

Israel Isn't Leaving the Golan Heights—Nor Should ItBy **Steven A. Cook**

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The territory is critical to Israeli security.

Should the United States recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights? The question has come up in the last few weeks, because Israel is having an election in April. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has reportedly been lobbying the Trump administration on the idea of formally acknowledging Israel's 1981 annexation of Syrian territory.

There's plenty of reason to suspect this diplomatic gambit is motivated primarily by Netanyahu's hope for domestic political gain as he faces re-election under the pall of possible indictment. But the U.S.-Israeli negotiations are a sideshow for a more fundamental strategic reason. Whether Washington recognizes Israel's annexation or not, the Israelis are never withdrawing from the Golan Heights—nor should they.

Israel conquered the area in the June 1967 war and have held it ever since. Critics argue that U.S. recognition of Israel's annexation would legitimate the acquisition of territory by force, setting a precedent for the West Bank and beyond. It is a valid criticism to which there is no good answer. (Although there are reasons the Israeli incorporation of the Golan has been significantly less controversial than its efforts in the West Bank. Above all, the Golan does not require the control of a large hostile population, as the approximately 27,000 Druze on the Golan Heights have accommodated themselves peacefully to Israel's rule, while other residents have sought Israeli citizenship in small but increasing numbers.)

Moreover, the Israelis haven't always even sought U.S. recognition of the Golan Heights as part of Israel. In the 1990s, Israel worked pretty hard along with American diplomats to fashion agreements to return the Golan to Syria. As recently as 2010, the Israelis were negotiating indirectly with the Syrians through the United States. Only a few years earlier, the Turkish government was facilitating indirect talks between then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Although Netanyahu's office denied it, the 2010 proposal for peace included a withdrawal from the Golan Heights, though perhaps not all of it.

The Israeli interest in trading away the Golan Heights was predicated on a belief—or wishful thinking—that a peace treaty would break the Syria-Iran-Hezbollah axis. It makes sense on paper, but peeling the Syrians from Iran and Hezbollah was never going to work. Bashar al-Assad's father, Hafez al-Assad, was at best a grudging participant in the peace process of the 1990s. Syrian diplomats showed up for talks, but they never actually negotiated

much. In his book *The Arab Center: The Promise of Moderation*, former Jordanian Foreign Minister Marwan Muasher recounts how the Syrians sought to obstruct regional peace rather than contribute to it.

It is true that Hafez al-Assad invoked “peace of the brave,” but getting around the table for a three-way handshake with a U.S. president and Israeli leader was not the way he did business. Rather, Assad was accommodating enough to keep his enemies at bay—for example, sending Farouk al-Sharaa or some other regime figure to meet Israel's Ehud Barak—while retaining the means to do his enemies harm, such as, say, facilitating the transfer of weapons to Hezbollah. Bashar's father was as shrewd as his son is plodding, and as a result there was very little chance that he was going to give up his strategic ally, Iran, and Hezbollah for a deal with Israel. He had seen what happened to his former partner in arms, Egypt's Anwar Sadat, whose separate peace turned out to be a humiliation only partially salved with copious amounts of U.S. assistance. Sadat also ended up dead.

Under these circumstances, it was surprising that Israel—including its much-vaunted security establishment—seemed so eager to give up the Golan Heights. The 1974 disengagement agreement between Israel and Syria provides a kind of legal cover for one important fact: Quiet along the Israeli-Syrian front for the last 45 years is a function not just of the capabilities of the Israel Defense Forces but of the unparalleled advantage the Golan Heights gives Israel's armed forces. The Golan multiplies Israel's force in the event of a war, but, more important for Israeli security, the area is an unrivaled intelligence-gathering platform. From its posts atop the Golan Heights, the IDF can look and listen in on the valley below that leads to Damascus, only about 45 miles away. Nothing is foolproof, of course. The Israelis occupied the Golan Heights in 1973 and ran into a lot of trouble when the Syrian attacked on Oct. 6 of that year, but all things being equal, there is no question that holding onto the plateau is superior to withdrawing and the uncertainty of an agreement with the Syrian regime.

If it was hard for Hafez al-Assad to come to terms with Israel, it is even harder for Bashar. When the elder Assad died in the summer of 2000, there was considerable speculation that his son would be a reformer, capable of making peace with Israel. This was more wishful thinking. When they were negotiating with the Syrians through Turkey in 2008, the Israelis believed they could trust then-Prime Minister (now President) Recep Tayyip Erdogan to bring the young Syrian leader along and effectively peel

him away from the Iranians. For all of Erdogan's skills and the amount of effort he invested in Syria, the Turkish leader was unable to advance the negotiations. No doubt, Israel's 2008 Operation Cast Lead—the operational name of its war that year in Gaza—short-circuited the Turkish effort, but there is little reason to believe that the Syrians would be willing to make a deal with Israel.

In late January 2011 after Tunisia's Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali fell and Egypt's Hosni Mubarak was teetering, Assad declared that an uprising against his regime could not happen in Syria because there was little "divergence" between "policy and the beliefs and interests of the people" in his country. He was incorrect. Popular protest broke out in Syria a few months later. And when the younger Assad proved himself to be a bloody blunderer who put the regime in jeopardy, it was the Iranians who came to the rescue. The Syrian leader now owes his and his regime's survival in part to Iran, which has sought thus far unsuccessfully to establish a permanent presence on

Israel's border. That shouldn't matter, though. Iran and its expeditionary force, Hezbollah, are a threat to Israel's security. The Golan Heights is critical to keeping both from achieving their ends.

This is the environment in which the idea that the United States should recognize Israel's annexation has surfaced, which makes it a more compelling case for Netanyahu to make. Still, the status quo in which the United States simply ignores Israel's absorption of the area is preferable to American recognition, which would result in a messy and counterproductive international debate that will do nothing other than highlight Israel's original annexation, spurring opposition when previously there was acquiescence.

