. It used to be called Mafdal, acronym of Miflaga Datit Leumit — the religious national party. For seven decades, Israelis belonging to this sector voted in great numbers to this party, that in return focused on sectorial interests — more funds for religious schools, more accommodation for Hesder Yeshivas, more legislation that

favors the settlers. This was a fine arrangement for a group that felt like a vulnerable minority but started to feel awkward and misplaced when religious-Zionists started to play a much more pronounced role as leaders in all Israeli institutions.

Bennett and Shaked identified the changing times and wanted to turn The Jewish Home into something else, less sectorial, more cross-over. They failed. The DNA of The Jewish Home is one of sectorial politics, and it proved resistant to dramatic change.

Bennett and Shaked have little interest in being the leaders of a sector. They entered politics to reach the top. And once they realized that The Jewish Home Party limited their horizon, by insisting on playing the old sectorial politics of religious-Zionism, the two leaders jumped ship. A bold and risky move — but one, if successful, of significance beyond the race horse.

According to early post-split polls, The New Right is going to attract many Israelis that used to vote for The Jewish Home. The message of religious-secular party, a post-sectorial party, resonates with these people who are no longer an endangered minority in need of special protection. Thus, the split could signify a new merge. The split is just a way to abandon the old religious-secular split to create a new partnership that no longer makes the yarmulke (or lack thereof) a defining feature of political vote.

And this is just one example of an old political Israel that is cast aside as times change. Yesh Atid is a party of secular and religious, a party of centrism. Kulanu is a party of centrism. Gesher, a new party of Orly Levy Abekasis, is a party of centrism. These parties cast aside the old definitions of right and left, as does the new party of former generals seems to be positioning itself in a similar manner. Sure, this is partially because the “left” is no longer a viable currency in Israel's politics, so everybody must rush to the center. But make no mistake: this is not just tactics. If General Gantz (considered to be more to the left) and General Yaalon (a longtime rightist) can form a party together it is because the traditional sectors and splits are dying.

Mr. Tobin is editor in chief of JNS — Jewish News Syndicate.

Is Europe Ready to Defend Itself?

By Yaroslav Trofimov

wsj.com

January 4, 2019

As Donald Trump's America pulls back and Vladimir Putin's Russia looms, France and Germany are leading a renewed drive for a common European Union military.

The new Republican administration in Washington issued a blunt warning: Unless Europe quickly set up its own unified army, the U.S. would be compelled to

undertake an “agonizing reappraisal” of its commitment to defend its European allies.

The year was 1953, and the main target of American ire was France, whose delay in ratifying the European Defense Community treaty, signed the previous year, meant that preparations for a federal European army had to be paused. But the pressure applied by the Eisenhower administration backfired spectacularly: A joyous choir of French lawmakers broke into the “Marseillaise” when France’s parliament finally rejected the treaty in August 1954. The idea of a joint European defense policy was shelved for decades.

Today, the push for European autonomy in defense—and even for a common European Union army—is gathering momentum again, in part because of doubts in many European capitals about President Donald Trump’s willingness to defend the continent against a renewed threat from Russia. Mr. Trump’s abrupt decision to withdraw U.S. forces from Syria, which prompted Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to resign, has added new urgency to the drive.

This time around, the revival of European defense integration is championed by French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, while the American president keeps lobbing angry tweets at the very idea. And inside Europe, the skeptics today aren’t in Paris but in the former Soviet vassal-states in the east that, despite all their misgivings, still view the U.S. as the only credible guarantor of their survival as independent nations. A historic swing in Europe’s public opinion, particularly in Germany—the EU’s most powerful state and one where trans-Atlantic cooperation was the bedrock of the political consensus since the end of World War II—has fueled this change.

Mr. Trump has described the EU as a “foe” and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as “obsolete,” and he has publicly questioned why American soldiers should die for a NATO ally like Montenegro. One recent opinion poll showed that Germans now rank Mr. Trump as the greatest threat to their country. In another, 73% of Germans described their relationship with the U.S. as “bad,” and 72% wanted a foreign policy more independent from Washington’s.

“The shift in public opinion is due to a mix of disappointment and fear,” said Volker Perthes, director of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, a think tank that advises the German government and parliament. “There is a fear that the U.S. will be less interested in Europe, and that the security commitments of the U.S. will no longer be reliable.”

It was in this political environment that Ms. Merkel told the European Parliament in a landmark speech in November: “The times when we could fully rely on others have ended....If we Europeans want to survive as a community, we must make a greater effort to take our destiny into our own hands.”

Achieving such “strategic autonomy” became the EU’s official policy in 2016. Though calls by Mr. Macron and Ms. Merkel for a European army are largely rhetorical so far, several concrete initiatives to achieve that goal have been launched since then. Probably most significant is the \$15 billion European Defense Fund, which aims to spur Europe’s military industry and could limit the influence of American weapons manufacturers. Another new initiative is the so-called Permanent Structured Cooperation system, under which European armies seek to remove the barriers to joint action that stem from fielding so many different—and often incompatible—types of weapons. Addressing a frequently voiced demand of Mr. Trump, European governments have also raised their defense spending to get closer to the NATO target of 2% of each country’s GDP.

