Palestinians Will Not Cease to Demand Their Rights

BY BASEM NAIM

The West has long been enamored with the specter of passive resistance with tens of thousands of unarmed demonstrators facing off against a heavily armed and ruthless force in pursuit of justice.

Today hundreds of thousands of peaceful unarmed demonstrators marched towards the rim of the sealed-off Gaza Strip. They got no closer than several hundred yards from Israeli snipers before shots rang out, leaving hundreds of Palestinians injured and at least 10 dead.

This is not a movie. It is Gaza. It is Palestine.

For more than 70 years Palestinians have tried by all means possible to obtain their rights as guaranteed under international and humanitarian law. Over these decades dozens of resolutions have come from a wide range of international bodies, associations and NGOs in support of our fundamental rights to freedom and self-determination and a return to our homes, from which we were forcibly expelled in 1948.

Despite a romantic rewrite, dozens of respected historians and journalists, including Israelis such as Ilan Pappé and Gideon Levy, have documented the coordinated Zionist attack on hundreds of age-old Palestinian villages in 1948 as the onset of a calculated project of ethnic cleansing that continues unabated today.

To suggest that almost a million Palestinians voluntarily left their homes, schools, mosques and churches in 1948 is little more than to proclaim the earth is flat. The hurried desperate mass flight of Palestinians from the paramilitary assault upon our age-old communities is beyond honest debate or dispute. Despite near unanimity among international jurists about our cause, the

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world community has been unable or unwilling to provide justice for Palestinian people who live in walled-off Bantustans in our own homeland or in a forced diaspora as so-much stateless refugees throughout the world.

Meanwhile Western states have openly embraced policies that not only favor and protect Israel but empower it to continue a now decades-old illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories.

No state has been more supportive of this historical injustice than has the United States. Not satisfied with more than 250 billion dollars in direct government aid to Israel, the USA has used its veto more than 70 times in the Security Council to prevent passage of resolutions condemning Israeli policies.

Among its unprecedented financial support for Israel, the U.S. has provided many tens of billions of dollars in military aid and equipment that has subsidized Israeli control over the legitimate rights and aspirations of millions of Palestinians and inflicted widespread death and destruction among our communities. Tens of thousands have lost their lives, many more been injured or crippled, and even more detained for years on end in a military “justice” system which denies Palestinians any modicum of justice.

Recently, in an effort to further punish Palestinian civilians for the temerity of their political will, the U.S. administration cut more than $300 million in aid out of what was its $360 million annual share to the U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). This international aid effort provides health, education and food benefits to some 5 million Palestinian refugees worldwide who represent some 40 percent of the total population of 11.5 million Palestinians inside and out of Palestine.

For the last 25 years, Palestinians have tried in good faith, and in vain, to achieve their legitimate aspirations through participation in a long, complex and counter-productive negotiation process.

Because of the fundamental imbalance of power on the ground and an ever-present international pro-Israeli bias, Israel has exploited this “negotiation” as little more than dilatory cover while it has continued its agenda of illegal annexation of Palestinian land in the West Bank.

Not satisfied with flooding the West Bank with hundreds of thousands of illegal “settlers,” Israel has continued its systematic attack upon fundamental rights of Palestinians throughout all the occupied territories, including Gaza.

What, then, has been the result of this 25-year-old unilateral Israeli stall? Have we not seen the disappearance of any meaningful opportunity for stability and de-escalation of violence that, predictably, has spilled over throughout the region?

Has not the delay, by design, challenged the remaining hope for our people for freedom, an independent state and a return to the homes they have been displaced from over these many years? And what of the daily life of Palestinians under occupation, whether in the West Bank that is divided into controlled cantons or the besieged Gaza Strip? Both have been turned into an unbearable hell, for all to see but for us to taste. Murder, imprisonment, siege, land seizure, house demolitions, poverty, unemployment, and denial of medical treatment and travel have become the daily way of life for millions of Palestinians.

Like the rest of the world, Palestinian are a people who love life, community and family and seek only a better future for our children. However, it seems as if our collective and lawful aspiration is unacceptable to some of the world, which stands by with idle interest and even less action as the occupation and injustice unfolds in plain view.

It seems few at the table of nations have felt the need to confront the Israeli aggression and its occupation which, by any definition, offends all standards of decency and international law.

Having considered our various options, as well as our lawful right to resist, Palestinians in Gaza have decided to launch peaceful marches near the segregation barricades that deny us any meaningful scrap of self-determination. This campaign will demand an end to the occupation, an end to the siege of Gaza, and recognition of the right of Palestinians to return to their homes in accordance with U.N. Resolution 194, issued in December 1948.

These events, which begin today, coincide with the anniversary of “Land Day,” in which six Palestinians were killed in 1976 while defending their land as it was seized by Israeli authorities in the Galilee area.

In the tradition of passive resistance, our activities will be peaceful and continue on the borders until May 15th, the 70th anniversary of the “Nakba,” when upwards of a million Palestinians were expelled from their homes.

All Palestinians in our homeland and diaspora, including men, women and children, will participate in these marches and related demonstrations that share a common theme of justice, opportunity and freedom. Our activity will be overseen by a national committee which represents all Palestinian forces and factions as well as civil society and independent Palestinian figures and supporters.

The Committee has circulated numerous publications and directives for participants in the marches, which emphasize the peacefulness of this particular movement and the need to avoid violence or any provocative escalation by Israel. The Committee has also designated various on-site representatives to oversee our collective efforts and to ensure that our message is heard through powerful and peaceful means.

Notwithstanding our best efforts, we full well expect provocation by Israel during our protests and will do all that we can to ensure its inflammatory efforts will pass without any response.

Despite our best efforts, once again, this fear proved to be reality today, as Israel unleashed hundreds of rounds of live ammunition and canisters of tear gas at first sight of peaceful demonstrators armed with nothing more than their voice and self-determination.

Ultimately, Israel has long feared and challenged any and all efforts by Palest-
PFLP, a Palestinian political party, has called for a three-day general strike to protest against the recent Israeli attack on Gaza. The statement was made in response to the Israeli army's continued use of excessive force in suppressing the March of Return demonstrations in the Gaza Strip.

In response to the Israeli attack, Palestinian protesters took to the streets and staged demonstrations throughout the Gaza Strip, demanding an end to the military occupation and the siege of Gaza. The PFLP called for international solidarity and support for the Palestinian people in their struggle for freedom and justice.

Despite the Israeli government's efforts to suppress the protests, the March of Return demonstrations continued to attract thousands of Palestinian protesters, who demanded the right to return to their homeland and an end to the Israeli occupation.

The PFLP statement also called for an end to the blockade of Gaza, which has had a devastating impact on the Palestinian economy and people's daily lives.

The statement concluded by emphasizing the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and the need for the international community to take concrete steps to support their struggle for freedom and justice.

As of now, no further updates are available. The situation remains tense, and the Palestinian people continue to fight for their rights and freedom.
Palestinians in cold blood. Israel, for all its nuclear might and America’s slavish diplomatic cover, remains the eternal victim.

In short, the Palestinian people have been abandoned by a cowardly, sycophantic international community. Very soon Donald Trump’s plan to relocate the U.S. Embassy to [occupied] Jerusalem, which he calls Israel’s eternal capital, will reach fruition, hammering the last nails into the coffin of even a semblance of a Palestinian state.

While it is true that Hamas’ takeover of Gaza has been a disaster for the 2 million people caged inside the world’s largest open-air prison camp, deprived of basic necessities, blockaded by land, sea and air, that should not mean that the population is open to being treated worse than penned cattle.

However, many Palestinian residents of occupied Jerusalem and the West Bank are only marginally better off, faced with apartheid walls, checkpoints, house demolitions and land grabs. Their ongoing plight is a dark stain on the community of nations and the ever more impotent body founded in the aftermath of the Second World War to safeguard human rights and freedoms. Time to say it like it is. The U.S. and Israel have got Western freedoms. Time to say it like it is. The country has plainly done something indefensible. The usual defenders are silent, and the criticism from the left/center is stronger than ever. Sen. Bernie Sanders’s sharp criticism is actually leading the U.S. discussion of the event.

Ori Nir of Americans for Peace Now captures the moment, tweeting in Hebrew (roughly translated):

“National Public Radio” Morning Edition, the United States’s largest radio network, opened its news: Israel says it will not investigate the circumstances of the 15 Gaza residents killed in Friday’s clashes. Another propaganda achievement of the government whose army is the most moral in the world.

“A pro-Palestinian narrative” is dominating international media, The Times of Israel reports; and fingers are being pointed throughout the Israeli government about who allowed Israel to be led into this PR “trap” by Palestinians. Michael Oren, who can spin anything, can’t spin this one.

Michael Oren, for one, the deputy minister in the Prime Minister’s Office who is responsible for diplomacy, said Israel was patently unprepared for the crisis on the diplomatic and media battlefield, and that the word he was getting from abroad was that the Israeli narrative is losing “big time” to the Palestinian narrative.

A crisis indeed. Usually vehement Israel defenders in the U.S. are keeping quiet. They surely hope this will blow over. Bill Kristol has nothing to say about the killings. Neither does the v-ole Bret Stephens. Jennifer Rubin has been silent on Twitter.

The liberal Zionist group Ameinu sent out a Passover greeting today with talk of the African refugees, but not a word about the killings. As for J Street—bupkus on Twitter. Nothing on the blog, either.

Jacob Magid of The Times of Israel dismisses the effort by the Israeli government to justify the killings by saying the army identified 10 of the 15 killed as “Hamas activists.” As if “this in and of itself was enough a reason to shoot them dead,” he said.

If the IDF wants to put out a statement saying the men were in the middle of carrying out an attack when soldiers engaged, that’s one thing but saying they were “Hamas activists” means little.

