

# Tough Love?

The Future of U.S.-Israel Relations



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# FOREWORD

Anniversaries are welcome opportunities to reflect on our past and recalibrate the present. The year 2015 marks the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the end of World War II, as well as the 50th anniversary of German-Israeli diplomatic relations. We commemorate these anniversaries at a critical moment in the relations between Israel and its most important allies — the United States and Germany.

Both Germany and the U.S. have, for different historical reasons, a special relationship to Israel characterized by close political, economic, and military ties. While both relationships have so far remained largely intact, subtle but substantial changes are underway: In Europe, the public mood is turning increasingly skeptical toward Israel and the occupation of the Palestinian Territories, and relations between President Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu have reached a historic low. And while public support of Israel has traditionally been much stronger in the U.S. than it has in Europe, young Americans today are growing increasingly critical of Israel.

This dossier highlights various aspects of change and continuity in U.S.-Israeli relations. Professor Daniel C. Kurtzer,<sup>1</sup> Professor at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University, and Lucy Kurtzer-Ellenbogen,<sup>2</sup> Director of the Arab-Israeli Programs at the United States Institute of Peace, address the current diplomatic storm in U.S.-Israeli relations: Professor Kurtzer comments on the heightened tensions between the current U.S. and Israeli administrations, especially with regard to the Iran nuclear deal, whereas Ms. Kurtzer-Ellenbogen explores if and how the U.S. should continue to engage in the paralyzed Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

The articles by Dahlia Scheindlin,<sup>3</sup> Public Opinion Researcher and contributor at +972 Magazine, and Allan Elsner,<sup>4</sup> Vice President for Communications at J Street, examine the dynamics in popular perceptions:

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1 <http://www.princeton.edu/faculty-research/faculty/dkurtzer>

2 <http://www.usip.org/experts/lucy-kurtzer-ellenbogen>

3 <http://972mag.com/author/dahlias/>

4 <http://jstreet.org/about/staff>

While Allan Elsner focuses on changes underway in the Jewish-American community, Dahlia Scheindlin takes a closer look at shifts in public opinion more generally. Libby Lenkinski,<sup>5</sup> Vice President for Strategy at the New Israel Fund, explores identity politics and approaches to diversity in the U.S. and Israel. Finally, Lara Friedman<sup>6</sup> from Americans for Peace Now evaluates the successes and failures of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) activists, and Professor Dan Rabinowitz<sup>7</sup> from Tel Aviv University formulates a progressive response to the movement.

We hope that this series will serve as a platform for open reflection and critical dialog. Hopefully it can contribute to a deeper understanding of political and social developments under way in the U.S. and Israel that will shape their ties in the future. Ignoring these developments will not serve us, even if we do not like what we see. Changing things for the better always begins with assessing reality for what it is.

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5 <http://www.nif.org/people/libby-lenkinski/>

6 <http://archive.peacenow.org/people/lara-friedman.html>

7 <http://danrabinowitz.net/>

# Weathering the Perfect Diplomatic and Military Storm



Israeli-American relations have always been characterized by sustained, intense cooperation and coordination on security matters and by periodic bouts of intense differences on political and diplomatic matters. Strategic cooperation and U.S. security assistance have continued almost without interruption for more than forty years, despite severe differences of opinion over the Middle East peace process and Israeli occupation practices. Some analysts have assumed that this dichotomous relationship will continue, unaffected by recent sharp differences of view on the Iran nuclear agreement and the introduction of partisan American politics in the equation. But this may not be the case.

Never before has the bilateral relationship been as fraught as it is today, marked by profound differences in strategic outlook vis-à-vis Iran,

chronic differences on the Palestinian issue, and toxic interpersonal relations between the American President and the Israeli Prime Minister. Never before has an Israeli Prime Minister played so directly in American domestic politics, thereby creating a rift in what traditionally has been bipartisan support for Israel in Congress. And never before has the language of the American-Israeli discourse become so polluted with personal invective and undiplomatic slurs.

## Peace or Annexation?

Since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the working assumption in American diplomacy has been that Israel desired peace with the Palestinians, was prepared for substantial territorial and other compromises, expected full recognition of its legitimacy as a state; and needed to be persuaded that its security following a peace settlement would be assured. Acting on these premises, the United States has played an engaged role as third party catalyst and mediator, accepting that peace could only emerge from direct, face to face Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, but also recognizing that the two parties needed help in achieving what was thought to be a shared goal of two states for two peoples.

Over the years, the United States has seen signs pointing to different premises held by the two sides. Persistent Palestinian violence and terrorism and the failure of Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas to negotiate seriously when presented with potentially forthcoming Israeli proposals at Camp David II or in the Annapolis talks gave rise to doubts about Palestinian intentions. Equally, Israeli settlement expansion and occupation practices ran counter to Israeli protestations of interest in peace and gave rise to doubts about Israel's commitment to a two-state outcome. American diplomacy, though led by Secretaries of State and senior envoys, lacked the teeth and backbone to move the two sides off their intransigent and diametrically opposite positions. Despite, this, however, the U.S.-Israeli relationship remained largely unaffected: the United States always condemned Israeli settlement activity and Palestinian terrorism but did nothing else in response. The Israelis and Americans appeared to settle in comfortably to a relationship of rhetorical differences that had little substantive impact on policy.

Today, however, there are significant indicators of change in this dynamic. Secretary of State John Kerry appears interested in resuming



the diplomacy that stalled in 2014, assuming that the violence on the ground subsides and does not morph into a new Palestinian uprising. The Administration may consider some significant policy changes, for example, laying out American “parameters” or terms of reference for negotiations that reflect what has been discussed in the past but which seek to draw the two sides toward narrowing differences on the core issues. The United States may also be considering assigning more importance to the Arab Peace Initiative as a means of injecting a regional component into what has traditionally been a bilateral peace process. The administration may weigh not vetoing a UN Security Council resolution on settlements if Israeli activity intensifies.

It is incorrect to think that any changes in U.S. policy will reflect President Obama’s “legacy” concerns; this is a false argument put forward by opponents of change in U.S. policy. It is equally false to assume that such changes will have a dramatic, positive impact on the prospects for peace. Indeed, in the immediate term, U.S. actions such as these are likely to harden the position of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and possibly lead to negative Israeli responses, such as increased settlement activity. Why, then, might the United States consider doing anything? The simple answer is that the administration may come to the conclusion that only a kind of shock treatment might move the conflict resolution process off dead center. Since neither the Palestinians nor the Israelis are likely to adopt a meaningful initiative in the period ahead, the reasoning goes, it will be up to the United States to shake things up. Whether this shake-up is ensconced in a strategy, or whether it is a one-off tactic remains to be seen.

## **The Iranian “Elephant in the Room”**

Netanyahu’s strident opposition to the Iran nuclear agreement may be abating, as he hinted after his address at the UN General Assembly, but the strains in the U.S.-Israeli relationship attributable to Netanyahu’s tactics are not likely to be reduced soon. To be sure there will be efforts by the Administration and Israel to patch over some differences, and this will be translated into some new security assistance. But the political ties between the two countries and the personal ties between the two leaders are likely to remain deeply fractured at least until Obama and/or Netanyahu retire from office.

This has never before been the case in the U.S.-Israeli relationship. The serious crisis in relations between the Ford and Rabin governments in 1975 was confined to significant differences over the negotiations on a second Sinai disengagement agreement. It took several months to work through the substantive issues and to smooth a solution via U.S. assurances, but there is no evidence that personal animosities got in the way of a solution.

Israel did not consider President Jimmy Carter a friend, and Carter's vocal opposition to Israeli settlements and his affection for Egyptian President Sadat did not endear him to Prime Minister Begin or the Israeli people. Here, too, the interpersonal relations did not get in the way of positive outcomes either at the 1978 Camp David summit or the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli treaty, in both cases facilitated by Carter's direct mediation.

The relationship between Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and the Bush 41 administration was rocky at times, and there was a major blow-up between President George H.W. Bush and Shamir in 1991 over the question of whether Israeli settlement activity should be curbed as a condition for U.S. loan guarantees to resettle Soviet Jewish immigrants in Israel. The fight went public when Shamir tried to reach over the president's head to secure Congressional funding; Bush pushed back and gained Congress' support to defer the issue. While the interpersonal relationships suffered as a result, Secretary of State James Baker — who was considered by the pro-Israel community to be hostile to Israel — reported later that he maintained a cordial relationship with Shamir at the time and afterwards.

Thus, although personal animosities came into play in earlier U.S.-Israeli crises, the current situation is unprecedented in that the two sides have failed to compartmentalize the problem and insulate the larger bilateral relationship from serious damage. By conspiring with the Republicans in Congress, behind the president's back, to arrange a Netanyahu speech to a joint session of Congress at which he attacked the impending Iran deal, Netanyahu not only set a collision course with the president but also made support for Israel a partisan issue. This was made clear when 56 Democratic members of Congress, including eight Senators, boycotted Netanyahu's speech in protest over the way the speech was arranged. Of these, almost all members of the Black caucus boycotted, adding a further dimension in the partisan strain caused by Netanyahu's actions.

## Prospects for Improvement

The prospects for real improvement in the relationship are mixed. As noted, the two countries are likely to agree on a package of security measures to help Israel feel more secure during the period of implementation of the Iran agreement. But the negotiations over this security assistance could itself exacerbate problems in relations. For example, some pro-Israel policy thinkers advocate providing Israel with so-called massive ordnance penetrators — huge bunker busters — and B-52 bombers to deliver them. Reaction to this proposal has been swift and negative from many who argue that Israel does not want these weapons and that it makes no sense to provide Israel with the means to attack Iranian sites while the U.S. is intent on ensuring Iranian compliance with the nuclear agreement would be self-defeating.