On the face of it, there is no reason why an economic giant like the EU shouldn’t be able to protect itself against Russia even without American help. Setting aside Britain (which seeks to continue to cooperate with the EU on security and defense even after leaving the bloc), the remaining EU’s population and defense budgets are roughly three times Russia’s size. France, the EU’s military powerhouse, spends almost as much as Russia on defense just by itself and operates an independent nuclear arsenal. All those sums, of course, are dwarfed by the U.S., whose military budget is nearly double the defense spending of the EU (minus the departing U.K.) and Russia combined.

“Europe is addicted to the American security umbrella,” said Bruno Tertrais, deputy director of the Foundation for Strategic Research, a think tank that advises the French government. “But if the U.S. weren’t there, Europe would have found a way to defend itself.”

Yet there is a Catch-22 that makes these aspirations risky. Building up European defenses after seven decades of American protection would take time. Meanwhile, every move that Europe attempts in this direction spurs an American backlash, further undermining NATO’s cohesion—and its deterrent capacity against a rapidly militarizing Russia.

“We have to hedge. But it is a very tricky situation: When does the hedge become a wedge?” said François Heisbourg, a veteran French expert who advised Mr. Macron’s presidential campaign on security and defense.

‘Trump doesn’t believe in alliances and doesn’t understand what an alliance is.’ —François Heisbourg, adviser to Emmanuel Macron’s presidential campaign.

“Trump doesn’t believe in alliances and doesn’t understand what an alliance is,” he added. “So if we discover that Plan A—what has happened over the last 70 years—is no longer on offer, we would have been remiss if we had not worked on Plan B. But of course, we do not want to precipitate the end of Plan A by getting Plan B wrong. This is the challenge for every country that is allied with the U.S.”

It is a particularly urgent challenge for NATO countries in Eastern and Central Europe. Officials there fret about loose talk of a European army and dislike the very concept of EU “strategic autonomy,” fearing that it may needlessly alienate the U.S. After all, if you border on Russia, what you want is more Americans in your neighborhood now, not a pretext for cost-conscious Washington to pull the plug. “Autonomy means autonomy from someone—it’s better to use another term, such as a European push forward or European structural strengthening,” said Lithuania’s defense minister, Raimundas Karoblis.

Poland, another neighbor of Russia, has even offered to pay more than \$2 billion to set up a permanent U.S. base on its soil, proposing to call it Fort Trump in a not-so-subtle appeal to the president’s vanity. (Washington is still evaluating the proposal, while German officials are lobbying against it, fearing that it would further antagonize Russia.)

“We believe that the United States is indispensable in European security,” said Bartosz Cichocki, Poland’s deputy foreign minister for security affairs. He held up the November 2018 incident in the Black Sea, where Russia attacked and seized three Ukrainian navy ships, as a sobering example of just how hollow the EU’s role in defending the region’s security remains. “Where was Europe? Nowhere. Those who advocate a European army, European self-sufficiency, had a great opportunity to take the lead, to show us the way of how to de-escalate and how to stop Russia,” he scoffed.

Such divisions within Europe on security matters make it a much weaker adversary for Russia, which has spent the past decade upgrading its military and is now fielding an entire new tank army on the EU’s eastern flank.

The EU is likely dealing with a lasting change in the global security architecture.

“In defense and defense industry, it is not Europe, it is 28 European states,” said Christian Mölling, deputy director of Germany’s DGAP research institute, who co-wrote a recent report outlining the shortfalls in the EU’s military muscle. “If you take trade, we are acting as one with a central and single policy, which makes us the biggest trading bloc in the world. But in defense, we are not able to act as a huge force.”

Though Mr. Trump’s repeated verbal attacks on European allies generated the current sense of crisis, Europe’s security predicament is compounded by an isolationist streak that runs through America’s political landscape. In fact, European officials say that the EU is likely dealing not with a temporary hurdle but with a lasting change in the global security architecture as the relative size of America’s economic and military might declines with the rise of rival powers, most notably China. President Barack Obama wasn’t as abrasive as Mr. Trump in his dealings with European allies, but it was his administration that withdrew two of the four U.S. Army

brigades deployed on the continent, including all American main battle tanks. “We see Trump as the symptom of the problem, not as the problem,” a senior French official said.

Paradoxically, Mr. Trump’s combative rhetoric has been accompanied, so far, by decisions that have actually strengthened U.S. commitments to European security. The Pentagon under Mr. Mattis deployed 700 Marines to Norway, adding to the rotating armored brigade-size American presence deployed in Poland and Romania in early 2017. Economic sanctions against Russia have been tightened, too, in part due to congressional action.

“With Trump’s presidency, more U.S. soldiers are on European soil than before, under Obama. The U.S. president is fulfilling the commitments of the U.S. one by one. This is appreciated, and we also have to do our part,” said senior German lawmaker Jürgen Hardt, the foreign-policy spokesman for Ms. Merkel’s faction. “What we are talking about is making the European pillar of NATO more effective, which also means burden-sharing, and this might take responsibility away from U.S. soldiers.... We do not talk about separation in the field of territorial defense of Europe. It is not helpful if some people interpret it that way.”

The current debate over Europe’s “strategic autonomy,” often clouded by misunderstandings within Europe and between European governments and the U.S., goes to the very foundations of the European project—an idea nurtured by Washington after the devastation visited on the continent by World War II.

