



OPINION and ANALYSIS

Vol 1, Number 46: 14 November 2013

A selection of some of the more challenging and thought-provoking
local and international writings on the Middle East

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Opinion and Analysis: Week ending 13 November 2013

(1) We are no longer placated by empty assurances – SA Zionist Federation

Ben Levitas, Politicsweb, 13 November 2013

A condemnation of the constant stream of anti-Israel vitriol emanating from the highest levels of the tripartite alliance.

<http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page72308?oid=453522&sn=Marketingweb+detail&pid=90389>

(2) John Kerry's 'third intifada'

David Keene, Washington Times, 10 November 2013

One of the dirty little secrets of American politics is that most senators don't do much. They talk to each other, to the media and to their constituents. They can and do say whatever will get them the attention they crave because very little they say is remembered from one news cycle to another.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/nov/10/keene-john-kerrys-third-intifada/>

(3) It's not anti-Jewish to oppose Israeli occupation of Palestine

Neeshan Balton, Politicsweb, 10 November 2013

Neeshan Balton says that as SA's history has demonstrated, retreating into ethnic laagers does not make the issues go away.

<http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page72308?oid=449353&sn=Marketingweb+detail&pid=90389>

(4) The looming bad deal on Iran

Alan Johnson, World Affairs Journal, 7 November 2013

Iran seeks a grey area in which to work, staying just the right side of the red lines set by Israel (a bomb's worth of uranium enriched to 20%) and the US (a decision to build the bomb), while increasing enrichment capability, immunizing facilities from attack, and shortening the time necessary for breakout (or weaponizing) after a decision to do so is taken.

<http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/blog/alan-johnson/looming-bad-deal-iran>

(5) The idea of a Jewish state is itself democratic: an interview with Tal Becker.
Toby Greene, BICOM, 6 November 2013

Most Israeli Jews see the Jewish character of the State of Israel primarily in national and cultural terms. They want Israel's character preserved as it was conceived by Israel's Declaration of Independence in 1948 and the UN Partition Plan of 1947. That is a Jewish majority state in which non-Jewish citizens enjoy full and equal citizenship, as befits a democracy.

<http://www.bicom.org.uk/analysis-article/6082/>

(6) Only talking heals wounds of war
Allan Massie, The Scotsman, 6 November 2013

Arabs must soften their hard line stance if there is to be any realistic solution to the Middle East crisis, writes Allan Massie.

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/allan-massie-only-talking-heals-wounds-of-war-1-3175235>

(7) Yes, Minister Lapid, Israel can be both Jewish and democratic
Gil Troy, Jerusalem Post, 5 November 2013

Judaism can welcome democracy today more than it did 3,000 years ago. In fact, many theorists root democracy in Judaism and the Bible.

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/Center-Field-Yes-Minister-Lapid-Israel-can-be-both-Jewish-and-democratic-330713>

(8) Holocaust remembrance: New tool for anti-Semitism?
Peter Martino, Gatestone Institute, 4 November 2013

One shocking aspect of the new wave of anti-Semitism is that the remembrance of the Holocaust is being abused to propagate anti-Semitism and feelings of hatred against Israel -- the state that the Jewish people established in order to protect themselves against future holocausts.

<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4044/holocaust-remembrance-antisemitism>

(9) Total frustration
Editorial, Oman Tribune, 4 November 2013

To put it succinctly, Israel does not want a viable free Palestinian state. Israel wants Palestine to be its colony with its people at its mercy forever. Adding to all these monstrous demands are the continuing Israeli provocations by building more settlements.

http://www.omantribune.com/index.php?page=editorial_details&id=2854&heading=Editorial

(1) We are no longer placated by empty assurances – SA Zionist Federation

As loyal South Africans who have made a disproportionate contribution to the wellbeing of South Africa, I and my colleagues at the Cape Board of the Zionist Federation wish to voice our dissatisfaction with the consistent attacks on Israel's internal policies, and on it alone being singled out for failure to reach an accord with the Arabs.

The Minister in the Presidency, Collins Chabane's assurances that "Government has not imposed a ban on travel to the State of Israel by government officials", made on November 6th, fly in the face of too many contrary statements from the African National Congress and its alliance partners. These assurances are too little, too late and do nothing to clarify or change the ongoing travel ban.

While acknowledging and supporting the statements that the main Jewish organizations have already made, I wish to address the general climate of heightened intolerance which is directed at the only state that also happens to be Jewish.