In reality, there is no need for the recognition. Israel is in Golan for its own reasons, and nothing the Trump administration decides will change that.

Mr. Cook's latest book is False Dawn: Protest, Democracy, and Violence in the New Middle East.

How Israel Can Best Benefit from Its Newfound Friendship with Brazil

By Emanuele Ottolenghi

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Combat Hezbollah, and don't repeat the mistake made with Paraguay.

For more than a decade, Brazil's left-wing governments shunned Israel and did little to prevent Hezbollah's growth in their own backyard. Hezbollah relies heavily on the proceeds of transnational crime networks, especially in the Tri-Border Area (TBA), or Triple Frontier, of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, but until recently, Brazilian officials were loath to acknowledge its presence in their country or its involvement in organized crime.

Then, last October, Jair Bolsonaro, a fervently pro-Israel firebrand politician and former military officer, won Brazil's presidency. Bolsonaro's top priority is fighting organized crime. Combating Hezbollah's terror finance is a vital Israeli interest. Making the case that Israel's and Brazil's interests perfectly dovetail should be easy: the US Department of Justice recently designated Hezbollah as a transnational criminal organization, and Hezbollah's partnership with Latin American drug cartels is long-standing and well documented. Last September, Brazil arrested a top Hezbollah terror financier in the TBA. Numerous ongoing Hezbollah terrorism finance, money laundering and drug trafficking cases in the US involve Lebanese with Brazilian citizenship and Brazilian companies.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu clearly understands that Bolsonaro's victory is important to Israel's interests. He quickly moved to exploit the new pro-Israel mood in Brasilia during his recent weeklong visit to attend Bolsonaro's inauguration – the first ever visit to Brazil by an Israeli leader. Yet, he hardly mentioned the terror group publicly, although he had a captive audience

for his message, focusing instead on the likelihood that Brazil will move its embassy to Jerusalem.

Bolsonaro's affection for Israel, which was clearly on display throughout Netanyahu's visit, will no doubt facilitate cooperation. But Netanyahu should be careful not to prioritize symbols over substance, a mistake he already made once in Latin America. During 2013-2018, Netanyahu invested heavily in his relationship with Horacio Cartes, then president of Paraguay. Cartes relied on a former adviser to Netanyahu to win his presidential campaign. He too had a genuine warmth for Israel, which culminated with Cartes's decision in May 2018 to move Paraguay's embassy to Jerusalem. Most importantly, from Israel's point of view, Paraguay began voting with Israel against the Arab bloc at the UN.

However, the Paraguayan side of the TBA remained ground zero for Hezbollah's money laundering in Latin America. The Cartes administration hardly lifted a finger to act against the terror funding networks hiding behind Ciudad Del Este's bustling commercial activities. Worse – when critics raised Hezbollah's TBA terror financing activities, Paraguayan ministers confronted their Israeli counterparts, threatening to change Paraguay's friendly international posture toward Israel, as an Israeli minister recently confirmed to the author.

Israel kept quiet on Paraguay's collusion with Hezbollah so it could get Asunción to move its embassy. Yet as soon as Cartes left office, his successor, Mario Abdo Benítez, moved Paraguay's embassy back to Tel Aviv and, despite rhetoric, has done little until now to tackle the problem of Hezbollah's terror networks in his own country. Israel's five-year investment ultimately yielded no embassy move and no progress on combating Hezbollah's terror network.

Bolsonaro's Election provides Israel with its first clear opportunity to attack Hezbollah's threat on the Brazilian side of the TBA. Brazil remains host to the largest concentration of Hezbollah operatives and sympathizers in Latin America, who thrived under the umbrella of friendly Brazilian-Iranian relations. Disrupting and dismantling these networks would be hard without the active involvement of Brazilian intelligence and law enforcement, which a pro-Iran political climate has so far mostly prevented. At a time when a future conflict between Israel and Hezbollah seems likelier than ever, Israel should make the battle against Hezbollah's terror finance networks in Latin America its top regional priority.

There are three key areas in which greater Israeli support could help Brazil crack down on Hezbollah and fight organized crime: Border controls, criminal investigations and money laundering.

Brazil's 16,000-km.-long border crosses impervious and sparsely populated areas. Natural obstacles make it hard for authorities to effectively patrol it, and Brazil's 10 neighbors do not always have a stake in keeping their side tight. Then there is the neglect by central authorities, which often do not allocate resources to strengthen border controls. The TBA is a case in point – and one where Israel can help. Israel is already supplying technology for border control to Brazil, such as an Israeli-made Heron drone stationed in the TBA since 2011. However, it has not been operational for years due to a multi-million dollar

maintenance contract the Federal Police of Brazil could not afford to honor.

Israel's expertise can also assist criminal investigations. With its knowledge of the families, clans and Hezbollah connections in south Lebanon, it can help map Hezbollah networks in South America. Brazilian law-enforcement officials may be on their trail already for criminal conduct, but helping them establish a terror nexus would go a long way to help them prioritize and solve cases.

Israel can also help Brazil with efforts to track the drug traffickers' dirty money. In the heyday of Iran sanctions, the Israeli intelligence community frequently helped identify Iranian sanctions evaders globally. The same toolkit can spot Hezbollah's global money laundering schemes and could serve Brazil well.

In short, there is much that Israel can do, by prioritizing the hunt for Hezbollah's dirty money, to help Brazil, and in the process help itself.

In Brazil, Netanyahu invited Bolsonaro to visit Israel in the coming months. When the Brazilian leader visits, the prime minister should explain to him that the fight against Hezbollah and the drug cartels is a single battle that both should care about. Israel can help Brazil's fight and benefit in the process. It's a win-win situation. And its outcomes should prove more enduring than a friendly administration and symbolic UN votes.

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Iran and the Taliban Are Working Together against the U.S.