The seed from which today’s European Union sprang up was the European Coal and Steel Community, established in 1951. By pooling these industries, indispensable for modern warfare, into a single market under a supranational authority, the founding fathers of European integration sought to make another war among Germany, France and Italy impossible.

French Prime Minister René Pleven came up with the plan for a unified European army under a common European defense minister in a speech in 1950, and Gen. Dwight Eisenhower—NATO’s first supreme allied commander—quickly became one of the idea’s most enthusiastic supporters. The 1952 treaty establishing the European Defense Community, with a headquarters in Paris, also provided for a joint European parliament, laying the foundations of a federal European state.

While most other member-states ratified the treaty, France, embroiled in a bloody colonial war in Vietnam, kept holding out. Once Mr. Eisenhower became president in 1953, his secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, repeatedly pushed Paris to act. Washington even threatened to cut off military aid to European countries that remained outside the EDC.

But by then, the alliance between French parties beholden to Moscow and nationalists skeptical of the European project (and of ties with America) was simply too strong—a precursor of sorts to political dynamics in

Europe today. The EDC treaty was killed without debate by France's parliament in August 1954. "It is a tragedy that, in one country, nationalism, abetted by communism, has asserted itself so as to endanger the whole of Europe," Mr. Dulles said the following day.

It took more than four decades, until the late 1990s, for the idea of a common European defense policy to rise again, this time with the participation of Britain. By then, the U.S., having won the Cold War, viewed any such European aspirations to strategic autonomy with suspicion. In 1998, then Secretary of State Madeleine Albright issued her famous "three Ds," warning that any European security initiative should avoid de-linking Europe from NATO, duplicating existing efforts and discriminating against non-EU states.

Today, U.S. hostility to European self-reliance in defense is rooted in similar concerns and is shared well beyond Mr. Trump's circle. Mr. Mattis, for one, denounced the idea in a sharply worded confidential letter to France's government in 2018.

Palestinian Leaders Fight Economic Growth

By Bassam Tawil

gatestoneinstitute.org

January 11, 2019

The shopping-mall nakba.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's ruling Fatah faction is angry. It seems a Jewish Israeli businessman has just built a shopping mall in east Jerusalem and most of its workers and customers are Arabs.

Fatah leaders have called for boycotting the mall.

Fatah, which is often described in the Western media as a moderate faction, has responded to the mall enterprise in a manner that showcases how Palestinian leaders continue to torpedo benefits to their people.

Where in the world would any leader condemn a project that provides jobs to hundreds of his or her people? Where in the world would any leader call on his or her people to boycott a shopping mall or a supermarket that offers competitive prices for clothes and food? Where in the world would a leader describe the opening of a commercial project that benefits his or her people as a catastrophe ("nakba")?

Rami Levy, a businessman and owner of the third-largest Israeli supermarket chain, invested more than \$50 million in the construction of a mall in the Atarot Industrial Park northeast of Jerusalem. Despite the boycott calls, some Palestinians have rented stores in the mall, which is being described as a model for coexistence between Arabs and Jews. The new mall also has a large supermarket belonging to Levy's supermarket chain.

Levy's supermarkets in Jerusalem and the West Bank are popular among Palestinian shoppers. They say the prices there are lower than those in Arab-owned businesses. That is most likely why hundreds of Palestinians converged on the newly opened supermarket in the mall when it officially opened on January 8. Israeli

"The recent initiative to create a European army, or European combined armed forces, is not a good idea. It will undermine NATO over time and will further the division between the U.S. and our European allies and partners," said retired U.S. Navy Adm. James Stavridis, who served in 2009-13 as one of Eisenhower's successors at the helm of NATO's supreme allied command.

In a rapidly changing world, however, those concerns are misplaced, argued Ivo Daalder, the president of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, who served in 2009-13 as U.S. ambassador to NATO.

"After 70 years, there is a legitimate question raised both in the United States and in Europe: When is Europe going to be able to take care of itself? How much more money do they need to make to finally deal with the security challenge that, economically, they should be able to deal with?" Mr. Daalder wondered. "I don't think we should discourage Europe. Anything that strengthens Europe's capacity to defend itself enhances the trans-Atlantic alliance rather than undermining it."

supermarkets hire hundreds of Palestinians from the West Bank, as well as Arab residents of Jerusalem, who work together with Jewish colleagues.

According to Levy, half of his 4,000 employees are Palestinians and Israeli Arabs. "I began employing Palestinian and Israeli Arab workers at the first Rami Levy location, a stall in Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market that opened in 1976. Arabs were among my first employees," he said.

"Those employees continue to work for Rami Levy Hashikma -- our supermarket outlets -- and many have seen their careers flourish with the company. The first employee I hired 35 years ago was a man named Ibrahim, an Arab from east Jerusalem who has remained at Rami Levy and currently works as our director of logistics. Other Arab Israeli and Palestinian employees who have since joined the Rami Levy team have also been promoted to upper management positions. Rami Levy does not discriminate on the basis of ethnicity, gender, or religion when hiring and promoting employees. All employees, Palestinians and Israelis, are treated equally and receive equal benefits. Salaries are based solely on one's position and performance. My goal for all Rami Levy employees is to have the same opportunity to succeed. This goal that can only be realized if the principle of equality is implemented in all aspects of the company."