The Republican Jewish Coalition is also reduced to slinging pathetic, patently false story-lines. It tweets:

Gaza March Used Civilian (Including Children) Human Shields to Trap Israel

While AIPAC tweets an article by David Horovitz in The Times of Israel that brims with Israeli paranoia:

Gaza’s terrorist rulers make no secret of their agenda. They are out to destroy Israel. Suicide bombers, rockets, and tunnels have failed. So now it’s mass marches on the border.

It is a sign of the discourse shifting that the Republican Jewish Coalition is now fastened on—Bernie Sanders.

Violent, militarized “protesters” were attempting to cross the Gaza border fence, but @SenSanders would have the Israelis sit back and take it. That isn’t leadership, it’s cowardice.

You’d think Sanders would be beyond the pale. But no, the moral leader of the left in the U.S. is at center stage. Sanders took a little while to condemn the killings, but he has been extremely strong. Here is Ynet’s report:

Sanders attacked Israel on Saturday with a tweet, saying, “The killing of Palestinian demonstrators by Israeli forces in Gaza is tragic. It is the right of all people to protest for a better future without a violent response.”

In an interview with CNN’s Jake Tapper, Sanders was asked if he accepted Israel’s version that most of the Palestinian dead were terrorists who directed attacks against Israel under the cover of protesters.

“No, I don’t,” Sanders responded. “My understanding is you have tens of thousands of people who were engaged in a nonviolent protest. I believe now 15 or 20 people, Palestinians, have been killed, and many many others have been wounded. So I think it’s a difficult situation, but my assessment is that Israel overreacted on that.

Yet more evidence of the fact that Israel is getting thrashed in the international response is, the New York Times...
op-ed page has had nothing to say about these atrocities, while a Washington Post foreign affairs writer, Ishaan Tharoor, is condemning them outright: “For Israel, there’s little political cost to killing Palestinians.”

Tharoor’s article is clear about the moral outrage here, and about the reason, Israel’s impunity:

“These are the predictable outcomes of a manifestly illegal command: Israeli soldiers shooting live ammunition at unarmed Palestinian protesters,” said Amit Gilutz, a spokesman for B’Tselem, a Jerusalem-based leftist organization that monitors human rights abuses in the occupied territories. “What is predictable, too, is that no one—from the snipers on the ground to top officials whose policies have turned Gaza into a giant prison—is likely to be ever held accountable.”

The Israeli leadership had reason to feel comfortable in its defiance. The most vocal criticism from abroad came from Iran and Turkey; censure from either country is more likely a source of relish for Netanyahu than unease. And at the United Nations, the Trump administration blocked the Security Council from issuing a statement that called for an “independent and transparent investigation” and affirmed the Palestinians’ right to peaceful protest.

Tharoor links to Eric Urmansky, deputy managing editor of Pro Publica, who has produced a lacerating and eloquent series of tweets on the optics of the murders:

1/ I know our capacity for outrage has been sapped, but the images coming from Gaza are truly shocking. 2/ Here’s a video—shared by The Washington Post—of a young man shot and killed as he was *rolling a tire away from the border* 3/ Here’s a video of a man shot as he was praying with others 4/ Israel says videos are fabricated. Except multiple videos show same thing. 5/ Here’s another young man who was shot in the head as he was watching the protests and puffing a cigarette. 6/ Sixteen Palestinians were shot to death, hundreds more wounded. You’ve heard of Bloody Sunday, right? That’s when British troops killed 14 protesters in N. Ireland. I wonder how history and we will remember Gaza, if at all. 7/ There may be plenty left to know about what happened. But Israeli officials aren’t interested in finding out. An investigation? Defense Minister Lieberman said, “There won’t be one” He said “all the soldiers deserve a medal.”

Finally, even mainstream Israeli figures are jumping ship. A leading radio host might be fired for saying he’s “ashamed to be Israeli.” Haaretz:

Top Israeli radio host Kobi Meidan has been silenced on Army Radio after posting on Facebook that he’s “ashamed to be Israeli” after 15 Gazans were shot dead during mass Gaza protests along the Israel-Gaza border last week.

After talking with the media personality, Army Radio commander Shimon El-Kabetz ordered the station to no longer broadcast Meidan on the air, but it remains to be seen whether temporarily or permanently.

We will of course be closely monitoring the international response to the killings, including in official forums. But the media narrative is hardening, Israel went way too far. No wonder a local friend asked me yesterday, Has Israel lost its mind?

Thanks to Ofer Neiman, James North and Todd Pierce. Philip Weiss is founder and co-editor of Mondoweiss.net, where this article was first posted April 2, 2018. Copyright © 2018 Mondoweiss. Reprinted with permission.

Is Trump Assembling a War Cabinet?

BY PATRICK J. BUCHANAN

The last man standing between the U.S. and war with Iran may be a four-star general affectionately known to his Marines as “Mad Dog.”

Gen. James Mattis, the secretary of defense, appears to be the last man in the Situation Room who believes the Iran nuclear deal may be worth preserving and that war with Iran is a dreadful idea.

Yet, other than Mattis, President Donald Trump seems to be creating a war cabinet.

Trump himself has pledged to walk away from the Iran nuclear deal—“the worst deal ever”—and reimpose sanctions in May.

His new national security adviser John Bolton, who wrote an op-ed titled “To Stop Iran’s Bomb, Bomb Iran,” has called for pre-emptive strikes and “regime change.”

Secretary of State-designate Mike Pompeo calls Iran “a thuggish police state,” a “despotic theocracy,” and “the vanguard of a pernicious empire that is expanding its power and influence across the Middle East.”

Trump’s favorite Arab ruler, 32-year-old Saudi Prince Mohammed bin Salman, calls Iran’s Ayatollah Khamenei “the Hitler of the Middle East.”

Bibi Netanyahu is monomaniacal on Iran, calling the nuclear deal a threat to Israel’s survival and Iran “the greatest threat to our world.”

U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley echoes them all.

Yet Iran appears not to want a war. U.N. inspectors routinely confirm that Iran is strictly abiding by the terms of the nuclear deal.

While U.S. warships in the Persian Gulf often encountered Iranian “fast attack” boats and drones between January 2016 and August 2017, that has stopped. Vessels of both nations have operated virtually without incident.

What would be the result of Trump’s trashing of the nuclear deal?

First would be the isolation of the United States.

China and Russia would not abrogate the deal but would welcome Iran into their camp. England, France and Germany would have to choose between the deal and the U.S. And if Airbus were obligated to spurn Iran’s orders for hundreds of new planes, how would that sit with the Europeans?

How would North Korea react if the U.S. trashed a deal where, after accepting severe restrictions on its nuclear program and allowing intrusive inspections, were cheated of the benefits the Americans promised?

Why would Pyongyang, having
seen us attack Iraq, which had no WMD, and Libya, which had given up its WMD to mollify us, ever consider giving up its nuclear weapons—especially after seeing the leaders of both nations executed?

And, should the five other signatories to the Iran deal continue with it despite us, and Iran agree to abide by its terms, what do we do then?

Find a casus belli to go to war? Why? How does Iran threaten us?

A war, which would involve U.S. warships against swarms of Iranian torpedo boats, could shut down the Persian Gulf to oil traffic and produce a crisis in the global economy. Anti-American Shi’i jihadis in Beirut, Baghdad and Bahrain could attack U.S. civilian and military personnel.

As the Army and Marine Corps do not have the troops to invade and occupy Iran, would we have to reinstate the draft?

And if we decided to blockade and bomb Iran, we would have to take out all its anti-ship missiles, submarines, navy, air force, ballistic missiles and air defense system.

And would not a pre-emptive strike on Iran unite its people in hatred of us, just as Japan’s pre-emptive strike on Pearl Harbor united us in a determination to annihilate her empire?

What would the Dow Jones average look like after an attack on Iran?

Trump was nominated because he promised to keep us out of stupid wars like those into which folks like John Bolton and the Bush Republicans plunged us.

After 17 years, we are still mired in Afghanistan, trying to keep the Taliban we overthrew in 2001 from returning to Kabul. Following our 2003 invasion, Iraq, once a bulwark against Iran, became a Shi’i ally of Iran.

The rebels we supported in Syria have been routed. And Bashar Assad—thanks to backing from Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and Shi’i militias from the Middle East and Central Asia—has secured his throne.

The Kurds who trusted us have been hammered by our NATO ally Turkey in Syria, and by the Iraqi army we trained in Iraq.

What is Trump, who assured us there would be no more stupid wars, thinking? Trump and LBJ got us into wars they could not end, and both lost their presidencies. Eisenhower and Nixon ended those wars and were rewarded with landslides.

After his smashing victory in Desert Storm, Bush I was denied a second term. After invading Iraq, Bush II lost both houses of Congress in 2006, and his party lost the presidency in 2008 to the anti-war Barack Obama.

Once Trump seemed to understand this history.

Patrick J. Buchanan is the author of a new book, Nixon’s White House Wars: The Battles That Made and Broke a President and Divided America Forever. This article was first circulated March 27, 2018 by Creator’s Syndicate, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Patrick J. Buchanan and Creator’s Syndicate, Inc.

Trump’s Choice Of Bolton Satisfies His Biggest Donor

BY ELI CLIFTON AND JIM LOBE

Last August, shortly after John Kelly replaced Reince Priebus as White House chief of staff and Steve Bannon was fired as the president’s chief strategist, John Bolton complained that he could no longer get a meeting with Donald Trump.

Just three months later, however, on the eve of Trump’s belligerent address to the United Nations, Bolton was once again in direct contact with the president. How did this turnaround take place? The reconnection was reportedly arranged by none other than Sheldon Adelson, the Trump campaign’s biggest donor.