The level of invective can be expected to increase in the lead up to the national elections. It is clear that the tri-partite alliance, desperate to gain control of the Western Cape, and not lose Gauteng, is pursuing the large Muslim vote, and prepared to forego the small influence that Jews would have.

Already in February 2012, the then Minister of Arts and Culture, speaking to the New Age Newspaper, said that the government has "no problem with supporting the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel." While discouraging contact with Israel, the Department of Arts and Culture proceeded to sign a cultural agreement between South Africa and "Palestine" and announced plans for South African artists and cultural entrepreneurs to participate in the South African Arts and Culture Week to be hosted in "Palestine". The Israeli Minister of Arts and Culture, who happened to be visiting South Africa privately around that time, was not accorded the same honours.

In mid-February, after a meeting was held in Cape Town with representatives of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies and SA Zionist Federation, the Minister of Arts and Culture clarified that, "notwithstanding certain remarks attributed to him by the media, neither he nor his government supported anti-Israel boycotts".

Despite these assurances, in August 2012, South Africa's deputy Foreign Minister Ebrahim Ismael Ebrahim told the City Press that South Africa was "discouraging" its citizens from visiting Israel.

"Israel is an occupier country which is oppressing Palestine, so it is not proper for South Africans to associate with Israel," and "We discourage people from going there except if it has to do with the peace process."

In a tone consistent with the recent statements by Minister of International Relations, Nkoane Maite Chabane's, Ebrahim Ebrahim went on to say that South Africans should "scale down" economic ties with Israel, but claimed that he was not advocating a full breakdown of relations between the countries. A planned trip to Israel by officials from the KwaZulu-Natal province was cancelled due to these government guidelines.

At that time, Minister Rob Davies, had drafted legislation that would require products made in the "West Bank" to be marked with a distinct label, to enable customers to differentiate between products that were made inside and outside Israel. The intended wording of the legislation displayed

the Minister's inherent bias and agenda, as it wished to label products from Judea and Samaria, as products originating from 'Palestinian occupied territories'.

The BDS Movement recorded on December 21st, that "South Africa's ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), at its 53rd National Conference, (in Mangaung) reaffirmed a resolution supporting the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel campaign." This declaration was made by Lindiwe Zulu, a special advisor to President Jacob Zuma at that time, as it flowed from Resolution 39 (b), of the ANC's October International Solidarity Conference (ISC) and all its resolutions.

Marius Fransman, the other Deputy Minister of International Relations, in a Ramadan message to South Africa's Muslims, clearly aimed at winning the support of the Muslim vote in the Western Cape, where he is also the leader of the ANC, stated emphatically that the government fully supported the Palestinian cause and its struggle for independence. This Minister has subsequently, brazenly and dishonorably made a series of explicit anti-Jewish remarks, which are currently being heard at the Human Rights court. Shamefully, there have been no official voices of disapproval from the government.

In October 2012, the ANC Chairperson, and former Deputy President, Baleka Mbete, reaffirmed the ANC's support for Sanctions and Boycotts against Israel, with a strong statement that she has been to Palestine herself and that the Israeli regime is not only comparable with but "far worse than Apartheid South Africa."

During this time, Cosatu's leaders, including Zwelinzima Vavi and the leadership of the Communist Party, consistently called for boycotts of Israel and Israeli goods. At no time did the leadership of the ANC intervene to distance themselves from these calls or to request that they be curtailed in any way.

With the recent visits of Ebrahim Ebrahim to North Korea and calls for closer relations between South Africa and Iran, the disjuncture becomes all too apparent and irrational. Applauding Iran's human rights record, while finding fault with Israel's, is delusional and insane. Limiting and restricting visits to Israel, while allowing and even encouraging visits and contacts with Palestinians, is discriminatory and excludes entirely, exposure to the Israeli narrative. This action implies that South African diplomats are not interested in hearing or being exposed to the Israeli perspective.

As Jews we wish to state emphatically that we are proud of Israel and its significance in our lives. Since its birth, Israel has struggled to survive in a hostile environment and this gives us hope and courage. Moreover Israel has thrived and is a shining example and model for the entire region.

Israel has fought the colonialism of the Ottoman Empire and subsequently the British Empire, and succeeded to restore Jews to their land. The bonds of Jews to Israel go back to the beginning of history, and attempts by any party to drive a wedge between Jews and Israel, will be resisted and are bound to fail. Such mendacious policies, would be akin to trying to separate Muslims from Mecca and deserve to be treated with the same contempt. Such policies are repugnant, hurtful and anti-Semitic.