For Abbas's Fatah officials, however, the image of Palestinians and Jews working in harmony is loathsome. They do not like the idea that Palestinian workers are being paid good salaries and are being treated by their employer with respect. They also do not like seeing Palestinian shoppers queuing to buy food and goods that

are being offered to them in better quality and cheaper prices. The Fatah officials would rather see their people unemployed or pay higher prices in the Palestinian market than give their business to a Jewish-owned shopping center.

Instead of welcoming the inauguration of the shopping mall for providing job opportunities to dozens of Palestinians and lower prices, the Fatah officials are taking about an Israeli plan to "undermine" the Palestinian economy. "This was a sad day for Jerusalem," said veteran Fatah official Hatem Abdel Qader Eid in reference to the opening of the new mall. "This project aims at undermining the Arab commerce in Jerusalem and making it subordinate to the Israeli economy."

The hundreds of Palestinians who flooded the new mall on its first day, however, seem to disagree with the grim picture painted by Abdel Qader Eid. The large turnout is, of course, good news: it shows that Palestinians are like any customers around the world who prefer better products at lower cost. For them, this was not a "sad day," as the Fatah official said, but an exciting one. Finally, a mall has come near their home, offering them a wide range of products at economical rates.

Nonetheless, Abdel Qader Eid got one thing right: his lament concerning the absence of Palestinian investors and capital. "Palestinian capitalists are cowards," he said. Palestinian investors, Eid added, could have prevented Rami Levy from building his new mall had they invested in the construction of a Palestinian shopping mall. "It's true that there are wealthy Palestinian businessmen. But while they are rich with money, they are poor in their will and education."

Sadly, the Fatah official is saying that Palestinian businessmen have no faith in their people and would rather invest their money elsewhere.

Another senior Fatah official, Osama Qawassmeh, took the incitement a step further. He warned that any Palestinian who shops at the new mall or rents space there

will be accused of "betraying the homeland." He went on to peddle the old Palestinian lie that purchasing Israeli products is an act of "supports for settlements and the Israeli army."

Fatah's incitement against the new mall did not fall on deaf ears. On the day the mall was inaugurated, Palestinians threw a number of firebombs at the compound, forcing (Palestinian) shoppers to flee for their lives. Fortunately, no one was hurt and there was no damage to the stores or vehicles in the parking lot.

The campaign of incitement against Levy's shopping mall began several months ago, as it was being built, and has continued until today. Now that the campaign has failed to prevent the opening of the mall, Fatah and its followers have turned to outright threats and violence. The threats are being directed toward Palestinian shoppers and Palestinian merchants who rented space in the new mall. The thugs who attacked the mall with firebombs could have injured or killed Palestinians. The thugs, who are believed to be affiliated with Fatah, would rather see their people dead than having fun or buying attractively-priced products at an Israeli mall.

By spearheading this campaign of incitement and intimidation, Abbas's Fatah is again showing its true colors. How is it possible to imagine that Abbas or any of his Fatah lieutenants would ever make peace with Israel when they cannot even tolerate the idea of Palestinians and Jews working together for a simple common good?

If a Palestinian who buys Israeli milk is a traitor in the eyes of Fatah, it is not difficult to imagine the fate of any Palestinian who would dare to discuss compromise with Israel. If he is lucky, he will have a close encounter with a firebomb. If he is not lucky, he will be hanged in a public square. How is that for Palestinian readiness to engage in a peace process with Israel?

Mr. Tamil, a Muslim Arab, is based in the Middle East.

Visit suburbanorthodox.org for the most recent weekly issues. Click on Israel Action tab.

How Mahmoud Abbas Crushed Palestinian Hopes for Democracy

By Elliott Abrams

cfr.org

January 9, 2019

One man, one vote, one time.

On January 9, 2005—exactly 14 years ago today—Mahmoud Abbas was elected president of the Palestinian Authority. For a four-year term.

Today Abbas begins serving the fifteenth year of his four-year term.

That 2005 election was actually a milestone for Palestinians. Yasser Arafat had died the previous November, and this election was to choose his successor as head of the PA. It was a good election—free and fair in the sense that the votes were counted accurately and people could campaign against Abbas. There were loads of international observers, including a U.S. team led by former President Jimmy Carter and then-Senators Joseph Biden and John E. Sununu. According to The New York Times, Javier Solana, who was then the European Union's

foreign minister, said "It has been a very good day. The moment is historic."

Abbas won only about 62 percent of the vote (compare Egyptian president Sisi's ludicrous claim to have won 97 percent of the vote in the 2018 election there) and one challenger won 20 percent. Hamas boycotted the election, but was not forced to do so—as we saw when it competed in the elections for the Palestine Legislative Council (PLC) in 2006.

That 2006 parliamentary election was the last parliamentary election held in the Palestinian territories, and there has similarly been no presidential election since 2005. Abbas just holds on and on and governs by decree. He has now undertaken machinations that will in fact eliminate the PLC entirely, replacing it with an unelected PLO organ. The PLC has been dissolved by the

Palestinian constitutional court--whose own term of office expired over a decade ago.

So what Abbas has done since the last election, in 2006, is to gut the development of Palestinian democratic institutions. There are excuses, of course: Hamas is too dangerous and might win as it did in 2006, Israel is to blame, and so on. But in fact Abbas is snuffing out all opposition to his rule and forbidding all dissent.