Politico reported that the most threatening line in Trump’s U.N. speech—that he would cancel Washington’s participation in the Iran nuclear deal if Congress and U.S. allies did not bend to his efforts to effectively renegotiate it—came directly from Bolton and wasn’t in the original marks prepared by Trump’s staff.

The line was added to Trump’s speech after Bolton, despite Kelly’s recent edit [restraining Bolton’s access to Trump], reached the president by phone on Thursday afternoon from Las Vegas, where Bolton was visiting with Republican megadonor Sheldon Adelson. Bolton urged Trump to include a line in his remarks noting that he reserved the right to scrap the agreement entirely, according to two sources familiar with the conversation.

Some analysts have suggested that Bolton, an anti-Iran iber-hawk, has the visit to Washington of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to thank for his imminent elevation. But Adelson, a huge supporter of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, likely played a critical role in Bolton’s ascendency.

HISTORY OF SUPPORT

Adelson’s promotion of Bolton dates back at least to the days immediately after Trump’s November 2016 election. According to The New York Times, Adelson strongly supported Bolton for the position of deputy secretary of state as Trump was putting together his cabinet:

Mr. [Rex] Tillerson has expressed misgivings about having Mr. Bolton as his deputy, according to a person who has spoken with Mr. Trump in recent days. But Mr. Bolton remains under consideration for the job.

And he enjoys a powerful ally in Sheldon Adelson, the casino magnate and Republican megadonor who favors the kind of hard-nosed posture that Mr. Bolton would bring.

Mr. Adelson’s backing has gone on especially long way with Mr. Trump’s son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who is expected to take on an important but still undetermined role in the new administration.

Tillerson won that battle at the time in no small part because of the prospective difficulty of getting Bolton confirmed by the Senate (although it’s also likely that mainstream foreign-policy
Republicans like Condoleezza Rice, Robert Gates and James Baker—to whom Tillerson owed his surprise nomination as secretary of state—believed Bolton would constitute a clear and present danger to national security. Despite a Republican majority in the Senate, Bolton failed to gain confirmation as George W. Bush’s U.N. ambassador in 2005 as a result of his extreme foreign-policy views.

Trump didn’t always like or identify with Adelson’s hawkish and pro-Likud views or even his money. Indeed, Trump told a December 2015 audience at the Likudist Republican Jewish Coalition, where Adelson serves on the board of directors and is, no doubt, its biggest funder:

“You’re not gonna support me because I don’t want your money. You want to control your politicians; that’s fine… I do want your support, but I don’t want your money.

Trump even mocked his primary opponent, Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL), for seeking Adelson’s financial support, tweeting:

Sheldon Adelson is looking to give big dollars to Rubio because he feels he can mold him into his perfect little puppet. I agree!

Trump has since not only accepted Adelson’s money—and given him a prime seat just behind Vice President Mike Pence at his inauguration—but aligned his positions on the Middle East with Adelson’s. His contempt for Rubio now seems highly ironic.

As we’ve documented on LobeLog, Trump dramatically changed his message on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in particular. At the outset of his campaign, for example, he pledged to be “sort of a neutral guy” between the two sides and even suggested that Israeli policies were themselves a major obstacle to reaching a settlement.

As he closed in on the Republican nomination, eventually securing Adelson’s support for his general election campaign in spring 2016, all that had changed. Among other things, Trump had promised to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, to depart from decades of U.S. policy opposed to Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, and to “dismantle the disastrous [nuclear] deal with Iran” as his “number one priority.”

Trump met Adelson in Las Vegas in early October 2017. One week later, Trump announced that he would no longer certify that Iran was complying with the Iran nuclear deal, even though the U.S. intelligence community and all of Washington’s European allies, as well as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), had found no evidence that Tehran was cheating.

One month later, Adelson used his own newspaper, The Las Vegas Review Journal, to express his frustration with Trump’s failure to quickly redeem his promise to move the embassy. Two months after that, Trump reversed a half-century of U.S. policy by formally recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. According to Michael Wolff’s book Fire and Fury, Steve Bannon credited Adelson for Trump’s decision.

Since the embassy announcement, the administration has aligned U.S. policy ever more closely with Israel’s right-wing government.

WAR WITH IRAN?
The Iran nuclear deal is another issue near and dear to Trump’s biggest campaign backer and may have played a crucial role in Bolton’s appointment. Adelson’s ultra-hawkish views on Tehran are remarkably close to Bolton’s.

In 2013, Adelson called for Washington to detonate a nuclear bomb in an “Iranian desert.” If that did not persuade Iran to abandon its nuclear program, he said, the U.S. should drop an atomic bomb on Tehran, a city of more than 12 million people.

Two years later, Bolton, who has long favored a military solution to Iran’s purported nuclear aspirations, penned an op-ed titled “To Stop Iran, Bomb Iran,” in which he argued:

The inescapable conclusion is that Iran will not negotiate away its nuclear program. Nor will sanctions block its building a broad and deep weapons infrastructure. The inconvenient truth is that only military action like Israel’s 1981 attack on Saddam Hussein’s Osirak reactor in Iraq or its 2007 destruction of a Syrian reactor, designed and built by North Korea, can accomplish what is required. Time is terribly short, but a strike can still succeed.

Adelson got his wish to move the embassy to Jerusalem, but he still hasn’t succeeded in pushing the U.S. into a military confrontation with Iran. Trump and the GOP’s biggest donor may now have installed their man in what is perhaps the most powerful foreign-policy position in the U.S. government, besides the presidency itself. As a result, the likelihood of a new U.S. war of choice in the Middle East has risen dramatically.

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Trump’s and Pompeo’s Path to Nuclear Crisis

BY PAUL R. PILLAR

The prospective replacement of Rex Tillerson with Mike Pompeo clears one of the last apparent hurdles between Donald Trump and his destruction of a significant diplomatic achievement that has been squarely in the interests of the United States, of nuclear nonproliferation, and of the containment of conflict in the Middle East. This is, of course, the multilateral agreement that restricts Iran’s nuclear program, known formally as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). There is ample reason to worry that such destruction is a step toward an even worse consequence: a new U.S. war in the Middle East. Even if events stop short of that neocon
dream, Trump and Pompeo are charting a course toward endless conflict, escalating tension, and an upsurge in weapons proliferation.

And they are doing it for all the wrong reasons. Tillerson certainly is no Iran-hugger. He came into his (short and unhappy) job as secretary of state with no identifiable ideological or political obsessions that could be expected to shape his thinking one way or another about policy toward Iran. He counseled Trump against destroying or pulling out of the JCPOA because any dispassionate and objective analysis leads to the conclusion that a strict and rigidly enforced set of limits on Iran’s nuclear program to keep that program peaceful, which is what the JCPOA is all about, is squarely in the interests of the United States, of nonproliferation, and of the containment of conflict in the Middle East. Now Trump has one less subordinate to annoy him with advice that is based on dispassionate and objective analysis.

Trump’s crusade against the JCPOA is based mainly on what has been all along one of the two major drivers of opposition to the agreement, which is to oppose and destroy anything Barack Obama accomplished. Trump’s urge to do the opposite of whatever Obama did has probably been the single most consistent thread in his otherwise inconsistent and erratic presidency. The urge repeatedly has taken precedence, as have the faux-populist memes and applause lines that energize Trump, over anything that bears resemblance to careful consideration of the national interest (as illustrated in recent weeks by trade policy). The other major driver of opposition to the JCPOA—the bending to whatever the right-wing government of Israel says and wants—has been a slightly less consistent thread for Trump personally but also a factor, as illustrated by other administration policies such as the move to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.

As for Trump’s soon-to-be (if confirmed) partner in destruction, Mike Pompeo, his unrelenting hostility to the JCPOA is rooted in his record as a congressman who was one of the most rabid partisans on Capitol Hill. His determination to destroy this foreign policy accomplishment of Obama is of a piece with his role as leading attack dog against Obama’s first secretary of state and would-be successor, Hillary Clinton. Pompeo also has a long record of Islamophobia and Iranophobia that is more visceral than cognitive. The extreme to which Pompeo is willing to go to act on his obsession about Iran is perhaps best illustrated by his tendentious and irregular effort—taking a page from the playbook of those who sold the Iraq war to the American public—to conjure up an alliance between Iran and al-Qaeda, even though no such alliance has existed and those two players are on opposite sides of most sectarian and geopolitical divides that matter.

**IRAN AND NORTH KOREA**

One possible remaining complication along the path to destruction involves the implications that policy toward Iran and the JCPOA may have for policy toward North Korea. Many commentators have observed that the time frame for a prospective summit between Trump and Kim Jong-un is similar to that for the next scheduled U.S. presidential waiver of sanctions on Iran. A failure to waive would be a clear violation of U.S. commitments under the JCPOA, in the face of what has been Iran’s consistent observance of its obligations under the accord. One line of analysis is that U.S. compliance with the JCPOA is important for getting any concessions out of Pyongyang regarding its nuclear program, both because the North Koreans need to believe that the United States will keep whatever bargain it strikes with them and because U.S. violation of the JCPOA would antagonize other parties to that accord whose support is necessary to maintain economic pressure on North Korea. The analysis makes sense. North Korea has no incentive to concede on anything if it suspects that the Trump administration will reneg on its promises, and nothing will feed this suspicion more than for the United States to reneg on its commitments in another nuclear agreement.