Even if differences over the security assistance package can be managed and overcome, Israel's metrics for measuring Iranian compliance with the agreement's provisions are very likely to be far more stringent than those of the United States and its negotiating allies. This will exacerbate strains in the bilateral relationship almost daily. Furthermore, Iranian aggressive actions in the Middle East — support for the Assad regime in Syria and for the Houthis in Yemen and for Hezbollah in Lebanon — will assure a steady diet of Israeli actions and words, including demands that the United States sanction Iran and pull out of the nuclear agreement. Netanyahu's address to the United Nations General Assembly indicated no signs of letting up in his effort to scuttle the agreement.

## Weathering the Storm

There are some who believe the U.S.-Israeli relationship is too deeply rooted to fail, in view of the persistent popular support for Israel among the American public and the dynamics of a political system that gives leverage to one-issue lobbies and major individual donors. In the short term, this is likely to be the case. However, if the United States and Israel try to paper over differences in policy — with respect to either Iran or the peace process — it will only be a matter of time until the next crisis in relations. Indeed, only a firmer strategic understanding between the countries, including on how to advance peace with the Palestinians, will help ensure the continued vitality of the bilateral relationship.

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# Dead End or New Beginning: U.S. Engagement on the Israeli- Palestinian Peace Process



The Israeli-Palestinian conflict arena is once again beset with violence. The parties have retrenched to recriminations and hardline positions, and once again the U.S. faces the question of how to get things back “on track.” The latest derailment of diplomacy has left an unclear road ahead. Those in the Israeli and Palestinian peace camps have largely reached the conclusion that peace will not be possible under their current leaderships, and with a year left of the Obama administration, a question arises whether bold moves by the U.S. to revive diplomacy will help.

Beyond personalities is the issue of process. The U.S.-mediated bilateral negotiation approach is a well-worn path, yet amid the simmering violence,

Israelis and Palestinians are further from peace today than they were when the Oslo process began. Israeli and Palestinian societies alike are internally and bitterly divided. While the conventional wisdom long held that a two-state solution was supported by a majority of the Israeli and Palestinian publics, the margin of that majority has steadily shrunk. The publics are moving on — whether through affirmative ideology or passive resignation. Additionally, a growing chorus of Israeli right-wing politicians — including those inside Prime Minister Netanyahu’s cabinet — now reject the desirability of two states and the land-for-peace formula.

## Two-state Endgame as Vital U.S. Interest

Notwithstanding shrinking support for, or belief in, a two state end-game, neither side has articulated an alternate solution to this conflict that simultaneously addresses legitimate Palestinian and Israeli demands and aspirations, without which, it is difficult to conceive of reaching any sustainable peace. With stagnation, further violence is certain.

Therefore, it is in the U.S. national security interest to prioritize the pursuit of a two state solution, because, and not in spite, of the broader regional disarray. The events unfolding in the Middle East over the past five years leave little doubt that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not the cause of all political and social ills in the region—a trope long-exploited by autocratic rulers and radical groups. However, the perpetuation of the status quo constrains the ability for Israel to maximize the benefit of strengthened regional diplomatic and security relations in a shared threat environment. The broader security benefits derived from such strengthening would be highly beneficial to U.S. interests. While a degree of regional cooperation between unlikely partners is already happening,<sup>1</sup> the strategic (not to mention economic) benefit to all parties to be gained by moving such engagement into the open should not be underestimated.

The most recent violence emphasizes another constant of this conflict: whenever it flares, the U.S. is drawn in, consuming diplomatic energy and attention. The past few weeks have seen Secretary Kerry in Amman meeting with President Abbas and King Abdullah of Jordan, and in Berlin, meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu, in an effort to defuse the current crisis through addressing its proximate cause: The Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/05/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-eshki-and-israel-dore-gold-netanyahu-share-allies-iran.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/05/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-eshki-and-israel-dore-gold-netanyahu-share-allies-iran.html?_r=0)

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict — a conflict over land — risks morphing into an intractable religious conflict that is seized upon by extremist actors beyond the geographic parameters of the territorial dispute.

Therefore, the U.S. must reject the well-worn notion that it can't want peace more than the parties themselves. It should reaffirm the two state goal as a vital national interest and pursue it vigorously and urgently. But it is also imperative to change the way of playing the game.

## **Coordinated Multilateralism to Maximize Leverage**

The U.S. role as primary third party actor and guarantor is indispensable, but it is time to leverage the roles of other key actors who, in a coordinated fashion with the U.S., can wield the right set of sticks and carrots at both parties to affect change. It has been considered axiomatic that only the U.S. can “deliver” Israel, in view of the U.S.’s role as a staunch ally that can give Israel the confidence to take risks for peace. This theory works optimally when paired with its corollary: that such leverage also requires the U.S. to wield disincentives. To date, the U.S. has focused much more on the former than on the latter, producing a situation in which behavior counter to the stated goals of a negotiated two-state solution is consequence-free. This is particularly the case when it comes to settlement activity: the U.S. issues verbal condemnation only, despite a longtime insistence that settlements are “an obstacle to peace.” This does not go unnoticed by the Palestinian public and has contributed to a sense of despair that is part of the drive behind the current violence.

The U.S. needs to find an appropriate balance by which it is willing to reinforce previously-articulated redlines with consequences, while providing Israel with the needed security assistance and diplomatic protection it requires in the face of frequent knee-jerk hostility in the international arena. This would signal seriousness, restore faith in the U.S.’ and international community’s sense of purpose, and would require immediate follow-through in order to maintain credibility. One can look to the 1991 withholding of loan guarantees to Israel under President George H. W. Bush and his Secretary of State, James Baker, for an example of where such an approach was wielded effectively, addressing the obstacle to peace of the settlement enterprise, without prejudice to Israel’s security concerns.

More recently, the last round of negotiations led by Secretary Kerry offers a constructive example of how a coordinated role with EU partners can yield results. In 2013 the EU issued guidelines limiting the financial support for activities of Israeli entities in the settlements, giving cover for the Palestinians to enter the talks. This was not, by all accounts, a move requested or endorsed by the Americans, but it was helpful to U.S. diplomatic efforts, suggesting a model for a productive division of labor that could be replicated and scaled up. This approach is also relevant in relation to the Palestinian Authority, where the U.S. and international community must use its influence to press for greater efforts on institution building and reform: projects key to the viability of a future Palestinian state, yet which have seen erosion in recent years.

Likewise, key Arab states have a role to play. The U.S. should continue to voice support for the Arab Peace Initiative (API), and actively engage relevant Arab countries on the possibility of a) reviving it as a basis for joint dialogue with Israel rather than as a take it or leave it proposition, and b) considering an incremental implementation strategy. Israel has legitimate concerns about the Arab world's willingness to follow through on API commitments, given the weakness of many of the relevant countries. Accordingly, an incremental mechanism by which Israel could reap gradual benefits in response to meaningful steps toward creating a Palestinian state could go a long way to building trust and confidence in the process. The growing convergence of interests between Israel and certain Sunni Arab states may ease the way down such a path.

## A Return to Interim Measures

Bringing the parties back to the table without success is not cost-free, and the U.S. would be ill-advised to push the leaders into negotiations today. Unfortunately, the parties and international stakeholders cannot afford to sit tight. The status quo is far from static. The current environment ultimately breeds violence and allows irreversible facts on the ground to take hold. Therefore, the U.S., along with its international partners, should work with the parties to take steps that are commensurate with the long-term goal of a two state solution. These should include pushing implementation of existing agreements under the Oslo framework, creating mechanisms to ensure adherence by both sides. This goal was already



articulated<sup>2</sup> by the United Nations Special Coordinator in its report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in September 2015. The outlined approach can induce the parties to work cooperatively with each other, and see the tangible benefits of doing so. This is particularly crucial on the economic front, whereby ensuring compliance with the terms of the Paris Protocol that governs economic relations between the two sides could reap great payoff to the Palestinian economy. Likewise, the U.S. and its international partners should work with Israel to promote the significant easing of "Area C" planning and development restrictions for Palestinians.

The Palestinians have long been averse to an incremental approach, which they have construed as a way for the Israelis to kick the can down the road while realities on the ground shift, and the final outcome never materializes. Meanwhile, Israel remains skeptical of Palestinian commitment to signing on to any end-of-claims agreement, and is concerned that any concessions will be pocketed by the Palestinians with no reciprocal assurances forthcoming. This is why such an approach must be buttressed by a coordinated U.S. and EU monitoring and accountability role and can only succeed if attached to a clear end game.

## Articulate a Vision

While the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif has taken center-stage in the recent events, and cynical actors have taken the opportunity to propagate incitement, the young age of the Palestinian attackers, and the East Jerusalem epicenter of the violence paint a more complete picture of what is driving events: the sense of despair among a generation that has seen no payoff from their parents' commitment to the peace process; has no hope for their future; and is constantly aware of the stark distinction in their prospects and living conditions relative to those of their West Jerusalemite neighbors. While this argues for improving the socioeconomic conditions of East Jerusalem neighborhoods, the situation has passed the point of responding to economic band aids alone.

The U.S. must take the lead in articulating a clear end game. There are a couple of paths to consider: 1) parameters put forth by President Obama that lay out a U.S. view of the minimum requirements for the two state solution, and that will leave a legacy to be picked up by the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unsco.org/Documents/Special/UNSCO%20Report%20to%20AHLC%20-%20September%202015.pdf>

next Administration; 2) parameters enshrined in a UN Security Council Resolution, and endorsed by the U.S., which would need to have a strong hand in the drafting to ensure such a resolution is balanced in its demands and expectations of each side. Public opinion is not static.<sup>3</sup> An internationally agreed upon set of guidelines for how this conflict gets resolved would reenergize the two-state conversation among the Israeli and Palestinian publics, empower the peace camps on both sides, and exert constructive pressure on Netanyahu and Abbas to make bold decisions.