Last Fall, Human Rights Watch issued a report on the ways in which the authorities in the West Bank and Gaza suppress dissent. Here are the opening lines:

In the 25 years since Palestinians gained a degree of self-rule over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, their authorities have established machineries of repression to crush dissent, including through the use of torture.

Both the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank and the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) in Gaza have in recent years carried out scores of arbitrary arrests for peaceful criticism of the authorities, particularly on social media, among independent journalists, on university campuses, and at demonstrations. As the Fatah- Hamas feud deepened despite attempts at reconciliation, PA security services have targeted

supporters of Hamas and vice versa. Relying primarily on overly broad laws that criminalize activity such as causing “sectarian strife” or insulting “higher authorities,” the PA and Hamas use detention to punish critics and deter them and others from further activism. In detention, security forces routinely taunt, threaten, beat, and force detainees into painful stress positions for hours at a time.

Solana was right 14 years ago: that moment was historic, in that the 2005 election (and the parliamentary election the following year) marked the high water mark of democracy in the West Bank. As Abbas marks his anniversary in power, those who had hoped for positive political evolution in the Palestinian territories can only mourn the way he has governed, especially in the last decade. He has outlawed politics in the West Bank. Under the guise of fighting Hamas, he has outlawed any criticism of the corrupt Fatah rule and prevented any debate on the Palestinian future. Just as Arafat soon eliminated all independent institutions when he returned to the Palestinian territories in 1994, Abbas has crushed the hopes that arose--after Arafat’s death in 2004 and his own election in 2005--for a democratic future for Palestinians.

Rashida Tlaib’s Anti-Semitic Defense of Boycotts of Israel

By Post Editorial Board

nypost.com

January 7, 2019

Will her fellow Democrats condemn it?

Freshman Rep. Rashida Tlaib may take great pains to deny she is anti-Semitic, but she’s just launched her congressional career by resorting to one of the oldest and most blatantly anti-Jewish canards.

At issue is a bill that aims to limit the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign. Tlaib, the first Palestinian-American in Congress, accused the measure’s supporters of dual loyalty.

“They forgot what country they represent,” the Michigan Democrat and unapologetic BDS supporter tweeted.

In fact, the bill in question does several things: It would also codify a memo of understanding with Israel, reimpose sanctions on entities funding the Syrian government and strengthen the US-Jordan relationship. But the controversy centers on the section that authorizes state and local government to combat BDS.

Some oppose it on the belief that restricting BDS limits First Amendment speech rights. But Tlaib just couldn’t stop there.

American Jews have long been slandered with charges of dual loyalty for their support of Israel. Activists such as Linda Sarsour hurl it more and more often these days. It was used against opponents of the Iran nuclear deal and supporters of the war in Iraq.

Yet it’s particularly ironic for Tlaib to make the charge, since she has vowed to “be a voice” for her relatives in the West Bank and declared that her “passion for justice is rooted in my beautiful Palestine.”

Is she just trying to top the ruckus she’d already raised by publicly taunting President Trump with a vow to “impeach the mother-----”?

Objectionable as that remark was, it didn’t venture beyond the uncouth and obscene. Her latest tirade is a far broader and lower smear, which also puts the lie to her claim that she merely opposes Israel.

So far, other Democrats have remained silent on Tlaib’s disgraceful canard. The party’s depressing drift of recent years makes that no real surprise. But it still makes them abettors, enablers — and equally guilty.

Muslim Congressmen Should Be Held Accountable for Their Anti-Semitism

By Siraj Hashmi

washingtonexaminer.com

January 08, 2019

But their bigotry shouldn’t be taken as representative of Muslim Americans’ attitudes.

Criticism of the Israeli government and criticism of Israel are two entirely different expressions.

One connotes disagreement over the implementation of policy, while the other suggests something deeper and potentially far more sinister.

With the recent elections of Reps. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn., and Rashida Tlaib, D-Mich., to Congress, their comments with respect to where they stand on the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict and the boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement have been catapulted to the spotlight. Both of their elections were historic, as they became the first Muslim women elected to Congress. Yet, their inability to not only clarify their comments but also not apologize for them is deeply troubling.

Both congresswomen made incendiary remarks about Israel that dredge up some of the oldest anti-Semitic tropes. In 2012, Omar wrote on Twitter that "Israel has hypnotized the world."

Omar's tweet, of course, focuses on the anti-Semitic line of thinking that Jews are conspiring to "take over the world." It has been used since the early 20th century, including in many Nazi German cartoons in the late 1930s that contributed to the change of perception among the public that eventually led to the Holocaust.

During the 2018 campaign, Omar was not supportive of the BDS movement. But as soon as the election ended, she announced her support to the publication MuslimGirl. BDS has long been accused of promoting an anti-Semitic agenda (i.e. the one-state solution, right of return, etc.) that would end the concept of a Jewish state.

This week, Tlaib, in an effort to be critical of legislation not related to passing a continuing resolution that would end the partial government shutdown, was accused of anti-Semitism for suggesting that Jews have dual loyalties.

To her credit, Tlaib later clarified saying she was accusing senators, not Jews, of having dual loyalties.

However, Tlaib's clarification can be considered anti-Semitic, since it again suggests that the state of Israel (and, by extension, Jews) is conspiring to control the world and, in particular, sitting U.S. senators.