An alternative scenario is that the prospect of negotiations with North Korea may give Trump more of an incentive to rip up the agreement with Iran because, as one pro-Trump exponent of this scenario explains, “Kim is going to learn that if he thinks he is going to cut a deal, it’s going to have to be way more ironclad than the JCPOA.” As a negotiating strategy this makes no sense at all, because of the disincentive to the North Koreans to strike a deal that they will have all the more reason to believe the United States will not observe. As a U.S. objective it also makes no sense, especially given the differences between the Iranian and North Korean situations. The biggest difference, of course, is that North Korea has a substantial arsenal of nuclear weapons and Iran has none. No conceivable agreement with Pyongyang at this point, even one that everyone could applaud as a positive contribution to stability on the Korean peninsula, would go as far as the JCPOA goes. An agreement identical to the JCPOA would have been great to have several years ago, before Pyongyang built its arsenal. Such an agreement would have avoided the fix the world is in now with the problem of Kim’s nuclear weapons. Today, an agreement with North Korea that is identical to the JCPOA would be wonderful—it would mean getting rid of all the North Korean nukes—but that is beyond the reach of even the most self-confident deal-maker.

**TRUMP’S COURSE**

That an approach makes no sense does not mean Donald Trump won’t take it. Besides, the more he thinks about it, the more he may not even want a deal with North Korea, just as he probably is having second thoughts about the summit meeting with Kim to which he impulsively agreed. Even after purging advisers who try to talk sense to him, Trump probably will realize that any feasible nuclear deal he could reach with North Korea would be less extensive and less restrictive than the agreement with Iran that he has excoriated so long and so loudly. Rather than make an agreement with North Korea...
that, by his own implied standards, would be subpar, it might look better from Trump’s perspective just to keep fulminating about how his predecessors had left such messes and about how he is putting more pressure on adversaries than ever before, while he goes ahead with pulling out of the JCPOA. That would mean two nuclear crises and not just one, but in Trump’s universe that is not necessarily seen as a setback.

The least bad outcome for the JCPOA as a result of Trump (and Pompeo) gunning for it is that the other six parties to the agreement would keep some version of the accord going after a U.S. pullout. But that may not happen. This week the Iranian deputy foreign minister said, “If the U.S. quits the nuclear deal, we will also quit it. We have told the Europeans that if they can’t keep the U.S. in the deal, Iran will also leave it.” That means all the restrictions that the JCPOA had put on what previously had been an accelerating Iranian nuclear program—restrictions that shoved that program backward—would come off.

That eventuality would underscore how much the talk about getting a “better deal” and correcting “flaws” in the JCPOA has been a charade covering efforts to kill the agreement outright for other reasons. (Here’s a lesson from Diplomacy 101: nearly all international agreements are “flawed” in that they are the result of negotiations in which neither side gets everything it would like.) Those complaining about Iranian missiles or other non-nuclear activities would see just as much of those activities as before and an expanded Iranian nuclear program. Those calling for the most sweeping inspection access imaginable in Iran would see the departure from Iran of the additional inspectors in the JCPOA having been a charade covering efforts to kill the agreement outright for other reasons.

Those expressing worry about what Iran would do a decade from now after “sunset” dates are reached will see Iran doing some of those same things right away.

Besides all that, there would be the broader harm to U.S. interests from a world that sees the United States not observing its agreements and sees a U.S. foreign policy in which destruction trumps productive diplomacy.

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We Made A Documentary Exposing the “Israel Lobby.” Why Hasn’t It Run?

BY CLAYTON SWISHER

You never know who you’re going to spot at the Doha Four Seasons in Qatar. So I was only somewhat surprised when I found myself standing next to Harvard Law Professor Alan Dershowitz in the omelet line last Saturday.

It was a fortuitous meeting. Dershowitz had recently played a small role in an episode that was threatening the reputation of my long-time employer, Al Jazeera. So naturally, I leapt at the opportunity to defend it.

The circumstances of the threat were these: In 2016, the award-winning Investigative Unit I directed sent an undercover reporter to look into how Israel wields influence in America through the pro-Israel American community. But when some right-wing American supporters of Israel found out about the documentary, there was a massive backlash. It was even labeled anti-Semitic in a spat of articles.

This uproar came at a time when due to an arbitrary blockade on Qatar imposed by the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, Qatar had been pursuing an end to its siege by appealing to the U.S. According to reports, Qatar sought to offer its own side of the narrative in this conflict by hosting thought leaders, including from the American Jewish community. From reports in the Israeli press, I learned that Dershowitz had been brought to meet with the Qatari emir, and that the American Jews had brought up what they saw as Al Jazeera’s “anti-Semitism” in those meetings.

Of course, our documentary is not anti-Semitic. It is an exploration of how Israel, a foreign government, influences U.S. foreign policy.

But I decided to show it to Dershowitz to get his point of view, and I was pleased when he obliged.

“I have no problem with any of the secret filming,” Mr. Dershowitz told me after watching nearly half of the documentary. “And I can even see this being broadcast on PBS. What I do take issue with is the lack of balance this program has, for example, not having a voice like me.” [Editor’s note: When asked about this by The Forward, Dershowitz said he did not specifically ask to be in the documentary himself, and that he brought up PBS for its use of undercover reporters.]

I understood Dershowitz’s remarks as a qualified seal of approval, which heartened me. And yet, our documentary has now been elevated to the center of an international scandal, with Al Jazeera’s reputation in America seemingly hanging in the balance.

Indeed, if the documentary doesn’t air soon, it might prove to be the ammunition sought by a group of zealous U.S. politicians who wish to declare Al Jazeera a foreign entity, and label us journalists as “spies.”

Since moving to Qatar in 2007, my professional life has been devoted to creating Al Jazeera’s first professional investigative unit, leading a team of committed journalists striving to challenge conventional wisdom rather than report the obvious. I am proud of how in such a short span of time, since our 2011 establishment, we have broken several important stories that have dominated the global news agenda, and even changed the course of history. You might recall our “Pales-
tine Papers” leak of confidential meeting minutes from the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations under Bush and Obama, or the investigation I led into Yasser Arafat’s death, resulting in his exhumation and the discovery of Polonium 210 in his corpse.

We have tackled a breadth of subjects and controversies, from exposing the depth of the Boeing 787’s battery problems to genocide in Myanmar to presidential corruption in the Maldives to a recent exposé on pedophilia in British youth football.

And we’ve won awards, including the Foreign Press Association, CINE Golden Eagle, One World Media and the New York Film Festival, as well as prestigious nominations in Europe’s top contests, including BAFIT, Monte Carlo and the Royal Television Society.

Even though our network is a private company funded by the government of Qatar, my unit operates independently and without government interference. If that weren’t the case, I have every confidence our staff—comprised of mostly British and American journalists—would walk. And rightfully so.

From time to time, when other investigative tactics won’t work, we escalate our efforts to include undercover reporters and secret filming. This practice is used by many international broadcasters, including BBC and CNN, and is carefully managed, through multiple layers of legal and editorial review, to ensure it is performed consistently with local laws, industry regulations, and our own Code of Ethics.

This tactic helped us to uncover sports doping at the highest levels of American professional athletics and, more dangerously, to expose South Africa’s illegal and gruesome rhino horn trade, which implicated the country’s own minister of state security.

It was under these auspices that our Investigative Unit placed concurrent undercover journalists in both Washington, DC and London to expose the clandestine efforts of Israel’s Ministry of Strategic Affairs to counter the global boycott, divestment and sanctions movement.

The UK Edition of “The Lobby” aired in January 2017. We captured on hidden camera an Israeli official, Shai Masot, manipulating domestic British NGOs and threatening to target pro-Palestinian MPs. Masot, whose business card read “Senior Political Officer” with the Israeli Embassy in London, threatened to “take down” the Foreign Office’s number two, Sir Alan Duncan, a critic of Israeli settlements. A British civil servant entertaining the plot, who we secretly recorded, was summarily dismissed.

The UK edition of “The Lobby” was of such public importance that it resulted in a formal apology from Ambassador Mark Regev. Masot resigned. Most significantly, a parliamentary inquiry was launched into foreign interference in UK foreign policy.

Frustratingly, despite all these proofs of the importance of our work, we were met with accusations of anti-Semitism. The Jewish Chronicle anonymously quoted a “communal figure” saying “the documentary revealed an ‘anti-Semitic’ mindset among those who made it.” A number of pro-Israel activists brought complaints against us, leading to an extensive regulatory investigation by Britain’s top broadcast regulator, Ofcom. But even that investigation cleared Al Jazeera of any foul play, including anti-Semitism. The lengthy verdict, issued last October, found that our work yielded “a serious investigative documentary” that was in the public interest. “Surreptitious filming,” Ofcom confirmed, “was necessary to the credibility and authenticity of the program because without it, the program makers would have had to rely on second-hand accounts.”

We could not have agreed more. Our journalism got at the heart of the crucial question of foreign interference in the UK government, and it was of vital public interest.

It was this same question—whether the Israeli government was funding or involved in lobbying efforts in the U.S. under the guise of a domestic lobbying group—that we sought to answer in the American edition of “The Lobby.”

Nowhere are these lobbying efforts more prominent than in Washington, DC, where we had a second undercover concurrently embedded to report on how the groups in America really work. We explored American pro-Israel lobbyists and their relationships with Israeli entities, like the Israeli Embassy or Israel’s Ministry of Strategic Affairs. Given the high volume of footage we obtained, it took us until early autumn 2017 to carefully ready the U.S. edition for broadcast.

After our journalism was validated and upheld by Ofcom in October, we assumed that the U.S. edition of “The Lobby” would be aired in just a matter of weeks, as I said in a series of interviews at the time. It was to be made available in the U.S. on YouTube.

There was a final step to the process. As a UK-regulated entity, we are obliged to send formal “right to reply” letters to anyone caught on our secret cameras, which I proceeded to do in January. This late stage formality is done in every project to notify unwitting people of our intention to broadcast. These letters clearly state the essence of our findings, providing the subjects the opportunity to respond. I duly instructed our reporter to proceed with sending the letters, which he did. More than 70 letters went out.