## Addressing Gaza and Palestinian Unity

Focus on the breakdown of negotiations between Abbas and Netanyahu, frequently relegates Gaza to an afterthought. However, in September 2015, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) reported that Gaza may be uninhabitable by 2020 if current trends continue. The implications for further instability are enormous and could fully derail any prospects for a peace agreement.

While Israel and Egypt have both relaxed border restrictions over the past few months, the U.S. should work with these two countries to do more, finding ways to maximize assistance to the Gazan population, while ensuring that respective security concerns are met. Part of this puzzle is the issue of Palestinian fragmentation — an obstacle to negotiating peace. Hamas's authority in Gaza presents a challenge to the U.S.'s ability to unreservedly embrace Palestinian unity, but the U.S. and Israel must actively engage this challenge and longer-term set of considerations, finding the best way to square this circle while not empowering Hamas at the expense of Abbas.

In the meantime, the U.S. should lean on Abbas to take up the charge of security responsibility at the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt. The Palestinian Authority (PA) returning to this border with its Presidential Guard would greatly enhance donor trust and facilitate movement across the border with Egypt, easing Gaza's dire economic situation.

To date, deep animosity between Fatah and Hamas has precluded the realization of this arrangement, which Abbas is reluctant to implement without Hamas ceding full presence or authority. However, meaningful efforts to address the Gaza humanitarian crisis could ultimately shore up much needed domestic legitimacy for Abbas who is largely seen by the Palestinians as having abandoned Gaza.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.usip.org/olivebranch/what-might-persuade-israelis-palestinians-back-peace>

## Leading the Way

President Obama has little more than a year left of his administration. He should prioritize using his second term capital to forcefully invest in keeping the two state solution viable, and handing his predecessor something to work with. Prime Minister Netanyahu will be in Washington the 2nd week of November. By all expectations, he and President Obama will focus on getting their soured relationship back on a more solid footing so as to safeguard the U.S.-Israel relationship that remains vital to both countries' interests. This is important. But mending these fences should not preclude steps in the direction laid out above.

To the contrary, there is an opportunity to reinforce the notion that a commitment to a two state solution is also a commitment to Israel's long term security. American regional interests are tied up in ensuring Israel's survival, and the creation of a Palestinian state. The current round of violence, grounded in desperation yet detached from an end goal that was once supported and assumed, marks a dangerous turning point for the conflict. Urgency dictates a new beginning and peace-seeking Israelis and Palestinians alike are desperate for leadership and vision. The stakes are too high, and for too many, for the U.S. to walk away.

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# America and Israel — Changes in Public Attitudes and Why It Matters



On the face of it, the relationship between the Israeli and American public appears strong, and could be considered simpler than that of their leaders. Most Americans and Israelis are spared the policy dilemmas or political pressures that sometimes bring the proverbial “daylight” between politicians.

The result has been a mutual support fest going back decades: by a wide margin, the U.S. public supports Israel rather than the Palestinians and considers Israel among its closest allies. Israelis think the same about America — trusting and reveling in its support, even as they remain baffled by certain cultural traits, like politeness and political correctness.

However, the high number of Americans who continue to express support for Israel hide important shifts in American public attitudes. Changing perceptions of what Israel means to Americans, and what policies Americans support for Israel and vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, are feeding polarization of attitudes among different groups.

## **U.S. Public Support for Israel: Towards a Partisan Divide**

In recent years, overall American public support for Israel has been shifting. While Americans still overwhelmingly side with Israel — according to Gallup polls,<sup>1</sup> support for Israel has actually climbed steadily since 2000 — the “internal” numbers, or variation among different groups on the issue, show a growing lack of consensus.

In 1967, a solid majority of both Democrats and Republicans,<sup>2</sup> roughly 60 percent, sided with Israel rather than with the Palestinians. Political leadership and American policy reflected this with a massive boost of economic, military and political support at the time.

But the romantic vision of Israel is descending from its perch above politics, and Americans increasingly examine Israel through the prism of their broader political world views. Democrats are now more critical, Republicans more supportive.

One scholar dates<sup>3</sup> the partisan divide — Republicans and conservatives versus Democrats and liberals — about Israel to the start of the second Intifada, and then to September 11 — roughly the early 2000s. However, Amnon Cavari<sup>4</sup> finds that the alignment of the Evangelical community with Republicans beginning in the late 1980s was also an early cause of the divide, since Evangelicals side with Israel for theological reasons.

By 2012, polling<sup>5</sup> confirmed these changes, and in 2013 the Pew Center released a highly publicized survey<sup>6</sup> showing a large and entrenched partisan gap on Israel. Although the average level of sympathy remains on Israel’s side rather than on the Palestinians’ side by a large margin of five to one (50 percent support it compared to 10 percent for Palestinians),

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1 <http://portal.idc.ac.il/en/schools/government/research/documents/rynhold.pdf>

2 <http://portal.idc.ac.il/he/schools/government/research/documents/cavari.pdf>

3 <http://portal.idc.ac.il/en/schools/government/research/documents/rynhold.pdf>

4 <http://portal.idc.ac.il/he/schools/government/research/documents/cavari.pdf>

5 [https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/aai/pages/9774/attachments/original/1439236677/Americna\\_Attitudes\\_on\\_IP\\_Conflict\\_2012.pdf?1439236677](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/aai/pages/9774/attachments/original/1439236677/Americna_Attitudes_on_IP_Conflict_2012.pdf?1439236677)

6 <http://www.pewresearch.org/daily-number/partisans-divided-about-level-of-u-s-support-for-israel/>

stark differences emerge when looking at the political camps. Three-quarters<sup>7</sup> (75 percent) of “Conservative Republicans” supported Israel, and just two percent chose the Palestinians; while just one-third of “liberal Democrats” supported Israel and 22 percent sided with the Palestinians — a gap of just 11 points.

The “sympathy gap” among different political communities isn’t just a general feeling. It reflects a corresponding partisan gap on the image of Israel and the Palestinians, as well as on issues and policies.

For example, Republicans are far more likely than Democrats to believe Israel is seeking peace. Among the former, 46 points more in 2011<sup>8</sup> said it is trying compared to those who said it was not. Among Democrats, merely 22 points more said Israel attempts to reach peace (Rynhold<sup>9</sup> 2015).

In the same 2011 study, Democrats were evenly divided about whether the Palestinians were also trying to reach peace (49% yes, to 40% no); while three-quarters (72%) of Republicans insisted that Palestinians are not trying to reach peace.

## America’s Role in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The majority of Americans, nearly two-thirds, would like the U.S. to play a balanced role in the Middle East, according to a 2014 Brookings survey.<sup>10</sup> Among Democrats, three times as many prefer for America to “lean towards” Israel’s side as a mediator rather than towards the Palestinians (17 percent, compared to six percent for the Palestinians). Yet 25 times as many Republicans prefer for the U.S. to “lean towards” Israel (51 percent compared to two percent for the Palestinians).

In terms of what Americans view as reasonable solutions for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the partisan gap has also grown dramatically: In 2002, just over 40 percent of Democrats and Republicans alike thought there should be a Palestinian state, with fewer Democrats who opposed it than Republicans. By 2009,<sup>11</sup> the portion of Democrats who favor a Palestinian

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7 <http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/12-14-12%20Syria%20Release.pdf>

8 <http://portal.idc.ac.il/en/schools/government/research/documents/rynhold.pdf>

9 <http://portal.idc.ac.il/en/schools/government/research/documents/rynhold.pdf>

10 [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/12/05-american-opinion-poll-israeli-palestinian-conflict-telhami/israel\\_palestine\\_key\\_findings\\_telhami\\_FINAL.pdf?la=en](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/12/05-american-opinion-poll-israeli-palestinian-conflict-telhami/israel_palestine_key_findings_telhami_FINAL.pdf?la=en)

11 <http://portal.idc.ac.il/en/schools/government/research/documents/rynhold.pdf>

state — 59 percent — outweighs the number of Republicans by a 20-point margin — only 39 percent of Republicans support a Palestinian state.

Further, Americans overall are less attuned to the Jewish state concept and more committed to upholding democratic values. Thus, if a two state solution isn't possible, the 2014 Brookings Institute<sup>12</sup> survey found that a strong 71 percent majority of Americans support one equal democratic state, rather than an unequal state in which Palestinians have fewer rights — including a clear majority of Republicans (60%).

## The Youth Factor

The political partisan divide at present appears fully entrenched. And it is unlikely to be reversed, because the constituencies who make up those partisan groups show similar trends.

Pew data from 2012<sup>13</sup> shows that young Americans are much less likely to support Israel over the Palestinians than older people. Among Americans above fifty years old, a large majority of 59 percent support Israel generally, compared to nine percent who support the Palestinians instead. But among young people, merely 38 percent side with Israel compared to 15 percent for the Palestinians — a ratio of just over two to one.

The findings make sense. Younger people have grown up in a political reality and public discourse that is more complex than the simplifying David versus Goliath image of Israel of the late 1960s. Instead of witnessing Israel withstanding seven Arab invading armies, a nearly 50-year long military occupation of the Palestinian Territories now takes center stage, forming the context to frequent wars in which Israel's power vastly out-muscles the Palestinian people.

It is particularly interesting that a survey by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) on anti-Semitism in 2013 showed that younger people are "remarkably free"<sup>14</sup> of prejudicial views. In other words, young people are becoming *less* anti-Semitic than the older generation, and simultaneously *more critical* of Israel — refuting the right-wing claim that criticizing Israel's policies often implies anti-Semitism.