Tlaib, during her campaign, was initially supportive of the two-state solution, but after winning her Democratic primary, she switched her position to supporting a one-state solution. Her policy flip made her lose the endorsement of the openly liberal Jewish group, J Street.

Omar and Tlaib weren't the only ones to fall into the trap of conduct that crossed well into the territory of anti-Semitism. Keith Ellison, who was the first Muslim elected to Congress and is now Minnesota's attorney general, was repeatedly denounced by Jewish groups, particularly in the past year, for his ties to raging anti-Semite and Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan.

Now, Omar, Tlaib, and Ellison certainly can express their First Amendment rights however maliciously they want, yet we shouldn't allow their ideas give the impression to other Americans that this is monolithic thinking among Muslims both in the United States and around the world.

It shouldn't be difficult to be critical of the policies and actions of a government and not make sweeping generalizations that devolve into hatred for an entire group of people.

The biggest challenge will be how long can their supporters let this conduct continue before they call them out on it. If the state of politics has taught us anything, it's that we shouldn't hold our breath.



Israel Should Tell the International Observer Force to Leave Hebron

By Prof. Eugene Kontorovich

israelhayom.com

January 10, 2019

It serves no purpose other than cooperating with anti-Israel groups.

The Temporary International Presence in Hebron is Israel's perpetual own-goal. The special task force oversees Jewish areas of Hebron and – beyond its members' diplomatic passports – is similar in its activities to left-wing rights groups such as the B'Tselem and Breaking the Silence. At the end of the month, Israel will have an opportunity to send TIPH home.

Israel has more observers than any other country, from the U.N. presence in Jerusalem's Armon Hanatziv neighborhood to the U.N. Disengagement Observer Force on the Golan Heights. But the TIPH is an entirely different animal. It isn't operated by the U.N. yet it is still an international force in Hebron. And unlike other such

forces, which only the U.N. can abolish, it maintains an ongoing presence in Hebron because Israel says it can.

Israel was pressured to accept TIPH's presence after Baruch Goldstein massacred 29 Palestinians at the Cave of the Patriarchs in 1994. The organization received its current mandate as part of a 1997 agreement stipulating that its validity must be renewed every three months – hence its "temporary" status. For 20 years now Israel has renewed the hostile organization's mandate to operate in Hebron. Otherwise, its presence would have ended long ago. It is now one of the oldest observer forces in the world, and it contributes to Israel's image as an outlaw state that demands special observation.

The anti-Israel bias of TIPH is built into its mandate, which tasked organization members with the one-sided

mission of "promoting by their presence a feeling of security" for Palestinians in Hebron. Protecting Jews from constant terrorist attacks is not part of their job description. Members of the organization even "succeeded" in veering from this narrow definition by attacking Jews in Hebron in the last year. The attackers were later pulled out of the country by the TIPH leadership without ever having to stand trial. TIPH has cooperated with radical groups like Breaking the Silence and leaked confidential reports to the press. The organization's reports are full of anti-Israel claims that have no connection to its stated task. According to media reports, TIPH asserts that Jews have no right to any presence anywhere in Hebron.

Unlike comparable U.N. forces, TIPH is not a separate international organization but an operational framework for security officials from five countries – Norway, Sweden, Turkey, Italy and Switzerland. These countries are themselves problematic in that they are often hostile to Israel. Turkey, the most blatant example, treats Israel as an enemy state. Ankara supports Hamas and has dispatched anti-Israel flotillas to Gaza, promotes anti-Semitic defamation and works to undermine Israel's sovereignty in Jerusalem. Despite all this, Israel grants official immunity to Turkish representatives who photograph and video record Israeli soldiers and citizens. When TIPH was first created, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was mayor of Istanbul. Ever since taking control of the government, he has turned his country into

an anti-Israel state.

In 2014, Sweden became the first European country to recognize the "State of Palestine" in violation of the 1993 Oslo Accords. Israel sufficed with castigating the Swedes for the move and allowed their "observers" to remain in Hebron. Norway, the most powerful country in the organization, is one of the biggest supporters of the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement. Italy helped build the Bedouin shanty town of Khan al-Ahmar and is involved in the violation of Israeli sovereignty in Area C in the West Bank. It is important to maintain diplomatic ties with these countries, but it is absurd to give them special policing privileges.

The continuation of TIPH's mandate sends these countries the message that no matter how much they harm Israel we will turn the other cheek. TIPH symbolizes the failure of Israeli foreign policy. Faced with a series of constant and ongoing campaigns against us – such as recognition of a Palestinian state, the banning of Israeli products and payments to Palestinians who relocate to the area – Israel always reacts out of diplomatic anxiety. It doesn't take concrete action and as a result, the status quo continues unabated at our expense. Israel would be fully within its rights to act against TIPH.

But Israel doesn't have to do a thing. It just has to abstain from signing the next round of agreements on Jan. 31. The decision is entirely up to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. We have never been required to do so little to advance Israel's interests.

Israel's Dangerous Dalliance With China

By Ilan Berman

The Jewish state needs an agency to review foreign investments in sensitive areas of its economy.