To this day, our letters yielded only a paltry three replies. Instead we faced a spate of articles by right-wing pro-Israel news sites in America, harshly attacking our work. They came from the likes of the “Foundation for Defense of Democracies,” whose staff was included in our secret filming, and who, according to earlier leaked e-mails, has aligned its pro-Israeli advocates with the United Arab Emirates government to smear Al Jazeera’s work as “an instrument of regional instability.”

Others, like Noah Pollak from the Committee for Israel, impugned our journalism as a “professional espionage operation carried out by Qatar on American soil.”

Rather than reply to our letter inviting him to challenge our findings about him, Pollak and other “leaders of Jewish American organizations” instead...
took meetings with the State of Qatar’s registered agent and lobbyist, a former aide to U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz named Nick Muzin, to “see if he could use his ties with the Qatari to stop the airing.”

Muzin, it seems, told them he could. In February, Muzin told Haaretz that “he was discussing the issue with the Qatari and didn’t think the film would broadcast in the near future.” One anonymous source even boasted to Haaretz that “the Qatari emir himself helped make the decision” to spike our film.

These same zealots are now lobbying Congress to pressure the Department of Justice to require our network to register as “foreign agents” under the Foreign Agent Registration Act (or “FARA”). In a letter circulated on Capitol Hill last week, some lawmakers even raised alarm over “reports” that our undercover had “infiltrated American 501(c)(3) and (c)(4) nonprofit organizations” in the course of our journalism.

I was outraged. When the network launched in 1996, it was set up to shine the light of transparency across the Arab and Muslim world. Established powers hated us, and on any given day, still do. Even the Bush administration contemplated bombing our headquarters during the second Iraq war. It was incredible to hear just a few years later then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton defending Al Jazeera as “real news” in testimony before Congress. I defy any journalist who truly values her or his craft to say that Al Jazeera has not been a force for good in our troubled planet. Al Jazeera has without question expanded press freedoms throughout the Arab and Muslim world.

And yet, I have to admit that someone has been hard at work putting the kibosh on our film.

For since October, we’ve faced a series of unexplained delays in broadcasting our project, the likes of which I’ve never experienced. I was repeatedly told by everyone I asked to “wait,” and was assured our documentary would eventually see the light of day. Then, as now, I took my senior management at its word. To my own specially trained ears, “wait” did not constitute “stop.”

In fact, it must not constitute “stop.” For if our documentary does not air, it may well lend credibility to the claim these 14 U.S. politicians have used and defamed us with—that Al Jazeera is indeed a foreign agent, at the direction and control of Qatar’s government.

I confess my own disappointment with Al Jazeera’s non-response to these attacks. In part because of this deep frustration and my inability to get any real transparency about the decision to delay our broadcast, I asked for and received a sabbatical, which I began this week. Meanwhile, the attacks against us continue. Although Al Jazeera is a world class media organization that wins awards and has changed history and the Arab world so much for the better, our shortcomings remain being way too shy (and late) to tell our own story. Worse, we often let others who have an agenda against us to tell it for us.

I am distressed to find that our investigation into America’s pro-Israel lobbyists may represent the most important test yet of Al Jazeera’s independence, and whether our network still has space to thrive amidst the unjust blockade against our Qatari host. I pray those outside our network do not seek short term political expediency and inappropriately interfere with our professional work, which we have zealously guarded and worked long term to preserve and uphold.

Nothing less than free speech and democratic values are at stake here.

Clayton Swisher is a Doha-based investigative journalist on sabbatical leave from Al Jazeera Media Network and author of The Truth About Camp David and The Palestinian Papers. The author speaks for himself and not for Al Jazeera. Follow him on Twitter @claytonswisher. The views and opinions expressed in this article are the author’s own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Forward, where this article was first published March 8, 2018. Reprinted with permission.

U.S. Officials Demand Al Jazeera Register as Propaganda “Agent”

BY PETER VAN BUREN

A bipartisan group of lawmakers has called for Attorney General Jeff Sessions to investigate whether Al Jazeera, the news outlet connected to the Qatari government, should register with the Justice Department as an agent under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). This will have broad implications for the First Amendment, our access to dissenting opinions, and even how the rest of the world views us.

The lawmakers include Representatives Josh Gottheimer, (D-NJ), Lee Zeldin (R-NY), and 16 other House members. Senator Ted Cruz, Texas Republican, also signed the letter to Sessions. The letter claims Al Jazeera “directly undermines American interests” and broadcasts “anti-American, anti-Semitic, and anti-Israel” material. If forced to register, Al Jazeera would join Russian outlets RT and Radio Sputnik, Japan’s Cosmомedia, the Korean Broadcasting System, and China Daily as acknowledged foreign state propaganda outlets. The DOJ has also been asked to look into a range of other Chinese media.

Ironically, the bipartisan request to force Al Jazeera to register comes amid a controversy over the network’s filming of a documentary critical of pro-Israel lobbying in the United States. For that exposé, the network used an undercover operative to secure footage revealing possibly illegal interactions between advocacy groups and lawmakers.

The Foreign Agents Registration Act was never intended to regulate journalism. In fact, the legislation includes finely worded exemptions for journalists, scholars, artists, and the like, who are not required to announce themselves as “agents of a foreign principal” regardless of what they do. The law was created in 1938 in response to German
propaganda, specifically Nazi officials and those they employed who were delivering pacifist speeches in then-neutral America to organize sympathetic German Americans. By requiring those working for the Nazis to register and report their finances and spending, U.S. counterespionage authorities could more easily keep track of their activities.

FARA doesn’t even prohibit straightforward propaganda, though it does seek to limit the influence of foreign agents by labeling their work, apparently to help out Americans who otherwise would not be able to tell the difference on their own. The law specifically says that “disclosure of the required information facilitates evaluation by the government and the American people of the statements and activities of such persons in light of their function as foreign agents.” Indeed, the Atlantic Council claims these actions “do not suppress freedom of speech; instead, it serves the First Amendment by supplementing information available to the public.”

Here’s a use of FARA in line with the law’s original intent: the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority, whose job is to lobby Americans on behalf of a foreign government—in this case, to take vacations in Abu Dhabi—is a FARA registrant. That way, when the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority says they have decent beaches you should visit, you know who is up to what. Other typical registrants might include an American lawyer hired by Saudi Arabia to lobby Congress in favor of more arms sales. Being a foreign agent is very legal and very popular with former congresspeople and government bureaucrats; you just need to announce who your employer is.

But FARA can also serve a more nefarious purpose: as a catch-22 prosecution (a “compliance statute”) for those the U.S. wants to declare as foreign agents but who resist. Once the feds want to register you as a foreign agent, you either agree and register or face jail time.

That is what happened in the cases of RT and Radio Sputnik. Following the 2016 election, frightened officials demanded that the Russian organizations register as propaganda agents. RT’s editor-in-chief maintained her network was an independent news outlet, but chose to comply rather than face criminal proceedings, adding “we congratulate the American freedom of speech and all those who still believe in it.” Critics then swung RT’s snarky comment on free speech into “proof” that it unfairly criticizes America.

The use of FARA to allow the government to declare which foreign media outlets produce “news” and which produce “fake news” and propaganda is “a shift in how the law has been applied in recent decades,” said the Committee to Protect Journalists. “We’re uncomfortable with governments’ deciding what constitutes journalism or propaganda.”

As the Justice Department wields its FARA weapon, here’s what Al Jazeera’s journalists could face. Designation under FARA requires that a media outlet label its reporting “with a conspicuous statement that the information is disseminated by the agents on behalf of the foreign principal”; in other words, a nutritional label for journalism. It also means the outlet must open its finances to the Department of Justice. It means Americans who choose to watch that media, or participate in its talk shows, or who work legally for those outlets, open themselves to accusations of “treason” (one political staffer was fired after being interviewed by Radio Sputnik). It adds credence to the muddy cries of “fake news” used to shut out dissenting opinions. It gives credibility to groups like PropOrNot, which lists websites it “determines” are Russian propaganda, and Hamilton 68, which does the same for Twitter.

Subjecting journalists to FARA sends a message about America. It encourages other governments to impose their own restrictions (Russia has already passed a law requiring outlets like CNN to register as foreign agents). It uses the full authority of the American government to declare that Al Jazeera, a network that reaches 310 million people in more than 160 countries, has no place within a free press because its broadcasts are “anti-American, anti-Semitic, and anti-Israel.” In the specific case of Al Jazeera, it seemingly extends American law to cover anti-Israeli propaganda as well. As with attempts to claim Wikileaks is espionage and not journalism, this particular use of FARA looks to be another instance of laws wielded to harass those with “un-American” opinions.

The employment of FARA to restrict foreign journalists also adds to the growing sense among too many already frightened Americans that our freedoms are being used against us. “The U.S. is at a huge strategic disadvantage when it comes to the New Media Wars because our information environment is so open and rich,” said one former CIA deputy director of intelligence. Perhaps too many dissenting voices isn’t a good idea. The Internet is just too much freedom to responsibly allow. Maybe the government should become more involved in what we say, hear, watch, and read, as Facebook and Twitter (which banned RT from advertising) do now—you know, for our own protection. Our open society is a vulnerability, not a strength.

The roots of our most basic rights can be found in the freedom of the press written into the First Amendment. The press must be unfettered in reporting so citizens can make informed decisions when voting, protesting, and petitioning their government. Government should play no role in designating good journalists from bad, in licensing who can report on or access a broad range of ideas. Sorting out the marketplace of ideas—opposing opinions, bias exposed and hidden—is supposed to be our task as an informed citizenry. We should reclaim that mantle and do the job ourselves.

Peter Van Buren, a 24-year State Department veteran, is the author of We Meant Well: How I Helped Lose the Battle for the Hearts and Minds of the Iraqi People and Hooper’s War: A Novel of WWII Japan. Follow him on Twitter @WeMeantWell. This article was first published by The American Conservative, March 27, 2018. Copyright © The American Conservative 2018. Reprinted with permission.
It’s Time For AIPAC to Register As a Foreign Agent

BY M.J. ROSENBERG

This weekend, 18,000 Americans from all over the country are coming to Washington to participate in the annual American Israel Public Affairs Committee Policy Conference.