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12 [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/12/05-american-opinion-poll-israeli-palestinian-conflict-telhami/israel\\_palestine\\_key\\_findings\\_telhami\\_FINAL.pdf?la=en](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/12/05-american-opinion-poll-israeli-palestinian-conflict-telhami/israel_palestine_key_findings_telhami_FINAL.pdf?la=en)

13 <http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/12-14-12%20Syria%20Release.pdf>

14 <http://www.adl.org/assets/pdf/press-center/adl-survey-attitudes-towards-jews-in-us-2013.pdf>

# The Rising American Electorate

An increasingly vital American constituency, the Hispanic community,<sup>15</sup> is generally less sympathetic towards Israel than others. When asked whom they side with more, Israel or the Palestinians, about ten points fewer Hispanics favor Israel than non-Hispanic American voters — under 50 percent compared to over 60 percent, respectively. Still the majority of both groups support Israel over the Palestinians, but again among Hispanics, support for the Palestinians is slightly higher than non-Hispanics, according to Cavari and Melnik's data from 2015.

The African American community, too, holds more critical attitudes towards Israel's policy than the average American public. A Pew survey from 2014<sup>16</sup> showed that black Americans were more likely than white Americans to think Israel was responsible for that summer's war with Hamas (Protective Edge), and more black Americans thought Israel had gone too far in its military response. But the same ADL survey cited earlier showed an overall *decline* in anti-Semitism among Afro-Americans — once again indicating that political criticism of Israel is unlikely to be a cover for underlying anti-Semitism.

So young people, Hispanics and African Americans express a more critical stance on Israel's policies, and they also embrace a more liberal Democratic-oriented political worldview in general. Why does that matter? It matters profoundly. These groups, together with unmarried women who are also largely young, are known collectively as the "rising American electorate." In 2016, for the first time, these groups combined represent a majority of American voters.<sup>17</sup> The future will see their share of the electorate expanding.

These trends create a changing context for the Jewish American vote, which raises a vital question. If the "rising American electorate" emboldens the Democratic party to take a tougher line on Israel, will Jews migrate to the Republican party rather than change their political stance, just as the "Solid South" migrated en masse<sup>18</sup> from the Democratic party to the Republicans following racial integration and the civil rights movement? The last Presidential poll saw the highest portion of Jews voting Republican (30%) since the Reagan-Bush years<sup>19</sup> in the 1980s (39%).

15 [http://www.herzliyaconference.org/\\_Uploads/dbsAttachedFiles/CavariMay2015%281%29.pdf](http://www.herzliyaconference.org/_Uploads/dbsAttachedFiles/CavariMay2015%281%29.pdf)

16 <http://www.people-press.org/files/2014/07/7-28-14-Israel-Hamas-Release.pdf>

17 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/page-gardner/the-rising-american-elect\\_b\\_7688610.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/page-gardner/the-rising-american-elect_b_7688610.html)

18 <http://umich.edu/~lawrace/votetour8.htm>

19 <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/jewvote.html>



Or could Jewish Americans, who still vote overwhelmingly Democratic, begin re-thinking their position on Israel?

## The View From Israel

Finally, given the crucial links between the two countries, what will this relationship look like in the future? What do Israelis know or think about American attitudes, and how much do they care?

The age gap that leads young Americans to be more critical of Israeli policies and more skeptical of general support is in stark contrast to Israeli young people. My own research, confirmed by other Israeli pollsters, shows that the latter have moved unequivocally further right<sup>20</sup> for a number of years.

There are two main reasons for this trend. A higher portion of the young Israeli Jews are religious, because religious families have significantly more children in Israel than seculars. More traditional and religiously observant communities generally express more nationalist views, maximalist positions on the conflict and sometimes even anti-democratic attitudes. This correlation is perhaps the most consistent finding in the history of Israeli polling.

But even among secular Israelis, young Jews are somewhat more right-wing than the general Israeli population, and certainly more than the oldest cohort (55+). This appears to be primarily because they have grown up experiencing 15 years of nearly non-stop violent conflict: the second Intifada, the second Lebanon war in 2006, three Gaza wars and a sharp increase in violence in the fall of 2015. While foreigners increasingly pay attention to the occupation, Israeli society invariably downplays one side of the equation — four million Palestinians living under military rule for five decades — and emphasizes the other side of the equation, in which Israel views itself as the victim of violence whose overtures for peace are routinely rejected.

Despite this widening perception gap, Israelis are well aware of shifting American attitudes. A 2015 study<sup>21</sup> shows that progressive Israeli Jews are more favorable to the U.S. while right-wing Israeli Jews are less so — apparently, the latter both grasp and resent the growing critical attitudes in America. Israeli Arab-Palestinian citizens generally hold more negative

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20 <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2011/mar/21/young-israelis-turn-right/>

21 [http://portal.idc.ac.il/en/main/research/apoi/publishedwork/documents/israel\\_opinion.pdf](http://portal.idc.ac.il/en/main/research/apoi/publishedwork/documents/israel_opinion.pdf)

views towards the U.S., most likely because they view America as heavily weighted in favor of Israel in the conflict.

Thus the generation of twenty-somethings in the U.S. and Israel today appear to be on quite different political paths with relation to Israel's future. Since today's young adults will eventually become tomorrow's leaders, the political calculus shaping American policy towards Israel may very well fundamentally change in the future.

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# The American-Jewish Community: Sea Change or Status Quo?



The recent political battle in the United States over congressional approval of the international agreement to restrain Iran's nuclear program provided an interesting real-life laboratory in which to measure the balance of forces within the American-Jewish community.

Urged on by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and most of the Israeli political establishment, the America-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), renowned in Congress as one of the nation's most powerful and influential lobbying organizations, threw itself into a campaign to block the agreement. AIPAC was backed by most of the other major American-Jewish groups — the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), and some of the more important local Jewish Federations. AIPAC alone spent roughly \$14.5 million on

this campaign, in addition to up to \$25 million contributed by like-minded institutions, thereby vastly outspending those who favored the deal.

With the entire Republican Party already fiercely against the agreement, the goal of the campaign was to persuade 13 of the 48 Democrats in the Senate and 43 of the 188 Democrats in the House of Representatives to oppose the deal. This would have given opponents a veto-proof majority, meaning that President Obama could not have reversed their vote and the agreement would probably have collapsed.

But something surprising happened. Opponents of the agreement not only failed to reach their goal — they did not even come close. In the end, only four Democrats in the Senate and 25 in the House voted against the deal. What happened?

## The Times Are Changing

It would be a mistake to view the Iran battle and its outcome as an isolated incident. Rather, it was the culmination of a long process that has unfolded over years encompassing changes in Israel, the American-Jewish community, and the general political landscape in the United States as it pertains to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Perhaps the best portrait of the American-Jewish community in recent years was provided by a major survey conducted by the Pew Research Center<sup>1</sup> and released in October 2013. The very first sentence set the tone: “American Jews overwhelmingly say they are proud to be Jewish and have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people. But the survey also suggests that Jewish identity is changing in America, where one-in-five Jews (22%) now describe themselves as having no religion.”

It has been clear for decades that American Jews tend overwhelmingly to be politically progressive and identify with the Democratic Party. Polling over the years has shown that American Jews have voted for Democratic presidential candidates at rates of 70 percent or higher in every election since 1988. The Pew poll, like others, also found relatively progressive views toward Israel and the conflict with the Palestinians among its participants.

Just 38 percent said the Israeli government was making a sincere effort to establish peace with the Palestinians. And only 17 percent of American Jews thought that the continued building of settlements in the occupied

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1 <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/>

West Bank was helpful to Israel's security; 44 percent said that settlement construction hurt Israel's own security interests.

However, examining the traditional and well-established institutions that have represented this community for decades, one finds a very different picture. The leaders of these organizations rarely allow criticism of Israel to surface. Instead, these institutions generally insist on unquestioning support for almost every action taken by the government of Israel. They seek to discourage debate or even questioning of Israeli policies and seek to impose blanket unanimity on the community.

Given that Israel has since 1977 mostly been ruled by coalition governments dominated by the right-wing Likud Party, which has aggressively pursued settlements in the Occupied Territories, American-Jewish organizations have actively or tacitly supported those policies. Perhaps as a result, the leadership of American-Jewish organizations has become dominated by right-wingers who feel most comfortable supporting such policies.

## Netanyahu Stirs Partisanship

At the same time, the actions of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have created a new political reality for the U.S.-Israel relationship. Traditionally, support for Israel was broadly bipartisan. AIPAC worked hard to keep it that way, cultivating close relationships with office holders — both Democrats and Republicans — at the federal, state and local level. Yet Netanyahu's clear preference for Republicans, spurred by wealthy backers like far-right Republican Las Vegas casino mogul Sheldon Adelson, has broken that pattern.

Netanyahu's strained relations with President Obama began from the moment he took office in 2009. In the 2012 presidential election, Netanyahu was widely perceived as strongly preferring the Republican candidate Mitt Romney and was indeed accused of meddling in the race. Then earlier this year came his address to Congress at the invitation of Republican House Speaker John Boehner, violating protocol by bypassing the White House completely. Many Democrats were deeply offended by his behavior which they considered disrespectful to the elected leader of the United States.

Netanyahu even appointed Ron Dermer, a former Republican who worked with then-House Speaker Newt Gingrich in the 1990s, as his ambassador

to Washington. We should remember that Adelson contributed some \$100 million to Gingrich's failed 2012 presidential bid. Adelson's money single-handedly kept Gingrich in the race well after his campaign would ordinarily have collapsed. Now, Republican presidential candidates for 2016 have been competing in the so-called "Sheldon primary" to win the endorsement and funds of the casino billionaire. Adelson is a powerful player in Israel, too, underwriting a free (and loss-making) newspaper, Yisrael Hayom, which has become the highest-circulation daily in the country and is devoted to supporting and sustaining Netanyahu's career.