By Aaron Kliegman

freebeacon.com

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A longstanding alliance goes public.

Wherever there is chaos, violence, and suffering in the broader Middle East, Iran is likely present. Tehran has its malign tentacles entwined in virtually every conflict in the region—from Gaza, to Yemen, to Syria, and beyond. One such conflict is the war in Afghanistan, which the media rarely discuss in conjunction with Iran. Yet the Islamic Republic plays an important role in Afghanistan—one that is disruptive and that threatens American interests. As the Trump administration debates whether to withdraw from Afghanistan, not just the Taliban but also Iran stands to gain from an American retreat.

Iranian activities in Afghanistan gained renewed attention over the past two weeks, after Adm. Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, confirmed for the first time late last month that Iran held talks with the Taliban, noting that the Afghan government was aware of the discussions. Days later, Iran also confirmed that the Taliban had visited Tehran for a second round of talks on ending the conflict in

Afghanistan; the Taliban said they discussed Afghanistan's "post-occupation situation" with the Iranians. Then on Wednesday, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said during a visit to India that the Taliban must have a role, but not a "dominant" one, in Afghanistan's future. Iran's top diplomat also acknowledged that his country has "unofficial intelligence" contacts with the Taliban, adding

that the Islamist group occupies areas by the border between Iran and Afghanistan.

Senior Afghan government officials took great offense to Zarif's comments. "If Iran believes in talks, it should pay attention to its domestic problems," Shah

Hossein Mortazavi, deputy spokesperson of the Afghan president, wrote in a Facebook post that was later deleted. "These days they [Iran's Foreign Ministry] act in the role of Taliban spokesmen."

"Certainly, such statements create division between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and this would have a negative impact on our



Our Iranian friends; we may or may not bring in Taliban. But thank you for your advice. To reciprocate the neighborly goodwill, I call on you to share power with Mujaheddin Khalq and NCRI, release Karobi and Musavi and make peace with Saudi. Because we believe it is good for you.

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355 people are talking about this

relations," added Sibghatullah Ahmadi, spokesman for the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Afghanistan's ambassador to Italy also criticized Zarif's comments, employing not-so-subtle sarcasm.

Our Iranian friends; we may or may not bring in Taliban. But thank you for your advice. To reciprocate the neighborly goodwill, I call on you to share power with Mujaheddin Khalq and NCRI, release Karobi and Musavi and make peace with Saudi. Because we believe it is good for you.

The U.S. has sought to force the Taliban to negotiate a peace settlement with the Afghan government. But the Taliban, which refers to itself as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, has consistently rejected talks with Kabul. The group seeks to topple the American-backed Afghan government and to re-impose strict Islamic law in Afghanistan as it existed under their totalitarian rule before the U.S. ousted them in 2001. That outcome does not seem so far-fetched now that the Taliban is engaged in diplomatic talks with an array of global powers, including the United States, and has the upper hand militarily.

Iran's recent comments on the Taliban are significant; in the past, Tehran has denied links to the group. It seems that, following reports indicating President Donald Trump wants to withdraw American forces from Afghanistan, Iran sees a golden opportunity to have a more public partnership with the Taliban and secure its interests inside the war-torn country.

Iran and the Taliban had a relationship before 9/11 that included arms sales, even as both sides were bitter rivals. Since 9/11, however, Tehran has helped the Taliban in numerous ways, especially in recent years. As I previously wrote:

Since American troops entered Afghanistan in 2001, Iran has given consistent financial support to the Taliban, which has only increased in recent months as [the Islamic State] has moved into Afghanistan.

In Today's Democratic Party, Identity Politics Can Provide Cover for Anti-Semitism

By Bari Weiss

nytimes.com

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Ilhan Omar and the old Jewish conspiracy theories.

In 2012, during one of Israel's periodic wars with Hamas in Gaza, Ilhan Omar, at the time a 32-year-old nutrition coordinator with the Minnesota Department of Education, tweeted the following: "Israel has hypnotized the world, may Allah awaken the people and help them see the evil doings of Israel. #Gaza #Palestine #Israel"

The sentence has dogged Ms. Omar, a refugee from Somalia who last year became one of the first Muslim women elected to Congress and was just seated on the influential House Foreign Affairs Committee. On Thursday, CNN's Poppy Harlow pressed her again: "I wonder just what your message is this morning as the first on our Game Changer series to Jewish-Americans who find that deeply offensive."

"That's a really regrettable way of expressing that," Ms. Omar said of the anchor's question. "I don't know how my comments would be offensive to Jewish

Iranian military support, however, began before the invasion, and the lethal assistance continues today to be used against coalition forces. WikiLeaks documents from 2005-06 show that Iran also offered bounties for the murder of members of the Afghan government and NATO soldiers while [Iran's Islamic] Revolutionary Guard Corps assisted Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a leader of a prominent jihadist group in Afghanistan, to carryout terror attacks.

Iran is even using its own military academies to provide hundreds of Taliban fighters with advanced training, according to reports. Moreover, some high-ranking Taliban leaders even live in Iran.

Iran continues this support while maintaining ties with Kabul, hedging its bets to position itself well for various outcomes inside Afghanistan.

There are many reasons the Islamic Republic supports the Taliban, such as fighting the Islamic State, issues concerning water, and the fact that Afghanistan borders Iran and can pose a threat if unstable, among others. But the most important reason for Washington is that both Iran and the Taliban share an interest in forcing the Americans to leave Afghanistan. Iran is very concerned about American bases in Afghanistan and uses Afghanistan as a way to exert pressure on Washington as needed. If the U.S. wants the war in Afghanistan to end in a peaceful way, it must counter Iran's support to the Taliban—support that perpetuates the conflict.

Analysts and commentators have made several valid arguments about why an American withdrawal from Afghanistan, even a partial one, would carry serious costs. Indeed, one cannot argue that a return to a pre-9/11 Afghanistan, a very real possibility, serves the U.S. well in any way. Another reason less often discussed is that an American retreat—which is the right word to use—would be a victory for Iran.