AIPAC is one of the leading forces behind the Israel lobby, joined in recent years by the ascending Christians United for Israel. Other Jewish “pro-Israel” organizations are niche affairs, representing particular constituencies on the left or right. But it’s AIPAC that is the registered lobby on Capitol Hill, and it is AIPAC whose clout on matters relating to Israel exceeds the clout of the National Rifle Association on matters related to guns; while the NRA’s sway is almost entirely over Republicans, AIPAC has historically drawn its support from both parties. Is there any place but AIPAC that not only gets Mike Pence, Paul Ryan, Mitch McConnell, Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi in the same room, but also gets to hear them in near total agreement?

But there’s something strange, too, about AIPAC. Consider Vice President Mike Pence’s remarks at last year’s conference: “Every freedom-loving American stands with Israel—because her cause is our cause, her values are our values and her fight is our fight.”

How can America’s representatives declare that any other country’s fight—even one as close to us as Israel—is our fight, its cause our cause, its values our values?

It’s precisely this kind of overidentification that George Washington warned against in his 1796 farewell address. “A passionate attachment of one nation for another produces a variety of evils,” Washington said. “Sympathy for the favorite nation, facilitating the illusion of an imaginary common interest in cases where no real common interest exists...betrays the former into a participation in the quarrels and wars of the latter without adequate inducement or justification.”

To protect against this kind of passionate attachment, the United States has laws in place that forbid foreign governments from wielding certain kinds of influence or lobbying. Every foreign country represented in Washington by foreign agents must register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. Under its terms, the country in question is absolutely banned from participating in or influencing American elections. Every contact the agents have with Congress must be reported to the Department of Justice, along with how and where they spend their resources.

This law applies to Canada as much as it does to Russia (although Russian interference in our political process is now one of the biggest issues in our political life). It also applies to Israel.

But it does not apply to the Israel lobby as represented by AIPAC, which is heavily involved in our political system, funding candidates who are perceived to be “good on Israel,” and defunding incumbents who fail to subscribe to the favored foreign state’s agenda.

How does AIPAC get away with it?

It gets away with it because AIPAC’s founder, I.L. Kenen, came up with a legal loophole by which AIPAC is defined not as a lobby for a foreign state but for Americans who support that state. It’s a critical distinction that makes AIPAC’s dominance over U.S. Middle East policy possible.

I worked at AIPAC directly for Kenen, back in the 1970s before moving on to Capitol Hill. He told me that he came up with the AIPAC formula—AIPAC as an American organization lobbying for Americans—so that AIPAC would be legally permitted to engage in politics and not have to reveal its activities. A devoted American and liberal Democrat, Kenen believed American and Israeli interests and values weren’t likely to diverge anyway, so what’s the problem?

After Kenen retired, Israel and AIPAC took a rightward turn, and he saw the mistake he made. Toward the end of his life, Kenen was outraged by the AIPAC leadership with its unquestioning support of the occupation of the West Bank and the blockade against Gaza, and other right-wing Israeli policies. He hated what he saw as AIPAC using its political power to keep the United States government and other influential Americans and, perhaps most important, the media from straying from the Israeli line.

Not only was AIPAC making it hard for the United States to restrain the Israeli government, but it was also weakening forces inside Israel that were trying to do so. The Israeli peace camp needed the United States on its side, but thanks to AIPAC, the United States could not help our natural Israeli allies. Of course, when Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was actively seeking peace and an end to the occupation, that was the moment AIPAC chose to separate itself from Israel, resulting in Rabin’s blistering exhortation that it get the hell out of his way.

By the time of his death, Kenen was thoroughly alienated from the organization.

Now is the time to undo Kenen’s mistake. It is time to require AIPAC to register as what it is: a foreign agent. It will still be able to advocate for Israel, but as an Israeli lobby, which admits to getting its marching orders from the Israeli government. What it would not be able to do is direct campaign money to politicians. Let’s see how many vice presidents, senators and representatives show up at its conferences then. Let’s see how many of its Israel-right-or-wrong resolutions pass the House 435-0. Let’s see if presidents are still afraid to say what they think about the occupation and the denial of democratic rights to Palestinians.

I began this piece by referring to AIPAC as the major component of the “pro-Israel” lobby. Actually, it isn’t. It is a lobby for the Israeli right and for a
status quo that has turned Israel into an international pariah. That is not the way it has to be.

In 1995, when the peace-seeking Rabin was gunned down by a right-wing Israeli zealot, more foreign leaders attended his funeral than had attended any similar rite since John F. Kennedy’s. Poll after poll showed Rabin, the man who negotiated honestly and directly with the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, to be among the most admired people in the world.

Today, Netanyahu and AIPAC (which has kept the United States government firmly behind Netanyahu’s policies) have turned Israel into a source of dissonance even among American Jews.

No, AIPAC is not a “pro-Israel” lobby. It’s the Netanyahu lobby and our laws should treat it as such, for Israel’s sake even more than our own.

As for the thousands of Americans gathered in Washington this weekend, they need to know one thing: They are not supporting the dream of a secure, democratic Israel at peace with its neighbors and the world. They are, unwittingly, supporting a right-wing political agenda that is placing Israel in ever-deeper peril and, frankly, jeopardizing its very existence.

M.J. Rosenberg worked at AIPAC from 1974 to 1976 and from 1982 to 1986. He worked on Capitol Hill for 15 years and was a Clinton political appointee at USAID. Find him on Twitter @mjro森berg. This article was first published by the Forward, March 2, 2018. Reprinted with permission. The views and opinions expressed in this article are the author’s own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Forward.

One Man Has Taken Over a Historic Organization. Is It Good For the Jews?

BY JOSH NATHAN-KAZIS

In 2010, the American Jewish Congress announced it was shutting down. This past summer, it started sending out fund-raising e-mails. Lots of them. At times in 2017 they arrived almost daily.

The e-mails posed a puzzle: Why was a defunct Jewish organization trying to raise money? And why was it selling a T-shirt with the phrase “Make Hanukkah Lit Again” across the front?

It turns out that instead of shutting its doors, a wealthy Jewish businessman named Jack Rosen had quietly transformed AJCongress into his own private Jewish State Department, taking meetings with presidents and expounding on Jewish policy. Now, he’s bringing it out of the shadows.

“For the purpose of talking to leaders around the world and getting them to support our views on Israel, it doesn’t take a huge staff,” Rosen told the Forward. “We prefer to be sort of smaller.”

In fact, AJCongress is pretty much just Rosen. Though its name and history imply that it speaks on behalf of the 500 most important decision-makers on issues relating to Israel and to get to know them. He does most of that relationship building. A lot of it seems to happen around the dinner table at his apartment near Manhattan’s Central Park.


Partway through the dinner, Rosen interrupted to criticize Argentina’s vote in favor of a UNESCO resolution despised by pro-Israel groups. Macri agreed that it was a bad vote. Weeks later, when another version of the same resolution came up again, Argentina abstained.

“Somebody has to talk to them, and I don’t think what you need to talk to them is 500 people working for you and a staff of lawyers,” Rosen said.

Some former leaders of the old AJCongress don’t like what Rosen has done with the group.

“I think it unfortunate that an organization with the history and the remarkable success over the course of 100 years has been decimated, and now appears to be controlled by one individual,” said Jay Umansky, a former member of AJCongress’s governing council and the former president of its St. Louis branch.
In recent weeks, Rosen has been making efforts to shore up AJCongress’s image. In January, Rosen invited a Forward reporter to the marble-floored office of Rosen Partners, his investment firm, in an art deco office building with a grand piano in the lobby, just down the block from Trump Tower.

“Ban Ki-moon and Kofi Annan have been to dinner at my house several times,” he said, referring to the former secretaries-general of the United Nations.

Rosen is known as an assiduous cultivator of relationships. He was a friend of the Clintons and close enough to President George W. Bush that the president gave him the nickname “Rosie.” He’s had Robert de Niro over for dinner. “You’re in New York, you come across all kinds of people,” he said.

Born in a displaced persons camp in Germany—the same DP camp where Zionist Organization of America President Morton Klein was born—Rosen grew up in the Bronx with a real estate developer father. Rosen, too, is a real estate developer, though the interests of his firm, Rosen Partners, are sprawling. He has close ties to the Russian Jewish billionaire oligarchs behind Alfa Group, Mikhail Fridman and German Khan, forming a massive joint investment venture with them in 2012 and serving as a member of the advisory board Altimo, their telecommunications investment firm. He also owns a number of large Manhattan buildings.

In one instance, Rosen’s business interests have messily intersected with his leadership of AJCongress. In 2012, AJCongress brought Allentown, Pennsylvania’s mayor, Ed Pawlowski, on its annual mayors’ trip to Israel, called the International Conference of Mayors. Later, Pawlowski solicited political donations from Rosen while trying to drive a city contract to a security firm Rosen controlled. Pawlowski was indicted in July 2017 on federal corruption charges over this and other incidents and is currently on trial. Rosen has not been accused of any wrongdoing, and though he donated to Pawlowski’s aborted U.S. Senate campaign, the city contract never went through.

Rosen said that he had never gone into business with any mayor whom AJCongress had invited on the International Conference of Mayors. “We get it all the time,” he said. “We get everybody, including U.S. mayors, who want people to invest. We’re successful businesspeople. I don’t believe I’ve ever done a deal with a mayor” he met through the conference.