Netanyahu's actions have undoubtedly damaged the bipartisan nature of the U.S.-Israel relationship. Israel is now a hot election issue and is expected to loom large in the 2016 presidential campaign. By forcing AIPAC into the Iran battle which it ultimately lost, Netanyahu has also damaged and weakened his most important U.S. political bulwark.

These developments have created a widening chasm between the organizations that purport to represent American Jews — which have moved further and further to the right — and the community itself, the bulk of which trends strongly to the left. It was to fill that chasm that J Street was created in 2008.

## **J Street: Pro-Israel and Pro-Palestinian**

J Street (the name refers to the fact that in Washington DC where streets are named after letters, there is no J Street between I Street and K Street) holds that it is possible to support Israel without also supporting the settlements and the Occupation. It believes that being pro-Israel does not automatically mean being anti-Palestinian. It believes that Israel's future as a democracy and a Jewish homeland depends on making peace with the Palestinians through a two-state solution.

The organization's rapid growth was a testament to the fact that it was widely perceived as filling a much-needed role by providing a political home for American Jews who previously lacked one. It quickly grew to around 200,000 supporters with offices in eight cities and chapters in over 50. It established a Rabbinical Cabinet which now has over 800 members and a student arm, J StreetU, that is the fastest-growing pro-Israel group on American campuses. J Street's national conferences, though still much smaller than those organized by AIPAC, have now grown to become the third largest gatherings of any American-Jewish organization.

Even more importantly, J Street's founder, Jeremy Ben-Ami, saw clearly from the start that the key to building support and influence that could counter the prevailing right-wing dominance of the traditional organizations lay in accumulating political power on Capitol Hill. That is why from the outset J Street developed a Political Action Committee (PAC) that raised money for candidates to Congress and a lobbying arm. J Street's political endorsees' list has grown with every subsequent election. In the 2014 mid-term elections, the J Street PAC distributed over \$2.4 million to its 95 endorsed candidates. The current Congress has 12 Senators and 74 Representatives endorsed by J Street — and that number is expected to grow sharply after the 2016 election.

These relationships made a critical difference in the battle over the Iran nuclear agreement. J Street was not able to match the financial resources of the opposition campaign but it did raise over \$5 million — enough to be heard. Most importantly, Democratic members of Congress understood that voting in favor of the deal was not an automatic death sentence for their political careers. Although such a vote might invoke the wrath of AIPAC, there was now another American-Jewish organization with the strength and ability to defend them. They understood that J Street would have their backs.

## Implications of the Iran Agreement

It is too soon to measure the long-term effects of the Iran battle on the U.S. political scene. But the importance of the event cannot be underestimated. As Elizabeth Drew wrote in the *New York Review of Books*,<sup>2</sup> “The fight in Congress over the Iran deal will go down as one of the major foreign policy struggles in this country's history. Legislative fights involving grave issues of the security of this nation are supposedly conducted on a higher level than more typical legislation. But never before in memory was the vitriol so strong as it was in this one.”

She went on to write: “Until this fight AIPAC was seen as a fearsome organization with the muscle and money to almost always get its way with Congress. [...] Until this fight, AIPAC had acted as a bipartisan organization, but in vehemently opposing the deal it became an ally of the Republicans in a highly partisan fight.”

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2015/oct/22/how-they-failed-block-iran-deal/>

At the very least, AIPAC's myth of invincibility has been shattered, as has the notion that supporting Israel requires politicians as well as the American-Jewish community to unquestioningly support the Israeli government. The way is now open to a more nuanced concept of what support of Israel can and should entail, similar to that proposed by J Street.

## No State, One State, Two States?

Although there is much talk of healing the divide, bringing the community back together and binding up the wounds, the 2016 presidential election campaign promises to highlight more divisions and more hard feelings. Until now, the official political platforms of both parties have expressed support for the two-state solution. It is an open question whether the Republican platform next year will continue to do so. Adelson himself is fiercely opposed to the creation of a Palestinian state and so are several of the Republican presidential candidates who now echo the rhetoric of the settlement movement arguing that the whole of the Land of Israel was given to the Jewish people by God.

Of course, on the left there are also those who have given up on a two-state solution and now advocate a bi-national state. Such a scenario would spell the end of the Zionist dream of having one country in the world where Jews can express their right to self-determination and take control of their collective fate as a nation.

The recent international record of binational states indicates that the trend seems to move toward more separation, either peacefully as in the case of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, or through war, as in the case of the former Yugoslav Republics. Even long-established states like Great Britain and Belgium are being strained by nationalist and separatist sentiment. Therefore, it seems overly optimistic — to say the least — to imagine Israelis and Palestinians coexisting peacefully in a country that belongs to neither one of them. A two-state solution remains the only workable solution because it gives both people what they want and need, namely a country and homeland of their own.

Recent trends in the U.S.-Israeli relationship seem gravely worrisome for many Israelis who know that the United States remains their most reliable international ally. However, they may in fact pave the way for a more honest and nuanced relationship both between American Jews and Israel and U.S. politicians and the Jewish state. Such a relationship would be based on unquestioned support for the security and safety of Israel and



a commitment to the wellbeing and success of the nation. But it would not include support for the settlement movement or a permanent continuation of the Occupation.

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# A Progressive Response to BDS



This essay comes in three parts. It begins with a brief statement on the current state of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, then presents my take on boycotts generally, and finally offers an analysis of BDS's mode of operation and its vision for the endgame of the conflict.

## Assessing the situation

Reasonably well informed people, averagely sensitive and equipped with an intuitive sense of justice, find it increasingly difficult to remain indifferent to Israel's conduct. The occupation, now nearing its 50th year, has turned Gaza, and to a lesser extent the West Bank, into de facto detention zones. It humiliates millions of Palestinians, robs them of meaningful citizenship, and violates their human rights on a daily basis. The consistent refusal by official

Israel to recognize the tragic consequences of 1948 for the Palestinians and the continuous disregard for the refugee problem are unacceptable.

The notable drift in Israel's public sphere towards essentialist thought patterns with obvious racist elements underwrites disturbing policies which resemble those practiced by the Apartheid regime of South Africa. The inferno of Gaza, in which Israel is a willing collaborator with Egypt, is untenable. So are the periodic outbursts of violence initiated by Israel against Gaza, which are grossly disproportionate to any damage caused by missiles launched by Gazans at Israeli targets.

All this amounts to unacceptable intrusions on the part of Israel beyond the pale of reasonable behavior, common sense and natural justice.

This assessment of the situation in Israel and Palestine is not radically different from those offered by spokespersons for BDS — the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions movement behind the current call to boycott Israeli universities. I also agree that BDS has dramatically enhanced global awareness of the situation in Israel and Palestine, successfully propelling a realization in the West of the urgent need for meaningful change.

My unease stems from the leap of faith and logic associated with suggestion that descent people who are enraged by the situation and seek justice for Palestine must boycott Israeli universities and cultural institutions. I find this leap not only misguided and flawed in logic, but also cynical and fundamentally dangerous — to Palestinians, to Israelis, to the Middle East and to world peace.

## Boycotts 101

Boycotts and sanctions are legitimate forms of political brinkmanship that can be inspiring and effective. Captain Charles Boycott, the heavy-handed manager of an estate in 1880s Ireland, evicted 11 tenant families for petty debts. Outraged parishioners got organized and declared that until he reinstates those families, no one would work for the state or trade with it. To save the summer's harvest, Boycott hired farm workers from another parish. At the end of the summer however he discovered that, the costs of transporting and protecting his replacement work force exceeded the harvest's worth. To cut the estate's losses, he then reinstated the evicted families.

Countless instances of boycott have taken place since. Famous ones include the boycott of British goods in China in retaliation to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1902; the Jewish American boycott of Henry Ford in the

1920s; Ghandi's boycott of British goods in the 1940s; the Montgomery bus boycott during the American civil rights movement in the 1950s; and the economic and disinvestment movement against South Africa in the 1980s.

To be effective, a boycott must fulfill four criteria:

- A. Those boycotted must be primarily and directly responsible for the injustice (Charles Boycott was the manager who instigated the eviction),
- B. Those boycotted must be capable of rectifying the injustice as soon as they resolve to do so (Boycott could re-instate those evicted at will, and eventually did),
- C. The conditions set for lifting the boycott must be clear, uncontestable and doable,
- D. Those boycotted must trust the boycotters to truly want their conditions to be met, without fear of any hidden future stipulations down the road.

The call for an academic boycott of Israel, as reflected for example in the resolution carried at the annual business meeting of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) on 20 November 2015<sup>1</sup> fails miserably on all four accounts.

First, Israeli universities are not directly or primarily responsible for the occupation and the violation of Palestinians' human rights. Second, these institutions cannot, even if they wanted to, rectify the situation.<sup>2</sup> Third, the condition set for ending the suggested boycott ("until such time as [Israeli universities] end their complicity etc ...") is deliberately murky. I want to invite the reader to perform a mental exercise. Think of a university you know. Now consider the following three questions:

- In 2015, is this university currently more or less complicit in the US-led invasion of Iraq that it had been five years ago?
- Is it more or less complicit in US drone attacks, social inequality or police treatment of minorities than the university down the road?
- How would you go about determining the answers to these two questions?

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<sup>1</sup> The issue will be put to an electronic ballot by the entire membership of the AAA between April 15 and May 15 2016.

<sup>2</sup> A nested argument which I will not develop here is that 'complicity', of which Israeli universities are repeatedly but not convincingly accused by boycotters, is an irregularity for which boycott is not necessarily the best remedy.