National security adviser John Bolton traveled to Israel this month to reassure jittery officials in Jerusalem that the Trump administration isn't planning a precipitous exit from Syria, notwithstanding the president's surprise December announcement to the contrary. But Mr. Bolton's most important message might have had nothing to do with America's commitment to fighting Islamic State or its efforts to roll back Iran's strategic influence in Syria and Iraq. The Trump administration, Mr. Bolton told Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, is concerned about the commercial relationship between Israel and China—and the strategic vulnerabilities those ties have created. The most immediate worry is China's impending access to Israel's strategic northern port of Haifa. In 2015 China's Shanghai International Port Group signed a multibillion-dollar deal with the Israeli Transportation Ministry for the future rights to operate the Haifa port. Under the terms of the agreement, the Chinese company will take control of day-to-day operations at the port for 25 years beginning in 2021.

Haifa isn't only a commercial hub but a fixture in the long-running American-Israeli strategic partnership. It

wsj.com

January 13, 2019

regularly hosts naval visits from the U.S. Sixth Fleet and joint naval exercises between the two countries. U.S. military officials therefore warn that port visits could be scaled back or even terminated once China assumes control of the facility in 2021.

Israel's emerging China problem is bigger than Haifa. U.S. officials are also carefully watching China's increasing penetration of Israel's vibrant high-tech sector. After years of systematic investments, the Chinese may now directly control or have influence over as much as 25% of Israel's tech industry. The U.S. wants to strengthen Israeli control of China's growing economic sway in the country.

When a foreign nation wants to make a substantial investment in a sensitive sector of the American economy, it is reviewed by an interagency body known as the Committee on Foreign Investment in the U.S. Cfius has the authority to nix deals that could have an adverse impact on national security. But Cfius has no Israeli analogue; the Israeli government's decisions about foreign investment are too often driven more by economic than security considerations.

This approach might be viable if Israel were a minor country disconnected from great-power politics. But Israel's vital geostrategic location, sophisticated military

and technology sector, and deep ties to the U.S. make its lack of a formal foreign-investment oversight body untenable over the long run.

In its eagerness to live up to its reputation as a global commercial and innovation hub, Israel has engaged deeply with China, potentially damaging its strategic relationship with the U.S. Mr. Bolton was right to deliver a stern message during his recent visit. Fortunately, Jerusalem seems to have received and understood it. Senior Israeli statesmen, including the country's former ambassador to

China, have called for a “rethink” of the Haifa port deal, and the Netanyahu government seems inclined to do it.

Still, the larger risks associated with China's growing investments in the Jewish state, and their implications for Israel's security as well as its relations with key international partners, haven't been sufficiently addressed by policy makers in Jerusalem. They should be, and soon. The long-term dynamism of the U.S.-Israeli strategic partnership could depend on it.

Mr. Berman is senior vp. of the American Foreign Policy Council.

Egypt tries to block airing of Sisi's '60 Minutes' interview

By Heba Saleh

ft.com

January 7, 2019

CBS refuses to stop broadcast, in which president confirms closest ever co-operation with Israel.

An interview with US television channel CBS in which Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Egypt's president, spoke of his country's close co-operation with Israel in fighting Isis militants, has stirred controversy after the broadcaster said Cairo tried to stop it from being aired.

The interview on the 60 Minutes news programme was due to air on Sunday evening after CBS said it had refused Egyptian government demands to refrain from broadcasting it. In an excerpt provided by CBS, Mr Sisi is quoted as having said: “That is correct... we have a wide range of co-operation with the Israelis,” in response to a question asking him if co-operation with Israel was now the closest ever between the two countries.

Egypt has had a peace treaty with Israel since 1978 and the two countries have diplomatic relations, but Egyptian public opinion still regards the Jewish state as an enemy and occupier of Arab lands. Mr Sisi's unprecedented admission could hand his critics further ammunition to attack him.

News of co-operation with Israel against Isis militants in the Sinai has been widely circulated in the past year. A New York Times story in February 2018 cited US officials saying Israel had conducted a covert air campaign including some 100 air strikes against Isis militants in the North Sinai with Cairo's permission. Egypt denied the story at the time. Egypt has fought four wars against Israel since 1948, the last of which in 1973 was aimed at winning back sovereignty over the Sinai.

Cairo has not responded to CBS's claim that it asked the channel to pull the episode in which Mr Sisi is interviewed by Scott Pelley, the program's anchor and journalist.

CBS has promoted the programme as “the interview Egypt's government doesn't want on TV”. CBS said it was contacted by the Egyptian ambassador shortly after the interview was recorded in the US and asked to refrain from airing it, but the broadcaster has not specified what the Egyptians found objectionable.

The channel has not said why it has held the broadcasting of the interview since September, when it was recorded during a visit by Mr Sisi to New York to attend the UN General Assembly.

Other excerpts of the interview made public by CBS include a denial by Mr Sisi of assertions by Human Rights Watch that the country is holding 60,000 political prisoners. Egypt's official line is that there are no political detainees in the country and that everyone in prison is there for breaking the law.

Mr Sisi, a former defence minister, led a popularly backed coup in 2013 against his elected Islamist predecessor. He has presided over one of the harshest crackdowns in Egypt's modern history, targeting mainly Islamists but extending to secular critics, bloggers and journalists.

“I don't know where they got this figure [of 60,000 prisoners],” Mr Sisi told CBS. “I said there are no political prisoners in Egypt. Whenever there is a minority trying to impose an extremist ideology we have to intervene regardless of their numbers.”