Americans. My comments precisely are addressing what was happening during the Gaza War and I'm clearly speaking about the way the Israeli regime was conducting itself in that war."

Perhaps Ms. Omar is sincerely befuddled and not simply deflecting. Because sentiments like these, once beyond the pale of our public discourse, are being heard with greater frequency and volume these days, allow me to explain why this Jewish American, and almost every Jewish American I know, found her words so offensive.

The conspiracy theory of the Jew as the hypnotic conspirator, the duplicitous manipulator, the sinister puppeteer is one with ancient roots and a bloody history. In the New Testament, it is a small band of Jews who get Rome — then the greatest power in the world — to do their bidding by killing Christ. Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, speaks to the Jews about Jesus in the book of John: "Take him yourselves and judge him according to

your own law.” But the Jews punt the decision back to Pilate: “We are not permitted to put anyone to death.” And so Pilate does the deed on their behalf. In the book of Matthew, the implications of this manipulation are spelled out: “His blood is on us and our children,” the Jews say — a line that has been so historically destructive that even Mel Gibson cut it from his “Passion of the Christ.”

In the two millenniums that followed, even after 1965, when the Catholic Church formally disavowed the belief that the Jews killed Jesus, this was the template for the anti-Semitic conspiracy: the ability of this tiny minority to use its wiles and its proximity to power to con others into accomplishing their evil ends. It has led to countless expulsions, murders, massacres and pogroms throughout Europe and elsewhere.

The Jewish power to hypnotize the world, as Ms. Omar put it, is the plot of *Jud Süß* — the most successful Nazi film ever made. In the film, produced by Joseph Goebbels himself, Josef Süß Oppenheimer, an 18th-century religious Jew, emerges from the ghetto, makes himself over as an assimilated man, and rises to become the treasurer to the Duke of Württemberg. Silly duke: Allowing a single Jew into his city leads to death and destruction.

After seeing the final cut of the film, in August 1940, Goebbels wrote in his diary: “An anti-Semitic film of the kind we could only wish for. I am happy about it.” And no wonder: It premiered at the Venice Film Festival, where it received the Golden Lion Award. By some estimates, more than 20 million people saw it.

Since then, the myth of the wily Jewish manipulator of those in power continues to persist in various forms. During the Iraq War, it became common to blame Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz and Doug Feith — Bush administration figures who happened to be Jewish — for a military campaign that had been ordered by George W. Bush, Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld. In the 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump blamed “globalists” with names like Lloyd Blankfein and George Soros for America’s economic woes.

But the biggest “Jew” today in the demonology of modern anti-Semitism is the Jewish state, Israel. While there are perfectly legitimate criticisms that one can make of Israel or the actions of its government — and I have never been shy about making them — those criticisms cross the line into anti-Semitism when they ascribe evil, almost supernatural powers to Israel in a manner that replicates classic anti-Semitic slanders.

During the weeklong November 2012 war, which began when Hamas fired roughly 100 rockets at civilian targets, Israel “hypnotized” nobody. It was subject to the usual barrage of intense criticism in the news media and at the United Nations, and from the leaders of other nations, not to mention protesters across the world. That Israel continues to retain support in the United States among mainstream Democrats and Republicans is because —

contrary to Ms. Omar’s tweet — the Jewish state is not engaged in “evil doings,” but defending itself against the enemies pressing on all of its borders, including Hamas, which has genocide of the Jews, and a belief in Jewish manipulative power, at the heart of its ideology. The original Hamas charter from 1988, only recently revised, claimed that the Jews orchestrated the French and Russian revolutions and both world wars.

Those who call themselves anti-Zionists usually insist they are not anti-Semites. But I struggle to see what else to call an ideology that seeks to eradicate only one state in the world — the one that happens to be the Jewish one — while empathetically insisting on the rights of self-determination for every other minority. Israeli Jews, descended in equal parts from people displaced from Europe and the Islamic world, are barely 6.5 million of the world’s 7.7 billion people. What is it about them, exactly, that puts them beyond the pale?

During that interview with CNN, Ms. Omar also tried to defend another of her controversial tweets, this one from last Tuesday, suggesting that Senator Lindsey Graham, the South Carolina Republican, was being blackmailed. Many people read this as an insinuation that he is gay and closeted, and someone was threatening to out him. Her evidence? She had none. But it was in keeping with her predilection for making accusations based on nothing more than prejudiced stereotypes.

Democrats may want to believe that such conspiracy thinking is the domain of the Republican Party. But Ms. Omar’s comments are proof that no party has a monopoly on speciousness.

The particular challenge in the case of Ms. Omar is that she is exactly the kind of politician a vast majority of American Jews, who overwhelmingly vote Democratic and who have long aligned themselves with liberal causes, want to celebrate: Here is a refugee, a mother, a Muslim and a woman of color — the first woman of color to represent Minnesota in Congress. It’s no wonder she has already landed on the cover of *Time* magazine and in front of Annie Leibovitz’s camera. Who wouldn’t cheer her on?

Indeed, some Jews have insisted that we ought to hold back from criticizing people of color who have recently exposed their anti-Semitism (Tamika Mallory, Marc Lamont Hill) because, well, it’s just not a good look to be criticizing leaders of the black community right now.

This is an untenable position, especially in a moment when the F.B.I. is sounding the alarm about the spike in hate crimes against Jews. Ms. Omar now sits on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, where she’ll represent a growing intellectual climate that sees Jews as bearers both of monstrous moral guilt and of the secret power to conceal it. It may be more difficult to call out those who ought to be our friends and political allies, but alas for the Jews, not all anti-Semites carry tiki torches

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Everybody loses from the left's false narrative about Netanyahu

By Evelyn Gordon

jns.org

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as two Israeli leftists recently admitted, is far more moderate than his hardline image. But by portraying him as an extremist, the left has tarnished Israel among both American Jews and the Democratic Party.