If you are having difficulty producing sensible answers, do not despair. These questions have no obvious answers. I bring them here to illustrate that the pivotal condition of the AAA's 2015 resolution cannot be met.<sup>3</sup>

Failure on criteria C of course leads to failure on criteria D. Those boycotted — and here I speak for myself and virtually every Israeli academic I conversed with on the boycott, including friends positioned on Israel's far left — interpret the impossible conditions as proof that BDS has no interest in any Israeli university ever qualifying to have the boycott lifted. As the report of the AAA's own Task Force on engagement with Israel and Palestine states, the initiative to boycott Israeli universities could potentially lead to an indefinite ostracization.

An indefinite boycott is deplorable not only because it is too harsh or too extreme. It is unacceptable because it defeats the purpose which every sanction ever deployed for political brinkmanship strives to achieve: to motivate the boycotted party to redirect its conduct and induce positive change. Why do *anything* when you think that however hard you try, you will never really qualify to have the sanction lifted?

## The Political Context of the Current Call for Boycott

Boycotters are a diverse crowd. They have no official leadership and cannot be held collectively accountable for anything. But based on my observation of Palestinian politics for many years, I can say that amongst the leaders of BDS many dream of a future without Israel. Some of them have held this view for decades. Others joined the drift more recently. But that is clearly the dominant sentiment amongst them.

Others in that diverse camp (and many potential supporters) may see a future for Israel, perhaps even through a two state solution. But rather than clarifying this crucial point, BDS's leaders deliberately obfuscate it. The standard line is that the movement 'has no position' on the endgame — it is strictly focusing on human rights for Palestinians.

This position is deeply unconvincing and unsettling. BDS's leaders *do* have a position. But since the notion of a future without Israel is hard to

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<sup>3</sup> This by the way is not a first. In 2014, many anthropologists signed a petition calling to boycott Israeli universities which had a different condition, equally impossible to meet: that Israeli universities 'call on Israel' to comply with BDS's blueprint for normalization (above). It is impossible because universities do not, cannot and must not, as institutions, take sides in political debates that split the societies in which they operate down the middle.

sell, they do their best to mute and to embellish it. An attempt to undo Israel is thereby camouflaged as an attempt to reform it. And a boycott designed to isolate, marginalize and silence Israeli moderates pretends to be a quest to reduce academic complicity as part of a larger struggle for human rights.

To be clear, I do not wish to trivialize the struggle for human rights, to which I have been committed throughout my career in academia and as part of Israeli and international civil society. But in the case in point, calling to boycott academic and cultural institutions as a means to promote human rights is decontextualized and misguided. Its real intention is to instrumentalize universities in Israel and academic associations abroad to achieve a broader, much more sinister objective.

This is the seed of wrath in BDS — its original sin. A boycott and sanctions campaign cannot work if it denies its target a future. It can only work if those boycotted can expect a brighter turn once they comply with the boycotters' demands. Applying boycott in a situation where the actual goal is to eliminate your opponent's existence will result in die-hard unwillingness to compromise.

This is why BDS has never focused on attempts to pressurize Israel economically. Economic sanctions are carrot-and-stick ploys, forcing those under pressure to do things against their will now in exchange for an alleviation of the pressure in the future. BDS, which strives to eclipse Israel altogether, has no carrots for it. That is why it has neglected economic sanctions, leaving them to sporadic action by committed student activists on US campuses who operate with little intervention, supervision or direction from BDS's leadership.

An academic and cultural boycott, on the other hand, is a perfect fit for those who seek a future without Israel.

The Netanyahu government's uncompromising and violent conduct in recent years brought international sympathy for Israel to an all time low. BDS now hopes that this fall from grace could soon be followed by Israel's ultimate collapse. They see an opportunity for them to play an active role in this process: demonize Israel as a radically essentialized epitome of evil, and you might expedite its ultimate demise.

This strategy finds willing partners on the Israeli right, where politicians thrive on cultivating an ethos which suggests that 'the whole world is against us'. Moreover, it is a strategy which cannot tolerate Israeli moderates. A vibrant intellectual milieu, where academics and artists embrace complexity and nuance, subverts BDS's essentializing mission. Israelis

who openly criticize the occupation and the government, who stand in solidarity with Palestinian farmers against settler violence, who work with Palestinian whose villages with no electricity to install solar panels, wind turbines and rainfall water systems — such Israelis have no place in BDS's cosmology.

Israelis whose actions and integrity complicate BDS's over-simplified, self-righteous, monolithic tale of evil colonial oppressors versus angelic indigenous victims must be marginalized and silenced. Stakes are even higher when it comes to people like my friend the late Edward Said and like Daniel Barenboim, whose *West-Eastern Divan Orchestra* brings Israeli and Palestinian teenagers to play classical music together, was declared 'boycottable' by BDS in 2012. In fact, as far as BDS is concerned, the more amenable to dialogue we are, and the more prominent we might become, the more 'boycottable' we must remain.

Those convinced that Israel should not have been created in the first place, or that it no longer has the right to exist, are entitled to their opinion. But they have obligations, too. They must come clean about seeking a post-Israel endgame. They must own up to the highly stereotyped, dichotomized incitement they pursue. They must develop detailed plans for what the new post-Israel reality might look like, with particular attention to the process they think might lead there. And they must openly acknowledge the terrible price both Palestinians and Israelis might have to pay for an attempt to force this vision onto Israelis who, apart from a tiny group of academics, are unable to imagine such a scenario even as an intellectual exercise. In short, they need to heed Noam Chomsky's warning, in a 2014 article in *The Nation*, that BDS and its supporters must be careful what they wish for.

The conversation I am proposing here will be tense. It will take place far outside the comfort zone of those amongst the BDS leadership who have so far controlled its discourse. But it will be a more honest one. Most importantly, it will allow stakeholders and observers to form opinions and decisions based on real positions, not deceitful manipulations.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://anthrodialogue.wordpress.com/>

*published by Cambridge, UC Berkeley and Ashgate, and published articles in American Ethnologist, JRAI, Critical Inquiry, IJMES, JAR, Ethnic and Racial Studies and more.*



# Changing the Conversation on Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions



Support for boycotts, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) targeting Israel is growing, generating great angst and solution-searching amongst Israel supporters — including pro-peace progressives — in the United States and elsewhere in the world. From the Adelson-Saban summit<sup>1</sup> earlier this year, which gave birth to a new anti-BDS organization (to be led<sup>2</sup> by someone who for years headed a far right-wing, pro-Israel, Evangelical Christian operation), to Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton's letter<sup>3</sup> to Jewish leaders, BDS is now being treated even by many pro-peace progressives as the new "existential" threat to Israel, despite the fact that the

1 <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.660391>

2 <http://forward.com/news/311662/leader-of-christian-zionists-named-head-of-adelson-campus-anti-bds-group/>

3 [http://www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2015/07/06/hillary-clinton-chides-israel-boycott-effort-in-letter-to-supporters/?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2015/07/06/hillary-clinton-chides-israel-boycott-effort-in-letter-to-supporters/?_r=0)

actual track record of the BDS movement, in terms of concrete impact, is thus far mixed.

## The Impact of BDS: Underestimated or Overblown?

Economically, the BDS movement has so far been largely unsuccessful in promoting wide-scale, economically-significant boycotts, divestment, or sanctions targeting Israel. Indeed, most of the economic victories the BDS movement claims have nothing to do with BDS targeting Israel. Rather, these victories have been limited to actions and policies — adopted by private sector companies, governments, some major faith-based organizations, etc. — targeted not at Israel but at settlements and the occupation. These include the decision by SodaStream to move its manufacturing plant out of the West Bank, the EU's Settlements Directive, and the decision of the Presbyterian Church to divest from companies active in supporting the occupation. Importantly, virtually all such actions and policies, at least thus far, have been framed in terms of continued support for Israel and for continued economic activity within Israel proper, as defined by the 1948 Armistice line (the Green Line).

At a political level, the impact of BDS has been mixed. Israelis and supporters of Israel clearly perceive BDS as a genuine threat to Israel. In fact, today one of the most potent arguments that supporters of peace and the two-state solution can employ against the policies of Prime Minister Netanyahu and his right-wing allies is to warn of the danger of growing BDS activism. However, concerns about growing BDS have thus far failed to translate into any discernible shift in the policies of the Israeli government away from policies that fuel BDS, or into a shift in the calculations of Israeli voters in favor of political leaders who support different policies. Indeed, Prime Minister Netanyahu has to an impressive degree hijacked concerns about BDS to build support for settlements. Netanyahu has accomplished this by arguing that there is no difference between BDS targeting Israel and similar activism targeting the settlements and occupation. According to this formulation, all such actions are defined as equally anti-Israel and anti-Semitic, and all such actions represent actions designed to delegitimize Israel's very existence. Thus, when the EU requires exports to Europe produced in settlements be labeled as

such, rather than misleadingly labeled as products of Israel, Netanyahu suggests that this is akin to anti-Semitic sentiments in Europe in the tradition of the Holocaust.

Efforts to exploit concerns about BDS in order to garner support for settlements came to a head earlier this year, with legislation introduced in the U.S. Congress seeking to conflate Israel and the settlements. This legislation, which was introduced in several forms, seeks to make it part of U.S. trade policy to reject boycotts and other forms of activism that target Israel or “territories under Israeli control” (or “Israeli-controlled territories”). During the debate over what supporters insisted on describing as “anti-BDS” legislation, members of Congress accepted without challenge the assertion that such legislation was necessary because European governments are engaging in BDS against Israel. They appeared uninterested, unable or unwilling to recognize the distinction between European policies related to Israel (no EU nation is engaged in BDS against Israel and the EU remains Israel’s largest trading partner), and European policies related to settlements and the occupied territories (like the EU settlement directive and settlement product labeling requirements). After Congress passed a major trade bill that included this faux anti-BDS language, the Obama Administration issued a rare clarification of U.S. policy rejecting the conflation of Israel and the settlements. Perhaps this step was intended to lay the foundation for opposition to further attempts in Congress to use BDS as a pretext to legislate protections for settlements in the future.