Why the Peace Process Doesn't Rank High on Israeli Voters' Agenda

By Evelyn Gordon

evelyncgordon.com

January 13, 2019

Israel's election campaign has only just begun, but one key issue is already notable by its absence: peace with the Palestinians. To many Americans—especially American Jews, who overwhelmingly consider this the most important issue facing Israel—the fact that almost none of the candidates are talking about the peace process may seem surprising. But several recent incidents help explain why it's a very low priority for most Israeli voters.

Not so long ago, of course, the peace process was Israel's top voting issue, almost its only one. But in a poll published last month, self-identified centrists and rightists both ranked the peace process dead last among six suggested issues of concern. Even self-identified leftists ranked it only third, below corruption and closing socioeconomic gaps.

There are many well-known reasons why Israelis have stopped believing peace is possible anytime soon. They

range from the failure of every previous round of negotiations, to Palestinians' refusal to negotiate at all for most of the last decade, to the fact that every bit of land Israel has so far turned over to the Palestinians—both in Gaza and the West Bank—has become a hotbed of anti-Israel terror. Yet the root cause of all the above receives far too little attention overseas: Israel's ostensible peace partner, the Palestinian Authority, educates its people to an almost pathological hatred of Israel.

I've discussed the way this plays out in Palestinian textbooks and the Palestinian media many times. But nothing better illustrates the problem than three incidents over the past two months.

The most shocking occurred in November when a Palestinian accused of selling real estate to Jews in eastern Jerusalem was denied a Muslim burial by order of the imams of Jerusalem's Muslim cemetery, religious officials at Al-Aqsa Mosque and Jerusalem's PA-appointed grand mufti. He was finally buried, with approval from Jerusalem's chief rabbi, in the non-Jewish section of a Jewish cemetery.

Of course, selling land to Jews is a crime in the PA, for which the maximum penalty is death. Just last month, a Palestinian-American was sentenced to life in prison for it. But in Islam, like in Judaism, proper burial is a religious commandment. Consequently, even the most heinous crime—for instance, killing fellow Muslims—does not preclude someone from burial in a Muslim cemetery, just as Jewish criminals are entitled to Jewish burial.

Thus, PA clerics effectively ruled that a major religious commandment was less important than opposing a Jewish presence in Judaism's holiest city (to which, not coincidentally, the PA adamantly denies any Jewish connection). Grand Mufti Ekrima Sabri even justified his decision by saying that “whoever sells to the Jews of Jerusalem is not a member of the Muslim nation.” But if PA-appointed clerics claim that selling even a single plot of land to Jews makes one an apostate, how exactly is the PA supposed to sign a peace deal that formally grants the Jews even pre-1967 Israel, which Muslims consider to be no less a part of “historic Palestine” than Jerusalem?

That same month, the PA suspended Hebron's police chief after social media posts showed him trying to help Israeli soldiers fix a stalled jeep (the original posts said he changed the jeep's tire, but Palestinian sources denied that, and it's highly unlikely that none of the soldiers could change a tire). Col. Ahmed Abu al-Rub was just doing his job: The jeep was stalled on a Palestinian road and blocking Palestinian traffic so, as a policeman, it was his

duty to try to remove the obstacle and get traffic moving again.

But ordinary human interaction with Israelis, aka “normalization,” is anathema to many Palestinians, including many PA officials. Though the PA will (usually) cooperate with Israel on hunting down Hamas terrorists, since it views Hamas as an existential threat to itself, preventing person-to-person contact with Israelis has been official PA policy for over seven years. So how exactly is Israel to make peace when the PA's hatred runs so deep that a normal neighborly act like helping Israelis with car trouble—for the sake of unsnarling a Palestinian traffic jam—can endanger a policeman's job?

Finally, there's the story of the new mall slated to open in east Jerusalem later this month. The mall, located in an industrial park adjoining several Arab neighborhoods, serves the city's Palestinian residents in two ways. First, 35 percent of the businesses in it are Arab-owned, and some of the others are Palestinian franchises of Israeli chains, so it's providing income and jobs to Palestinians. Second, for residents of many Arab neighborhoods, it offers more convenient shopping than malls in Jewish neighborhoods. In short, it improves both the economy and the quality of life of the city's Palestinian areas, which the PA claims to want for its future capital. Thus, you might think the PA would welcome it.

Instead, the PA's ruling Fatah party, led by PA president and ostensible Israeli peace partner Mahmoud Abbas, urged Palestinians to boycott the mall, declaring that “buying, renting or shopping” there is a “betrayal of the homeland.” Why? Because the mall's owner is Jewish. And boycotting Jews is more important to the PA than promoting the welfare of Palestinian residents of its ostensible future capital.

Peace can be made with people who want peace. But it can't be made with people who think that working with Jews to improve the Palestinian economy is a “betrayal of the homeland,” that helping Israelis with a stalled vehicle could justify being fired, or that selling land to Jews is a sin so heinous the sinner can no longer be considered Muslim. And as the above incidents show, that's exactly what the official PA leadership does think.

As long as this is true, prospects for peace will remain nonexistent, and the peace process will remain at the bottom of Israelis' order of priorities. There are too many issues where government policy really matters for Israelis to waste their votes on something beyond the government's power to change.

Recent issues available at suburbanorthodox.org. Click on Israel Action tab.

If you see something, send something” –editor