It's easy to see why political polarization is so bitter today in both Israel and America these days: Moderation is a "lose-lose" proposition, winning politicians no credit from their opponents while alienating elements of their own base. This problem exists on both sides of the aisle. But two unusually candid left-wing assessments of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu provide a particularly clear example of how it works and why it's bad for both sides.

In an interview with Haaretz last month, senior opposition politician Tzipi Livni noted (as I have repeatedly) that Netanyahu built very little in the settlements during his 10 years in office. "Why hasn't Netanyahu built up until now? Because he gets it," she said, referring to the Palestinian issue.

Moreover, she continued, "Bibi will not go out and start a war. In that respect, he is responsible."

His problem, she charged, is that he's under pressure from his rightist base on various issues, and sometimes, "he caves in to them. I'll say it again, it isn't him. I've spent hundreds of hours with him [as justice minister in the previous Netanyahu government, in which she was responsible for diplomatic negotiations]—his actual positions are different."

What makes this astounding is that Livni and her compatriots on the left have spent most of the past decade saying exactly the opposite—that Netanyahu is responsible for massive settlement construction, that he's anti-peace. And this has serious real-world consequences.

The first and worst is that this narrative, which Livni now admits is false, has been widely embraced by American Jews and the Democratic Party. That's bad for Israel as a whole, as it has contributed to growing anti-Israel sentiment among both groups.

To be clear, I don't think either group's alienation stems primarily from Israel's policies, whether real or alleged. Nevertheless, had prominent Israeli leftists told the truth—that Netanyahu was doing very little settlement building, that his "actual positions" are far from his hardline image—it might have slowed the process.

Second, this false narrative hurts leftists themselves since it impedes Netanyahu's ability to adopt policies they favor. Many such policies, like the dearth of settlement construction, are indeed very unpopular with his base, but he could justify them if they were achieving something important for Israel, like maintaining its bipartisan support in America.

In reality, however, they don't achieve anything. For instance, despite his restraint on settlements, the Obama

administration repeatedly accused him of "aggressive" settlement construction, with full-throated backing from Israeli leftists. That makes it impossible for Netanyahu to justify restraint to his unhappy base, which is precisely why he sometimes "caves in to them."

Finally, this false narrative hinders his ability to form a broader-based government. Far from being the "right-wing extremist" leftists term him, Netanyahu is a center-rightist, and he desperately wanted the Labor Party in his current government to balance the right-wing parties. But after months of negotiations with former Labor Chairman Isaac Herzog, it became clear that Herzog had no support for such a move within his own party. So Netanyahu ultimately brought in the right-wing Yisrael Beiteinu instead.

Nor is this surprising. Having told its own voters for years that Netanyahu was anti-democratic and anti-peace, Labor would have trouble persuading them that joining the government was justified. But had it instead told the truth about issues like Netanyahu's settlement restraint and diplomatic moderation, joining the government (and thereby pulling it further to the left) might have been an option.

Two days after Livni's interview ran, Jerusalem Post columnist Susan Hattis Rolef, who has worked for various senior Labor politicians, published a column lamenting that "in the past Netanyahu could be trusted to block legislative proposals that were blatantly undemocratic," but today, he "no longer seems to bother himself with acting as a barrier against threats to democracy coming from the direction of his own coalition."

Here, too, what's shocking is that Rolef and her compatriots on the left have spent the last decade saying exactly the opposite. Netanyahu has indeed allowed legislation in his current term that he would previously have quashed (most of which isn't actually undemocratic, but that's a separate argument). Nevertheless, the claim that he's responsible for "anti-democratic" legislation didn't just arise this term; prominent leftists have accused him of that for the last 10 years, even though, as Rolef now admits, he spent most of those years blocking proposals the left considered "anti-democratic."

Again, the damage is threefold. First and worst, the false narrative that Israel is becoming increasingly undemocratic has contributed to growing anti-Israel sentiment among American Jews and the Democratic Party.

Second, it hurts leftists themselves, by reducing Netanyahu's ability to adopt policies they would prefer. It's hard for him to justify killing legislation his base supports unless doing so achieves something useful for the country. But in fact, his years of quashing bills the left disliked accomplished nothing since Israeli leftists still accused his

government of being anti-democratic, and American Jews and non-Jewish leftists believed them.

Finally, this false narrative impedes his ability to form a broader-based government. Had Labor joined the government, it would have been able to kill any legislation it considered undemocratic, as coalition agreements usually give every party veto power over issues particularly important to it. But after falsely telling its voters for years that Netanyahu himself was anti-democratic, how could it justify doing so?

Many of the same evils obviously derive from Israeli rightists' favorite trick of calling left-wing opponents "anti-Zionist," though most Israeli leftists are no such thing.

An Israeli Scandal Involving Judicial Appointments Results from a Fundamentally Flawed System

By Yitzhak Ram

israelhayom.com

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Elected officials should choose judges in a transparent process.

Very few public bodies have more influence over our lives than the Judicial Selection Committee. The litigiousness of public life in Israel has made judges main players in the social and public sphere, and courtrooms have become the primary arenas for sorting out public disagreements. The Supreme Court has assumed the authority to torpedo democratic decisions and political compromises.

Due to the interpretive doctrine currently pervading the country's higher courts, laws cease to have meaning in and of themselves. It is the interpreter of the law who gives it its meaning, a meaning often completely unrelated to the intention and desires of the lawmakers who drafted it. Today, the monopoly on legislative interpretation belongs to the court, whose judges are appointed by a nine-member committee which works behind closed doors to perpetuate that same monopoly.