Finally, on the societal level, it is clear that the appeal of the BDS movement is growing rapidly in the U.S. and around the world. The appeal of BDS, and the growing effectiveness of its advocates, is being felt today in energetic activism on campuses across the country, in the embrace of boycotts by various academic and trade associations, and in the continued growth of boycotts of Israel by the entertainment industry, to name a few. The main reason for this is apparent: the actions, policies, and rhetoric of successive Netanyahu governments have sent a resounding message to the world that Israeli leaders and their voters are not interested in a negotiated two-state solution. Indeed, it appears that grassroots support for BDS — its tactics, if not the organized movement itself — has grown to encompass increasing numbers of people who may actually consider themselves supporters of Israel but who no longer believe that Israel will stop building settlements and sincerely pursue peace unless it faces more coercive tactics and concrete consequences for its actions.

In sum, the BDS movement has until now enjoyed very limited success in terms of mobilizing serious boycotts, divestment, or sanctions against Israel. Pro-peace and pro-settlements advocates alike are using the threat of greater BDS to try to promote their agendas, but have so far achieved little at the political or policy level. The only place where the BDS movement is showing real success is at the popular level. So long as Israeli policies do not change to convince the world that Israel is serious about peace and the two-state solution, the appeal of BDS will almost certainly continue to grow.

## Misguided Tactics: How Not to Respond to BDS

Part of the reason for the growing popular success of the BDS movement, in addition to the Netanyahu government policies of the discrediting of peace efforts, is the failure of progressive, pro-peace advocates to make an effective case against BDS. Indeed, the response to BDS by much of the progressive, pro-peace community has been not only ineffective but self-defeating. Many opponents of BDS still fall back on oversimplifying and caricaturing BDS and its appeal, insisting that the BDS movement and all of its adherents are anti-Israel, quite possibly anti-Semitic, and interested only in delegitimizing and ultimately destroying Israel.

This argument is years past its sell-by date. Many BDS leaders, advocates and supporters may be motivated to a greater or less degree by anti-Israel and/or anti-Semitic views. However, increasing numbers of people who today are moving towards BDS are motivated by neither. This includes both older pro-peace progressives who have become disillusioned with Israeli policies and younger progressives whose values shape their political views and activism across the board, including with respect to Israel. Many of these progressives are concluding that as people of conscience, they can no longer stand by idly as Israeli policies disclose an ever-more pro-settlement, anti-two-state, pro-Greater Israel agenda, and as the U.S. and other nations appear impotent to challenge them. Absent other avenues for consequential action, these pro-peace, pro-two-state progressives are increasingly turning to BDS tactics, if not to outright support for the BDS movement.

Likewise, many opponents of BDS, including within the progressive community, seem to still believe that they can push back effectively at

a societal level against BDS while ignoring or downplaying the role that Israeli policies and actions play in stoking support for BDS. They are mistaken. After almost 50 years of occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem — accompanied by almost 50 years of Israeli policies designed to sustain and in many cases expand and deepen the occupation at the expense of the Palestinians — BDS cannot be fought by simply defaming its supporters and ignoring or denying the legitimacy of many of their grievances.

## An Effective, Progressive Response to BDS

How, then, can pro-peace progressives respond to the BDS movement?

**First, respectfully engage BDS supporters.** Simply dismissing all those who support BDS as anti-Israel and anti-Semitic is not only unfair but also counter-productive. Progressive, pro-peace opponents of BDS should at every opportunity engage in dialogue with BDS supporters. Opponents of BDS must recognize that BDS supporters — just like themselves — are grappling with a complex, emotionally-charged issue. Open, respectful dialogue can enable BDS supporters to see those who oppose BDS in the same light. And while such dialogue will have little effect on BDS supporters who have strongly-held views that are genuinely anti-Israel and/or anti-Semitic, dialogue with other BDS supporters can lead to greater mutual understanding and respect. Perhaps it can even convince them to look at other options for protesting Israeli policies to which they object.

**Second, face the facts.** Any effort to convince people, in the U.S. or any country, to reject BDS must start with an emphatic recognition and rejection of Israeli policies that are feeding much of the growth in support for BDS today, particularly those related to expanding settlements and deepening the occupation. It is simply not possible to credibly engage supporters of BDS, let alone make the case against adopting BDS tactics, if at the same time one fails to speak out and engage in other activism against pro-settlement, anti-peace policies and actions of the Israeli government. Denying or downplaying these Israeli policies and their impact will only discredit those making the case against BDS.

**Third, endorse the one serious alternative.** Many progressives, both Jewish and non-Jewish, remain squeamish about engaging in or endorsing any kind of boycotts or other activism that involves concrete consequences for any Israelis — including boycott/divestment activities that focus exclusively on settlements and the occupation. This is a mistake. Rejecting activism targeting settlements and the occupation leaves the door wide open for advocates of BDS against Israel and everything Israeli. It tells pro-peace progressives who hunger for opportunities for consequential activism against Israel's anti-peace policies that they face a binary choice — boycotting Israel or, in effect, supporting settlements. Faced with this choice, some progressives are, unsurprisingly, choosing BDS. It need not be this way. Endorsing boycotts and similar activism targeting settlements and the occupation offers progressives a third option — one that enables them to express their anger and frustration over Israeli occupation policies, and one that has proven to be far more effective and consequential than BDS in both economic and political terms.

**Fourth, reject efforts to conflate Israel and the settlements.**

The success of activism targeting settlements and the occupation should come as welcome news to those who are genuinely worried about BDS against Israel. It is clearly unwelcome news, however, for Netanyahu and other settlement supporters. That is why they have long sought to conflate Israel and the settlements, in a cynical effort to exploit opposition to BDS in order to prevent pressure on settlements. By failing to challenge the argument that Israel and the settlements are one and the same — logic shared, ironically, by hardliners in the BDS movement and pro-settlement Israelis — progressive opponents of BDS will only further alienate those who are not automatically inclined to support BDS but who staunchly oppose settlements and the occupation.

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# The Power of Otherness: Identity Politics in the U.S. and Israel



In his recent award-winning book *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates writes with profound insight on American racism, white supremacy, and the experiences of Black Americans. Coates offers a powerful framework for understanding how Americans have built an “empire on the idea of ‘race’, a falsehood that damages us all.”

Without drawing any direct parallels to systems or experience of racial dynamics between the U.S. and Israel, I would argue that Coates’s approach to identity provides a useful lens for seeing identity politics in Israel, offering us a new perspective on what might be seen as the same old story.

Coates writes about whiteness as a construct. He talks about “people who believe themselves to be white” and makes the argument that

whiteness is a hollow identity built mainly out of “other-ing”, that is defined by who is left out of the category as opposed to the common attributes and experiences of those in it. According to Coates, the concept of a white identity is perpetuated to maintain the power dynamic. In the book, he explores deeply his own discovery of black identity. He claims that whiteness is more about not being black than about being white. Because given the multiplicity of ethnicities in the category, who is really white?

There is little argument that the Israeli identity that has dominated the public sphere and has defined the culture of power across the political, social and cultural spectrum for decades is a narrow one. The Zionist revolution sought to open a new chapter in Jewish history — and to create a new Jew in Israel. Zionist thinkers wanted to rid Jews of the old othering that constructed their identity — the other-ing of not being a gentile. But the reality of the land to which they immigrated presented them with a new other — the Arab. To the old Jewish identity in Europe — the not-gentile — was added another layer in Israel: being “not Arab”. So *Israeliness* came to be defined as much by this new other-ing of not being Arab than by the first one — of the new Jew free from persecution.

The Ashkenazi Jews, Jews of Eastern-European descent, define Israeli identity because of this migration history and today, because they are most explicitly not Arab. This construct of *Israeliness* is perpetuated to maintain a status quo in which Arabs and those who resemble Arabs — Mizrahi Jews of Middle Eastern decent — remain outside or at the lowest levels — of this culture and structure of power. In recent years, however, the *Arabness* of the Palestinians and the *Arabness* of Mizrahi Jews have posed growing challenges to the concept of *Israeliness*. Of white, *Ashkenzi* *Israeliness*, that is. This pressure is the result of a new wave of identity-driven politics, along with social, political and technological changes.

## The Non-Arabs and the Arabs

If the concept of *Israeliness* is based on citizenship in the State of Israel, then what does this Israeli identity mean for the 20 percent of its citizens who are Arabs? If it is based on a common experience of Zionism and persecution in Europe and then national self-determination in Palestine, then what does this Israeli identity mean for 61 percent of Israeli Jews who come from the Middle Eastern and North African heritage?



Israeli Arabs, who are in fact Palestinian citizens of Israel, live inside what many refer to as “green-line” Israel, are Muslims and Christians, religious and secular, urban Northerners and Southern Bedouin rural communities. They are citizens but they do not fit the defining Israeli identity.

Despite their citizenship, Israeli Arabs were never considered a part of *Israeliness*, because being Israeli meant by definition being non-Arab. Those who stayed in Israel after its independence in 1948 and became citizens were subject to Martial Law until 1966 — including administrative detentions, curfews and other legal tools of dominance. Today, most Palestinian citizens of Israel do not serve in the military, which is the dominant institution forging Israeli culture. They are also generally not included in national polling.