The meetings that Rosen takes with world leaders are undeniably high-level. He has met with the controversial new crown prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman (“He’s a very interesting guy”) and with the emir of Qatar. He attended the wedding of the son of the prime minister of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. In an e-mail, a spokesman for AJCongress said that the organization had other programs besides Rosen’s diplomatic work. Most of that appears to consist of op-eds and statements by Rosen on anti-Semitism, Iran and U.S.-Israel ties.

Abraham Foxman, the former leader of the Anti-Defamation League, said that Rosen has earned his position as a spokesman for the Jews. “Jack Rosen earned his stripes, both in time and in money and in effort,” Foxman said. “The organization disappeared. But that doesn’t mean that he has to disappear. He’s not a fly-by-night.”

Still, the current AJCongress is a far cry from its former self. In 2015, the most recent year for which tax filings are available, the group raised $340,000 and spent $503,000. At the end of that year, the organization was deep in debt, with liabilities that amounted to a half-million more than it had in the bank.

In its persistent fund-raising e-mails and its public statements, AJCongress focuses almost exclusively on Israel, a historical departure for the organization. While AJCongress was staunchly Zionist from its earliest incarnation, it concentrated during its heyday on domestic advocacy. It fought for abortion rights, women’s rights and civil rights. Its legal efforts were largely responsible for the end of the quota system in college and university admissions. As groups like the American Jewish Committee focused increasingly on foreign affairs, AJCongress specialized in domestic matters.

It differed, too, in its tactics. In contrast to the elite-driven philosophy of AJC, which preferred to seek backchannels through which its wealthy leaders could influence policy, it worked through public advocacy and organizing. The organization had tens of thousands of members and regional offices across the country. Its members had a direct hand in setting the policies of the organization through conferences and resolutions.

Today, AJCongress is the epitome of the elite-driven model. The grassroots model, meanwhile, has been abandoned. Broad-based groups like B’nai B’rith and Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America have shriveled, while AJC, which has always emphasized elite leadership, has grown, and had nearly $70 million in revenue in 2016. Meanwhile, Jewish federations across the country have emphasized fund-raising from wealthy donors.

“Everybody wants to maintain the appearance of larger representation, but increasingly actual decision-making is confined to a relatively small number of people,” said one long-term observer of the Jewish communal scene, who asked not to be named. “The model of the grassroots, policy-determined-by-democratic-vote national organization is, for better or for worse, in eclipse now on the American Jewish scene.”

Foxman said that the legitimacy of a spokesman for the Jews is always in the eyes of the beholder. “It’s always been an issue,” he said. “Where do you get your credentials?…To a large extent, it’s been what the outside world sees.”

For some younger Jewish activists, that may not be enough.

“To me it’s emblematic of the out-of-touch establishment,” said Yonah Lieberman, a leader of the leftist Jewish group IfNotNow, which has a young grassroots constituency. “There’s dozens of old white Jewish guys who are attempting to speak for the entire community. And for too long we’ve let them do that.”
What Will Happen When Muslims Outnumber Jews in the U.S. by 2040?

BY DUNIA EL-ZOBAIDI

Estimates from the Pew Research Center indicate that by 2040, Muslims will replace Jews as the second-largest religious group in the United States after Christians. By 2050, the U.S. Muslim population will total 8.1 million people, nearly double what it is today.

How will this growth affect the way America views Muslims? Will they be more of a threat or less?

Besheer Mohamed, the lead author of the Pew study, said Muslims will be more influential in American society.

“People who know more Muslims personally can have more positive views toward Islam and Muslims than people who don’t know Muslims. So, if there are more Muslims, then there will be more Americans that know Muslims personally,” Mohamed said.

Many Muslims in the United States are rising to the top of their chosen careers, and many more are entering high positions in the federal government and in the ranks of state governments across the country.

“As Muslims will be here longer and become more established, we will see more Muslims in all walks of life with larger amounts of influence, such as in Congress. We have already started to see it, as there are more Muslims in Congress now than 10 years ago,” Mohamed said.

Muslims in the United States tend to be as well off as the general U.S. public; 24 percent of Muslim households in the U.S. earn more than $100,000 a year, compared to 23 percent of the general population. However, U.S.-born Muslims are also more likely to start on the lower end of the salary scale, with 40 percent of Muslim households averaging less than $30,000 a year.

“Muslims are a younger population than the public overall, so they would have just finished their college degree and are looking for their first job, so they won’t be earning as much as someone who has been in the field for 20 years,” Mohamed said. “So, this is not a trajectory. It’s just where they are in their life at the time.

“Many U.S.-born Muslims are African-American converts. African Americans, in general, tend to have lower incomes.”

The path a foreign-born Muslim takes to a high-paid job is usually different from the one of a U.S.-born Muslim.

“Many foreign-born Muslims in the United States are here because they have skills that are in high demand. They are here with a high-paying job. Institutionally, they have good connections abroad, so they have been fast-tracked into success,” Mohamed said.

For U.S.-born Muslims, success can depend on the extent to which their immigrant parents know how to navigate the American system. However, 24 percent of U.S. Muslims have U.S.-born parents. Many of them are children of converts. Mohamed said the latter group has the advantage of knowing the system.

For all the positive indicators for American Muslims, they are perceived negatively in some quarters.

Mohamed’s 2017 survey indicated that 50 percent of Americans do not see Islam as a part of mainstream society. “They think there is a conflict between Islam and democracy. So, there is tension,” Mohamed said. One respondent said: “There is no democracy in Islam.”

Some say there is a misunderstanding, as the public does not understand Islam or that terrorists give Islam a bad name.

“A lot of people do not understand Islam. They think it is [the Islamic State] and that is not true,” one respondent said.

Others, however, said Islam’s teachings about gender and sexuality are not compatible with democracy. A respondent said: “Islam is not for freedom of women.”

Democrats said there is a natural conflict between Islam and democracy, and approximately half or fewer of those in other major religious groups express that view.

Older Americans and those with relatively lower levels of educational attainment tend to be more negative than others in their views about Muslims and Islam.

“Americans have a mixed set of views on Muslims and Islam,” Mohamed said. “The majority of Americans feel there is a great amount of discrimination against Muslims. They think there is more discrimination against Muslims than toward Blacks, gays, Jews or any other group we have asked about.”

Mohamed’s full 2017 survey of U.S. Muslims can be found on the Pew Research Center’s website.

Palestinian Teen Ashed Tamimi Reaches Plea Bargain, to Serve 8 Months in Israeli Prison

BY YOTAM BERGER
Palestinian teen Ahed Tamimi reached a plea bargain with military prosecution on Wednesday, according to which she is to be sentenced to eight months in prison. The military court handling her case approved the plea agreement on Wednesday, making it an official court order.

As part of the agreement, the 17-year-old pleaded guilty to four counts of assault, including the videotaped slapping of an Israeli soldier. The agreement, which the court has also approved, sentences Nur Tamimi to time served—16 days in prison—and a 2,000 shekel ($575) fine. Nariman Tamimi’s sentence is eight months in prison and a fine of 6,000 shekels ($1,725).

Ahed Tamimi’s case has been conducted behind closed doors. The military court rejected a request that she made this week to hold proceedings in public. Earlier Tamimi’s lawyer, Gaby Lasky, confirmed that a plea agreement had been reached. “The fact that the plea agreement provides for the dropping of all of counts of the indictment that made it possible to detain her until the end of legal proceedings is proof that Tamimi’s arrest in the middle of the night and the legal proceedings against her were steps designed to settle scores,” Lasky said.

Before the ruling was confirmed by the court, sources told Haaretz that according to the plea bargain, Tamimi would be found guilty of the assault that was videotaped in December, incitement for violence for the posting of the video, and two other assaults on soldiers. Additional charges for assault and stone-throwing were to be dropped.

According to one source, the punishment in Ahed Tamimi’s case is not considered particularly lenient or particularly severe. The Israeli military felt the need to end the legal matter, the source said, as it damaged the army’s reputation in the media and internationally, which may be why the plea bargain was intensively promoted.

Tamimi’s initial January indictment included 12 charges going back to 2016. The indictment included five counts of assault against security forces, including stone throwing. She was charged with assaulting a soldier, threatening a soldier, interfering with a soldier in the line of duty, incitement and throwing objects at a person or property.

Tamimi’s mother, Nariman Tamimi, was also charged with incitement on social media—she filmed the slapping incident—and with assault. Tamimi’s cousin, Nur, was indicted on charges of aggravated assault.

Nur Tamimi said she and Ahed slapped the soldiers in part because they had invaded Ahed’s yard on Dec. 15, the day they were filmed—but the main reason was that they had just read on Facebook that a cousin, Mohammed Tamimi, had suffered an apparently fatal head injury from an Israeli soldier’s bullet. He actually survived the shooting.

Bassem Tamimi, Ahed’s father, said that his wife and daughter had done nothing wrong and are “fighting for freedom and justice.”

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world: There's apartheid here.

Only by chance were the three all religious, a kind of innocent coincidence. We don't know who among them is a settler, but that of course means nothing either. They went to work in a military court of the occupation to protect human rights in the territories, in the name of the Lord of Hosts. After their rulings on Tamimi, there are no fair-minded people left in the world, not even in brainwashed Israel, who can seriously claim that an apartheid regime does not exist in the territories. The BDS movement should congratulate the officers who lifted all doubt from those who still had any doubts. The legal system that has one law for Jews and another for Palestinians, without apology, without whitewashing, should be appreciated for its honesty. A legal system that sentenced a soldier who shot a wounded man to only one more month than its sentence for a teenage girl who slapped a soldier—this is a system that openly admits it considers slapping the occupier equal to the murder of a person under occupation. Only one month separates the two.

A system that could not conceive of arresting, interrogating, indicting and certainly not sentencing to many months in prison a girl from the settlements who slapped a soldier, threw garbage at him, punctured the tires of his vehicle, threw stones at him or struck him—such a system sent Tamimi to eight months in prison. Need we say more? Her attorney, Gaby Lasky, could do nothing but agree to the plea bargain. Lasky, too, like two million people around the world, wants to see Tamimi free.