All power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. When such immense power is put into the hands of so very few, corruption becomes probable. However, public life is not possible without a governmental entity operated by human beings. In democratic societies, therefore, mechanisms are created to limit and monitor the government, to mitigate the concerns over potential corruption. One of these mechanisms is transparency. Sunlight, according to former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, is the best of disinfectant; electric light the most efficient policeman. Even the most corrupt individuals will pause before daring to display open contempt for the public.

The Judicial Selection Committee is the civilian body most shielded from the sunlight. Its hearings are closed and its protocols secret. In a ruling from 2008, then-Justice Esther Hayut said the Judicial Selection Committee was not a "public authority" under the Freedom of Information Law, and therefore was not bound by it. Even if it were bound by the law, said the future Supreme Court president, there were still no grounds to open its hearings to the public due to the sensitive nature of the discussions. Furthermore, said Hayut, it was important to allow the

Inter alia, the false narrative that anti-Zionism is widespread on the Israeli left helps legitimize anti-Zionism as a normative left-wing position overseas.

But since Netanyahu has led Israel for the last decade, the greatest damage has come from the left's false narratives about his beliefs and conduct. And in the end, everyone has lost by it. Netanyahu, and by extension the entire center-right, has been unjustly tarred as anti-democratic and anti-peace. The left has forfeited its ability to block policies it opposes and promote those it supports. And Israel as a whole has seen its image overseas undeservedly tarnished.

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participants to express themselves freely, without fear of their comments becoming public fodder.

The concentration of power in the hands of a small committee that operates behind a thick curtain is an invitation for corruption, nepotism, cronyism and other underhanded dealings. And while these are certainly unfortunate and regrettable aspects of life in the political arena, it is truly sickening when purportedly apolitical players get in on the act.

The makeup of the Judicial Selection Committee gives the judges a built-in advantage – they comprise one-third of the committee; they don't have to deal with a coalition or an opposition and they vote as one. Indeed, from the time the committee was established until recently, the judges aggressively determined all appointments. Via the "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" system, uniformity of thought has pervaded the Supreme Court, such that its monopoly over legal interpretation and principles has become almost entirely hegemonic.

Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked wanted to diversify the panel of Supreme Court justices. She had to choose between changing the system and a tactical fight over specific appointments. Changing the system was a strategic matter, and when she chose not to pursue that path, she had to find allies on the Judicial Selection Committee who could help her override the judges' influence. Representatives of the Israel Bar Association were these allies.

The criticism over the well-intentioned alliance between the justice minister and Effi Naveh, head of the Israel Bar Association, misses the main problem. The alliance itself isn't the issue, nor is the corruption. The corruption is just the result. The real problem is the structure of a system that permits and encourages personal corruption on one hand and empowers the opportunistic and corrupt individuals on the other.

To overcome the crisis of corruption and ensure diversity of interpretive thought and principle in the legal system, it is not enough to forge alliances on the existing committee. The system itself has to be changed – this pernicious committee has to be terminated; appointment

power must be taken away from the judges; and judges should be appointed by elected officials in an open and

The Women's March Follows Farrakhan off a Cliff

By Elliot Kaufman

Its leaders' anti-Semitism drives off the Democratic Party and the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Saturday's Women's March was much smaller than the original, held in 2017. It was notable not only because far fewer showed up but for who stayed away. The Democratic Party disavowed its partnership with the march, as did the Southern Poverty Law Center, Emily's List, the Human Rights Campaign, NARAL, the Center for American Progress and hundreds of other liberal interest groups. The march had 550 official partners in 2018 and less than half as many this year. One by one, the pink hats came off.

What happened? The group that yelled loudest about Mr. Trump's bigotry was brought low by bigotry of its own. Tablet reported last month that at the first meeting to organize the Women's March, four days after Mr. Trump's election, two of the group's leaders, Carmen Perez and Tamika Mallory, insisted that, in the reporters' paraphrase, "Jewish people bore a special collective responsibility as exploiters of black and brown people" and were leaders of the slave trade. Vanessa Wruble, a key organizer who is Jewish, told reporters Ms. Perez and Ms. Mallory later berated her: "You people hold all the wealth." Ms. Wruble was pushed out of Women's March Inc. by late January 2017.

So were other early organizers, leaving Ms. Perez, Ms. Mallory, Linda Sarsour and Mari Lynn Foulger, who calls herself Bob Bland, as co-chairmen. The four were the toast of the "resistance," drawing effusions from prominent Democrats. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand called them "the suffragists of our time." Nancy Pelosi praised them as "courageous." The American Civil Liberties Union's magazine lauded Ms. Sarsour as a "leader in the truest form of the word." The ACLU is still a march sponsor, as are the Planned Parenthood Action Fund and the American Federation of Teachers—never mind that three of the four co-chairmen admire Louis Farrakhan.

The Nation of Islam leader makes an unlikely feminist. In one sermon, he ranted about "lazy women" who "don't

Arafat's Decades-Long Alliance with Iran and Its Consequences for Both Palestinians and Iranians

By Tony Badran

A relationship that predates the 1979 revolution.

This is a story about two people going to jail and the countries sending them there. Both are Palestinians and were sentenced on Monday in courts separated by an hour's drive. Jamil Tamimi was sent down for 18 years at Jerusalem district court, in Israel, for the murder of British student Hannah Bladon. Bladon, a religious studies undergraduate at Birmingham university, was in Israel on an exchange programme. On Good Friday 2017, she was riding the Jerusalem light rail to church when Tamimi stabbed her seven times with a seven-inch knife. The frenzied assault stopped only when the other passengers

transparent process, per the norm in Western democracies. *Mr. Ram is a jurist.*

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want to get in the damn kitchen and cook." He is also infamous for his anti-Semitism, including the canard about Jews and the slave trade. In that regard at least, the three Women's March leaders find in him a kindred spirit.