Not only are these Israeli citizens excluded from *Israeliness*, they are perceived to be a threat-from-within, and are subject to increasingly harsh forms of structural, symbolic and economic discrimination. They are commonly seen as a “time bomb” and “a potential fifth column” in both demographic and security terms and characterized as liable to undermine the state in times of war — continuing the perception of the military regime 50 years later.

The dominant political rhetoric around Arab citizens was made explicit in the final days before the most recent Israeli election last spring when, according to the Washington Post,<sup>1</sup> “Netanyahu’s rhetoric grew increasingly hawkish, even for his standards. On Monday, he declared there would be no independent Palestinian state under his watch. And on Tuesday, as Israelis cast their ballots, he sounded the alarm about who was voting. ‘The right-wing government is in danger,’ Netanyahu wrote in a Facebook post. ‘Arab voters are coming out in droves to the polls. Left-wing organizations are busing them out.’”

Over the past years, Israel’s Knesset has enacted several laws, and considered many more bills, that further entrench structural discrimination and exclusion of Arab Israelis from Israeli society. The Nakba Law, which according to the Association for Civil Rights in Israel<sup>2</sup> (ACRI), “authorizes the Minister of Finance to relinquish monetary support if the body or institution has made any payment towards an event or action that undermines the ‘existence of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state,’ violates

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1 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/03/17/on-israeli-election-day-netanyahu-warns-of-arabs-voting-in-droves/>

2 <http://www.acri.org.il/en/knesset/nakba-law/>

the symbols of the State, or marks the date of Israel's establishment 'as a day of mourning.'"

This perception of identity carries meaningful consequences: While Palestinians make up about 20 percent of Israel's population, less than 7 percent of the budget is allocated to their communities.

## The Mizrachim: Being an Arab Jew

"Arab Jews", or more commonly called by most Israelis "Mizrahi Jews" refers to people who trace roots back to Muslim-majority countries. This includes descendants of Babylonian Jews from places like modern Iraq, Syria, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iran, Lebanon, Uzbekistan, Yemen, and Georgia. If *Israeliness* is mostly about being a non-Arab, Mizrahi Jews don't fit the bill. After all, many of these families were actually Arab in their culture and everyday lives. They spoke Arabic at home long after immigrating. Many had Arabic names like Rafiq, Najib and Jamila. They were consumers of Arab culture — films, music, literature and entertainment.

David Ben Gurion, a founding father of the new state, wrote<sup>3</sup> in 1949 about the recent immigrants from Yemen: "They are separated from us by 1000 years. The concept of civilization is absent to them. Their relationship to women and children is that of primitive man." Labor Prime Minister Ehud Barak famously referred to Israel as a "villa in the jungle", a popular metaphor in Israel to this day. But if the Middle East is a jungle, how are its inhabitants classified? And what does this mean for Mizrahi Jews living in Israel? Are they part of the villa or part of the jungle?

Most of those immigrants were settled in "maabarot" (tent camps) in remote areas often in the desert. Many were moved then into development towns like Dimona, Netivot and other remote places. Not only did they leave their possessions and economic standing in the country they came from, they now found themselves on the outside of society symbolically, geographically and financially. The transition from insider to complete outsider was devastating. But mainly, their segregation in Israel meant that they continued to carry their *Arabness* even after becoming officially Israeli. Their cultural identity was a bar to achieving true *Israeliness*.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://hazatetet.wordpress.com/category/%D7%9E%D7%96%D7%A8%D7%97%D7%99%D7%9D/>

# Of Symbols, Soccer and Dominant Accents

Prof. Nina Toren of Hebrew University found that in 2008, the academic staff of Israeli universities were 90 percent Ashkenazi, 9 percent Mizrahi, and 1 percent Arab. According to a survey by the Adva Center, the average income of Ashkenazim was 36 percent higher than that of Mizrahim in 2004. According to a study conducted by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (ICBS), Israeli-born Ashkenazi Jews are up to twice more likely to pursue academic studies than Mizrahi Jews.

So is it possible for Israeli Arabs or Mizrahi Jews to achieve this elusive *Israeliness*? Only when they are willing and able to shed their *Arabness*.

For Palestinian citizens, the demand has been to passionately adopt the symbols of the State of Israel, symbols created and defined by Ashkenazi Jews. Chana Pinchasi, Dr. Eilon Schwartz, and Shaharit Fellows describe symbols in their article entitled *The Value of Culture*:<sup>4</sup> “Symbols touch us deeply because they are an expression of an essential part of our identity. A national anthem that lacks deep historical underpinnings—like the national anthem of Canada, for example, which only describes Canada’s size and climate—reveals the paucity of some shared identities, but it does not create any conflict. In contrast, for a non-Jewish Israeli, the symbol of the Star of David creates a sense of alienation.”

They go on to describe a story in which the soccer team of the Arab town of Sakhnin won the national cup and the team captain Abbas Swann ran a victory lap in the stadium wrapped in the Israeli flag. Pinchas, Schwartz and the Shaharit fellows argue that the sting of the symbol of the Star of David would fade if it was not set against a backdrop of structural inequality that Israeli Arabs face. I would like to see Swann’s victory lap as a radical reclaiming, a statement that *Israeliness* can no longer mean shedding *Arabness*. I would also like to see the political demand for an inclusive citizenship, for challenging school curricula that exclude large swaths of students, for revising state symbols.

For Mizrahi Jews, access to the culture of power also comes from shedding the most outstanding aspects of their *Arabness*. Eva Illouz, herself an academic of French-Moroccan descent, describes this process with a focus on accent in speech. She says:<sup>5</sup> “people and the institution they work in cannot feel represented adequately by someone speaking with an accent.

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4 <http://zmani.shaharit.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Value-of-Culture.pdf>

5 <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israel-s-politics-of-discrimination-1.426528>

Ashkenazis, it should be said, have no less an accent than Mizrahim, but theirs is “unmarked” – it is not heard, precisely because Ashkenazis have established the norm of speech, which in turn becomes neutral.”

## The Mecca of Diversity

Talking about a shared society in Israel and deconstructing identity politics opens up the opportunity to bring about a more inclusive and constructive Israeli identity beyond *non-Arabness*. In *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates describes his experience as a college student at Howard University, a historic-Black school in Washington DC that he attended as an undergrad student. He nicknames it “Mecca” in the book and describes in detail the experience of being on campus, with a multiplicity of black identities intermingling — black Muslims, Caribbeans and Islanders, Africans, people from the Urban neighborhoods of American cities, Indians, black Jews. He writes about this time as his first encounter with the various cultures, ethnicities, and histories that are included in the construct of blackness.

Like Coates, I believe that the construct of “race” is destructive and damaging to all of us, most of all to those on the wrong end of the power dynamic. While I am included in those who believe themselves to be white in the United States, and in those who believe themselves to be Israeli in Israel, I surge with excitement during Coates’ description of “Mecca”. It uncovers the gorgeous layers of identity, of culture, of appearance, of speech that black people in the United States hold, and not just the struggle, persecution and injustice they face in a system that actively discriminates against them.

On the symbolic level, Americans elected a black man as President in 2008. In his famous speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, then-Illinois Senator Barack Obama included authenticity about blackness in his keynote<sup>6</sup> address: “My father was a foreign student, born and raised in a small village in Kenya. He grew up herding goats, went to school in a tin-roof shack. His father, my grandfather, was a cook, a domestic servant to the British.” He went on to say. “My parents shared not only an improbable love; they shared an abiding faith in the possibilities of this nation. They would give me an African name, Barack, or ‘blessed,’ believing that in a tolerant America, your name is no barrier to success.” Many people

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A19751-2004Jul27.html>

say that it was this speech that elevated Obama on the national political scene and eventually got him elected to President of the United States.

## Mizrahi Cultural Renaissance: Turning Back to Go Forward

My revolutionary imagination rests on the idea that structural discrimination can and must be dismantled. In Israel, that means that the symbols, culture, and the experience of *Israeliness* is changing and must change. It is hard to imagine an Arab Israeli Prime Minister any time in the near future — Israel has not even elected a Mizrahi Prime Minister so far. But both Arab Israelis and Mizrahi Jews are increasingly reluctant to shed their Arabness in order to fit in with the dominant concept of *Israeliness*. A new generation of Israelis is emerging.

I heard the young Moroccan Jewish singer Neta Elkayam say, at a night-club in Tel Aviv, that her music was picking up where her grandmother's music left off. In the 1950s, her grandmother stopped singing in Arabic because that was unacceptable in Israel. That is where her culture stopped. Neta said, "people want me to write 'modern music' but I want to write and perform my grandmother's music here in Tel Aviv where she wasn't allowed to. I'm not ready to fast-forward."

In his inauguration speech to the Knesset last May, MK Ayman Odeh, the leader of the Joint List (a coalition of the major Arab political parties) imagined life in Israel in 2025. He imagined what it would look like if we were successful in overcoming discrimination and the campaigns to end racism were successful. His dream was of Arab children learning Hebrew in schools and Jewish students learning Arabic. He dreams of business cooperation, of shared spaces.

Neta Elkayam is part of a Mizrahi cultural renaissance fueled by a new identity politic in Israel. Ayman Odeh is part of a political and social moment of Arab Israelis. Tying these and many other pieces together could lead us to a new *Israeliness* — one that is defined by what it encompasses and not by what it excludes.

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This collection of articles highlights various aspects of change and continuity in US-Israeli relations. On the political level, it addresses the increasingly partisan divide on Israel in U.S. politics, as well as heightened tensions over the Iran nuclear deal

and the paralyzed peace process. On the societal level, it delves into the challenge posed by identity politics in the U.S. and Israel, and analyzes how public opinion is shifting.

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