And perhaps Tamimi's sentence is proper. Thanks to it, Israeli propaganda can no longer argue with the world against the charge of apartheid without ridicule. The colonels from Judea have exposed the truth, which has long been known. You bet it's apartheid.

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Take a Look Around. This Is What Annexation Looks Like

BY MICHAEL OMER-MAN

The annexation of Palestine will not come one day, it is happening every day, and this is what it looks like: legislating mundane changes about higher education councils.

There will be no definitive moment, event or a point in history, when we can say that annexation happened. Israel's annexation is a process—a deliberate process—which has been carefully planned, began a long time ago, and which will continue for years to come.

It is hard to get too excited over small steps toward annexation, such as a law that moves a university from the jurisdiction of one council of higher education to another. The international community will not raise a storm. The U.N. Security Council will not hold an emergency session. The EU will not threaten sanctions. Yet this is precisely what the annexation of Palestine will look like.

The Knesset on Monday passed a law that places Israeli universities in the occupied Palestinian territories under the aegis of the Israeli Council for Higher Education, a civilian body created by Israeli law to oversee universities and colleges in Israel. Settlement colleges and universities were previously supervised by the Council for Higher Education in Judea and Samaria, a military body created specifically because the civilian council's jurisdiction did not extend beyond the State of Israel's borders.

This was not the first time the Knesset decided that it could legislate beyond the boundaries of the territory over which the state claims sovereignty. Israel rules over the West Bank not with the laws of its elected civilian government but rather with a military regime, in loose accordance with those parts of international law that deal with occupied territories. The wholesale application of civilian law to an occupied territory amounts to annexation.

There are many other small steps toward annexation being planned in the near and long term. Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu on Monday stressed the need to advance those plans in an organized manner, and not as ad hoc proposals from individual politicians looking to make headlines.

"With regards to the question of the application of Israeli law in Judea and Samaria and the Jordan Valley," the prime minister said in a Likud faction meeting, referring to the entirety of the West Bank, "...it should be government-sponsored legislation and not private legislation. This is a process with historic consequences...We will act intelligently."

The media immediately latched onto a different part of Netanyahu's statement, in which he claimed Israel is coordinating and holding ongoing discussions with the United States regarding annexation plans. The Prime Minister's Office was forced to retract that part of the statement, which made for even better headlines. The prime minister openly and unabashedly describing how he plans to apply Israeli law to the Palestinian territories, however, is barely news anymore. It has fully penetrated the mainstream discourse.

And that is the point. Annexation is no longer a topic that the Israeli right whispers about in closed meetings and fringe conferences. The Israeli government no longer feels bound by the conventions of the past few decades, according to which it constantly reassures the world that it is working to achieve a two-state solution—even if only years down the road. Ironically, the only world leaders who are willing to call out that false sincerity these days are those, like Donald Trump, who were never invested in a two-state outcome to begin with, and those, like John Kerry, who have left public life for good.

Annexation is spoken of as if it is an outcome in and of itself. But annexation is not the goal. The goal is simply to strengthen and cement Israel's con-

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is a compulsory stop on these propaganda tours. Being only a mile from the Gaza Strip, residents have little time to take cover, though very few have been killed by Gaza’s erratic garden-shed missiles.

The story of brave Sderot is told ad nauseam to brainwash the media and their own people, besides the coachloads of gullible foreign politicians and tourists. The Israeli authorities have studiously counted and broadcast the number of homemade Qassam projectiles, claiming that more than 15,000 “terrorist” rockets have “rained down” on Sderot since the Israeli occupier pulled its citizens and troops out of the Gaza Strip in 2005, saying they were making a concession of territory designed to bring peace. Of course, it didn’t. Why?

For several reasons. Israel’s “concession” was the handing back of territory that didn’t belong to them in the first place. Furthermore, the pull-out on the ground has still left Israel occupying Gaza’s territorial waters and airspace, and in control of all land crossings—including the one into Egypt. The Zionist regime has thus maintained a vicious blockade on the tiny coastal enclave for the last 10 years. Hotovely and her regime colleagues, who preach non-stop about Israel’s right to self-defense, fail to understand that the Palestinians have the same right and are entitled to mount an armed resistance against their illegal occupier.

What Israelis never admit to is how many missiles, bombs, shells, mortar rounds and other high-tech ordnance launched by their F-16s, helicopter gunships, drones, tanks and navy gunboats have slammed into crowded Gaza, causing horrendous slaughter and reducing homes and vital infrastructure (much of it paid for by European Union and American taxpayers) to rubble.

And there’s another little fact that Hotovely is careful not to mention. Sderot is built on the lands of a Palestinian Arab village called Najd, which was ethnically cleansed by Jewish terrorists in May 1948, before Israel was declared a state and before any Arab armies entered Palestine. The 600-plus villagers, all Muslim, were forced to flee for their lives. Britain, the mandated government, was on watch while this and many other atrocities were committed by rampaging Jewish militias.

Arabs owned over 90 percent of the land in Najd and, according to U.N. Resolution 194 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, they are entitled to return home. But, as we have come to expect, Israel refuses to recognize the rights of others and will not allow them back. Anyway, what is there for them to return to? The 82 homes there were bulldozed. Najd was one of 418 Palestinian villages and towns ethnically cleansed and wiped off the map by Zionist Jews. Its inhabitants became refugees in Gaza and their families are probably still living in camps there.

The irony is that some of them may be manning the rocket launcher!

When Barack Obama visited Sderot he spouted the well-worn mantra backing Israel’s right to protect its citizens from rocket attacks. “If somebody was sending rockets into my house where my two daughters sleep at night, I would do everything to stop that, and would expect Israel to do the same thing.” Well said, Obama. But let’s hope you wouldn’t be so stupid or arrogant as to live on land you stole from your neighbor at gunpoint.

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Stuart Littlewood is the author of the book Radio Free Palestine, which tells the plight of the Palestinians under occupation. This article was first posted on <www.redressonline.com>, March 13, 2018. Copyright © 2018 Redress Information & Analysis. Reprinted with permission.

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A gathering of rich oil Arabs pledged $30 billion this week at a meeting in Kuwait to start rebuilding war-shattered Iraq. Sounds nice but these kinds of conclaves are notorious for offering big but delivering little.
The event was billed as helping Iraq repair war damage caused by ISIS. In fact, most of the damage from that short-lived conflict was caused by U.S. bombing and a few Russian air strikes. ISIS, as this column has long been crying in the wilderness, was largely a paper tiger confected by the U.S., Britain and France to justify their military re-entry into Syria.

Iraq’s government says it needs at least $88 billion to rebuild war damage. What the U.S.-imposed client regime in Baghdad won’t or can’t say is that the damage to Iraq is far greater than $88 billion and was largely inflicted by U.S. air power in 1990-1991 and 2003.

Iraq was ravaged, as I saw myself while covering the wars. This small nation of 23-25 million souls, a third of whom were in permanent revolt against the Baghdad government, was pounded into rubble by U.S. air power and cruise missiles. First in 1990-1991, then in 2003, everything of value was blown to bits: hospitals, schools, food factories, chemical plants making insecticide, bridges, and communications. In short, all the attributes of a modern state.

Most shocking to me was the destruction of Iraq’s water and sewage treatment plants by U.S. air strikes.

Their destruction resulted in epidemics of cholera and other water-borne diseases. Children were the primary victims. The U.N. asserted that over 550,000 Iraqi children died as a result of contaminated water. U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright later notoriously asserted that these deaths were “a price worth paying.” I call them a war crime.

In 2003, 900,000 U.S.-directed troops massed in Kuwait, invaded Iraq to finish off, it was claimed, the “work that the first President Bush failed to achieve,” the overthrow and lynching of Iraqi President Saddam Hussain. If Saddam had any nuclear or broad-area biological weapons, the invader’s buildup in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia would have been a dream target.

But Saddam Hussain had no nuclear weapons, contrary to U.S. and British claims. I discovered in Baghdad a group of British scientific technicians who had been sent by the UK Ministry of Defense to build outlawed biological weapons at Salman Pak. These included deadly anthrax and Q-fever—but only for use against Iran if a second Iraq-Iran war erupted.

It is now widely accepted that Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction pointed at the West, as George Bush and Tony Blair incessantly claimed. But this was the excuse for going to war against Iraq and destroying it.

When no such weapons were found, the story from Washington and London was changed to “oops, it was an intelligence failure. Sorry about that.”

Journalists like myself who asserted that Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction were fired or marginalized. I was blacklisted at CNN after the White House told the network to fire me at once. All the “presstitutes” who acted as government boosters for the war were promoted and lauded. Welcome to the new Soviet media.

Since Iraq, one of the Arab world’s most developed countries, was laid waste by U.S. bombing, and since the war was deemed a big mistake, who is responsible for trying to repair Iraq to its pre-war condition? The money offered last week in Baghdad by the Gulf Arabs was a drop in the bucket and designed to bring Iraq into the forming anti-Iran alliance.

If this war crime was being properly litigated, Washington would likely end up being assessed something like $100 billion in damages just to replace physical infrastructure destroyed in the two wars, never mind the deaths of so many Iraqi civilians. Iran would also have a claim against Iraq’s Western and Arab backers for Baghdad’s 1980-1988 war of aggression against Iran that caused an estimated one million Iranian casualties.

“Oops, I’m sorry we destroyed your country and children” is not a sufficient mea culpa. The Western leaders who engineered this criminal war against Iraq deserve to be brought to book. So far, they have gotten off scot free. In fact, the same terrible fate has since befallen Syria, Yemen and parts of Somalia. Were these disasters also mistakes due to faulty intelligence?