Ms. Sarsour has asserted that Zionists can't be feminists and that "some folks . . . always choose their allegiance to Israel over their commitment to democracy and free speech." She spoke at a 2015 rally a New York Times columnist described as a "pageant for Farrakhan" and has bragged that she has Nation of Islam bodyguards. Throughout 2016 Ms. Mallory and Ms. Perez shared a steady stream of Farrakhan quotes and video clips on Instagram. In November 2016 Ms. Perez posted a picture of herself holding hands with Mr. Farrakhan. Ms. Sarsour commented: "God bless him."

In May 2017—four months after the first Women's March—Ms. Mallory posted her own picture with Mr. Farrakhan, calling him the "GOAT," an acronym for "greatest of all time." Mallory attended a Farrakhan speech in February 2018 in which he denounced Jews as "children of the devil" and gave her a nice personal mention.

Hoping to save the good name of the Women's March, liberals pleaded with its leaders to condemn and abandon Mr. Farrakhan. They wouldn't—not in 2017 or 2018, and not last week, when Ms. Mallory was questioned about it on "The View."

"I called him the greatest of all time because of what he has done in black communities," Ms. Mallory said. "Just because you go into a space with someone does not mean you agree with everything they say."

The remaining supporters of the Women's March—including the Democratic Party until last week—keep telling themselves they can compartmentalize the anti-Semitism and join, praise or even fund the march despite it. The implication is that it's OK to be anti-Semitic as long as you're for the left. That was the message of this year's Women's March.

Mr. Kaufman is the Journal's Joseph Rago Memorial Fellow.

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managed to overpower him. Hannah was taken to hospital but died soon after arrival. She was 21 years old.

The murder bore all the markers of a terrorist attack. In fact, Tamimi had just been released from a psychiatric hospital and is thought to have been attempting 'suicide-by-cop' — slaying the student in the hopes a responding police officer would shoot him dead. He was charged with murder but reportedly reached a plea bargain with prosecutors on the grounds of mental illness, reducing his sentence from life to 18 years. 'This was not a terrorist incident,' the prosecutor told the court. 'This was a terrible murder carried out by a mentally ill person.' In a statement,

Hannah's family protested the leniency of the sentence, saying 'it makes no difference whether this was a terror attack or just another crazed murderer'.

Our second convict is Issam Akel, and he did get a life sentence. He was convicted at Ramallah high court, in the Palestinian-run section of the West Bank, of attempting to sell land to a Jew. Akel was also sentenced to hard labour for the transaction, which involved property in Jerusalem's Old City. He actually got off lightly; selling land to a Jew carries the death penalty under Palestinian law. Fortunately for him, he also holds US citizenship and the state department is reportedly working to extradite him. If you get your news from the BBC, you might have missed this story, what with it not appearing to merit a single word on the corporation's website. Happily, there was space on the Middle East page for a puff piece on Kholoud Nassar, 'a Palestinian Instagrammer in the Gaza Strip [who] wants to show us a different side of life there'.

When Tamimi and Akel stood to hear their sentences on Monday, the world got to hear — if it chooses to listen — two countries with two very different values systems. But it seems we are on the periphery of the only Middle East territory nobody wants to occupy: The Land of Awkward Facts. Isn't saying Israel and the Palestinians have different values perilously close to saying one country's values are superior to the other's? It is and they are, as these two convictions underline. There is racism at work here but it doesn't lie in preferring the society that produced the sentence given to Jamil Tamimi to the one that jailed Issam Akel. Israel showed leniency to a vulnerable person who committed a horrific crime. The Palestinians showed no mercy to a member of their own population who committed the crime of selling real estate to a Jew. The primary victims of the Arabs' century-long war against a Jewish homeland have been the Arabs themselves. They don't just miss opportunities for co-existence, they jail them.

And we avert our eyes and let them get on with it. To do otherwise would mean confronting awkward facts that might disturb safe certainties. Why talk about the Palestinians jailed for selling land to Jews when we can demand Israel release the Palestinians jailed for killing Jews? Why talk about the stipends paid to the families of terrorists who murder Israelis when we can condemn Israel for the security fence built to stop the terrorists getting in? Why talk about the Palestinians' insistence that the West Bank be rendered Jew-free before they pledge to accept a state there when we can repudiate Israel's cunning scheme to 'Judaize' Judea? Why talk about Mahmoud

For Turkey, U.S. Exit From Syria Is an Opportunity—and a Risk

By Yaroslav Trofimov

wsj.com

For Turkey, U.S. Exit From Syria Is an Opportunity—and a Risk

President Trump's abrupt decision to withdraw U.S. troops from east Syria, transferring the region to Turkish

Abbas, the moderate Palestinian president, and his explicit, on-the-record, even book-length distortions of the Holocaust and Zionism when we can decry Netanyahu's chauvinism and alliances with fellow chauvinists? Why, in short, face up to the real 'obstacles to peace' when we can pretend building houses in the West Bank is what's really holding things back?

Interrogating Palestinian politics, culture and social attitudes terrifies liberal souls because we might find things we don't like. Things like Issam Akel's sentence. Like jihad-themed kindergarten graduations. Like rocket launchers set up in civilian areas. Things that can't be willed away with a sombre head shake and a plea to 'both sides'. Things that might lead us to question the Palestinians' interest in peace. Question our entire approach to the conflict since at least 1967. Question the viability, or even desirability, of a Palestinian state.

I've always railed against liberal blindness and hypocrisy on Palestinian extremism as a product of anti-Israel bias. I'm not so sure anymore. I'm starting to wonder if the real bias is against the Palestinians. We expect Israel to operate like Belgium south of Beirut and castigate it for failing to live up to our values (or what we claim to be our values). We expect almost nothing of the Palestinians, and certainly not for them to conduct their affairs as we do (or tell ourselves we do). In Jerusalem, we see Boers; in Ramallah, Zulus. This is not pro-Israel — it is based on the myth of Israel as a white European colonial enterprise — but it is flagrantly anti-Palestinian. Yes, these two cultures are distinct (though there is a deal of crossover). Yes, Palestinian culture has a lot of work to do to catch up on democracy, human rights, minority rights, and much else besides. But none of this is inherent to being Palestinian; these are political and social values and they, and the cultures that espouse them, can change. This, however, is at odds with the underlying assumptions of Western policy on the Middle East in which Israeli misdeeds are aberrations to be condemned and corrected while Palestinian misdeeds are shrugged off, excused or justified. This is just who they are.

The sentiment is sympathy but the logic is pure bigotry. We are not friends of the Palestinians. We are not lending them solidarity by indulging their outrages. We are treating them like savages from an Edgar Wallace adventure, benighted but noble in their own way, wide-eyed grateful to the white man for understanding their backwardness. There is your racism. Issam Akel is going to jail for selling land to a Jew and our hearts break for his jailers because they couldn't possibly know any better.

December 25, 2018

military control, goes beyond the wildest expectations of Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

For Mr. Erdogan, this may also turn into an example of the need to be careful what you wish for.

Turkey, which was angling to seize from U.S.-backed Syrian Kurdish forces a much more modest swath of land along its southern frontier, could now become the pivotal power in Syria, establishing a protectorate over a vast and oil-rich territory.

Already, Mr. Erdogan is seeing his ambitions for regional leadership validated by the White House, as Turkey turns from the target of frequent American criticism (and even economic sanctions) to an indispensable partner in Syria and beyond. Mr. Trump even accepted an invitation from Mr. Erdogan to visit Turkey in 2019.

“It’ will be a game-changer for the region if the U.S. and Turkey were to start working as partners,” said Hassan Hassan, a Syria specialist at the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy in Washington. “If the U.S. wants to do something about Iran, it needs a partner in the Middle East—and this partner is Turkey, not Saudi Arabia.”

Turkey, with NATO’s second-largest army and sophisticated diplomatic and intelligence services, certainly has more ability to project power than Mr. Trump’s initial ally of choice in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia. That’s especially so after the Saudi monarchy’s image in Washington, and the region, was stained by the kingdom’s assassination of Jamal Khashoggi, the affair that could still spur Congressional punishment of Riyadh.

Yet, the Syria expansion also takes Turkey into a period of new, and to a large extent unpredictable, risks just as its economy starts to emerge from a currency crisis. In addition to confronting the Kurds, Turkey will also likely have to contend with Syria’s Sunni Arab areas where sympathies for Islamic State extremists still linger.

“If the U.S. is fully withdrawing and Turkey is asked to take over all these areas, it will be too much. Even the U.S. could not do it all by itself—there will need to be local forces supporting the Turkish military, and other actors will have to be standing by Turkey,” said independent Turkish lawmaker Ozturk Yilmaz, the country’s former consul-general in Mosul who was held hostage by Islamic State in 2014.

In fact, Turkey may end up cutting a deal with Russia and the Syrian regime to take over only part of the territory that the U.S. will vacate—and leaving alone the most troublesome zones, such as Raqqa and lands further south. Mr. Erdogan said Tuesday he will soon be meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss how to confront the consequences of Mr. Trump’s decision.

“It is certainly more than the Turkish side had hoped for,” said Ahmet Kasim Han, a professor at Altinbas University in Istanbul. “But it still remains a Turkish prerogative how deep its operation should go, and how long for.”

Mr. Trump, for his part, has tweeted that Mr. Erdogan promised him “to eradicate whatever is left” of Islamic State in Syria—an expectation that Turkey, rather than Iran or Russia, would be responsible for eliminating the militant group’s remnants.

There are many potential pitfalls that could scuttle Turkey’s Syria ambitions and undermine the unfolding realignment of America’s Middle East policy. The biggest unknown is what the YPG Syrian Kurdish forces who currently control eastern Syria—and who would prefer virtually anyone but the Turks to replace American troops—will do in coming weeks.

Turkey views YPG as an existential foe because it is affiliated with the PKK, or Kurdistan Workers’ Party—a movement that has waged a secessionist war in eastern Turkey for decades, and that is classified as terrorist by Ankara and Washington alike. Mr. Erdogan has been sending more troops and tanks to its border with Syria along Kurdish-held areas in recent days.

The American withdrawal doesn’t automatically open the path to a Turkish invasion into Syria’s Kurdish enclave, cautioned Ertugrul Kurkcu, a former Turkish lawmaker and honorary chairman of HDP, the pro-Kurdish party in Turkey’s parliament. Following Mr. Trump’s decision, Russia, Iran and the Syrian regime have become “the new interlocutors for the Kurds to negotiate their and Syria’s future,” he said, as the Kurds seek “to protect their political and social gains in the east of Euphrates.”

U.S. troops have forged close bonds with these Kurdish fighters in the common fight against Islamic State since 2014, and have come to view YPG fighters as allies and comrades-in-arms. That was one reason why Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and the presidential envoy on fighting Islamic State, Brett McGurk, resigned in protest against Mr. Trump’s pullout decision.

The flip side of that shift is a dramatic improvement in America’s ties with Turkey.

“The U.S. withdrawal is eliminating the most egregious irritant in bilateral relations—U.S. support for YPG,” said Sinan Ulgen, a former Turkish diplomat and head of the Edam think tank in Istanbul. “This will vastly improve relations and defuse the prevailing anti-American rhetoric in Turkey.”

In another perhaps unintended consequence, the planned withdrawal could also torpedo Turkey’s rapprochement with Russia and Iran that began, in part, as Ankara’s response to the cold shoulder it received from the Obama administration and, until recently, Mr. Trump.

“Turkey’s cooperation with Iran and Russia is a matter of convenience,” said Yasar Yakis, who served as one of Mr. Erdogan’s foreign ministers. “And their interests in Syria overlap only occasionally.”