Implying, as Minister Maite Nkoane Mashabane has done, that the Jewish community in some way condones these policies, is malicious, dishonest and completely without foundation. There is a widespread perception that Israelis are not welcome here, particularly if they have served in the military. Illustrative of this are attempts that have been made to arrest certain visiting Israelis. Certain venues, particularly on university campuses, are positively considered to be out of bounds

and unsafe for Israeli visitors. A case in point was the humiliating treatment heaped on an invited Israeli Professor, Jeff Kantor, for refusing to denounce Israeli policies.

This constant stream of anti-Israel vitriol, emanating from the highest levels of the tri-partite alliance, is giving rise to a sense of impunity that all criticism of Israel, without any bounds, is permissible. This sense of 'open season', carries the risk of generating hate speech, examples of which have occurred at Wits and Cape Town universities, and this could translate into violence.

For Collins Chabane, from the office of the Presidency, to dismiss the fears of Jewish South Africans as baseless, in view of this barrage of anti-Israel and anti-Jewish vitriol, is an insult to the intelligence of Jews and displays how out of touch with reality the Presidency is.

"The South African Jewish community should have nothing to fear," he said. "We don't consider them to be part of the Jewish state of Israel; they may be having part relationships but they are South Africans, they pay taxes like anyone; they vote here; they have been part of this country for a very long time; they contribute towards the development of the country, so they are part of us."

For Jews to feel safe and for us to feel part of the 'Rainbow nation' it is time for the government to stop with these obfuscations and incriminatory policies and to desist from these attacks on our spiritual homeland. As citizens, we call on the Government to state unequivocally, that it does not support the cause of one people above another and that it will pursue normal relations and stop interfering in the internal affairs of the State of Israel, as non-interference in the domestic affairs of sovereign states is its stated policy with regard to every other country. A lesson that we have garnered from our long sojourn in the diaspora, is that as long as Jews and our interests are treated exceptionally, then we will have reason to fear.

Ben Levitas, Chairman; South African Zionist Federation (Cape Council)

(2) John Kerry's 'third intifada'

John Kerry is a man who likes to talk, but at times doesn't seem to appreciate the fact that words have consequences.

This shouldn't come as a surprise. After all, our current secretary of state spent most of his career as a U.S. senator. One of the dirty little secrets of American politics is that most senators don't do much else. They talk to each other, to the media and to their constituents. They can and do say whatever will get them the attention they crave because very little they say is remembered from one news cycle to another.

Some years ago, a Democratic friend of mine and I were trying to round up Senate support for an amendment to a bill that was working its way through a subcommittee chaired by Mr Kerry, then the junior senator from Massachusetts. My friend knew Mr Kerry fairly well and before long, we found ourselves having dinner with him and making the case for the amendment.

Mr Kerry listened and enthusiastically agreed with us. He offered to put out a statement praising what we wanted to do. He did not, however, offer that this good idea on which we all agreed would be acted upon by his own subcommittee.

As we said our goodbyes, I asked my friend why Mr Kerry didn't actually seem anxious to help us. "A statement?" I said. "He has the power to make it happen, and all we get is a statement?" My friend was surprised by my reaction. "In his world, 'a statement' is doing something. Don't you realize by now that all senators like John do is talk?"

A senator can talk without worrying much about precision, but secretaries of state live in a very different world. Everything the secretary says is studied by reporters and analysts for friendly and unfriendly governments for clues as to what the government he represents is doing or expects to do. A secretary of state has to speak clearly and precisely, lest other nations misunderstand him and act on that misunderstanding.

Mr Kerry's penchant for loose talk is on constant display these days as he careens around the Middle East. In Saudi Arabia, he was asked what he thinks about the controversy in that country about whether women should be allowed to drive. There, women are denied driver's licenses and even non-Saudi women caught behind the wheel are jailed. When asked, Mr Kerry quite correctly responded that the controversy was to be solved by the Saudis themselves, but gave the distinct impression that neither he nor his boss really cares a whit about the rights of women in the Persian Gulf kingdom.

That did little real harm, but when Mr Kerry landed in Israel, the potential consequences of the dangerous imprecision of his words became clear. He appeared on Israeli television to condemn the continued settlement of the West Bank that he and President Obama want turned over to the Palestinians as part of an agreement to establish an independent Palestinian state on Israel's border. Mr Kerry threatened the Israeli government and predicted that if the Israelis don't buckle under, there would be "chaos" and perhaps a "third intifada" that would leave the Jewish state isolated and alone.

His words were meant to pressure the government of Benjamin Netanyahu, but the Palestinians may well have heard them as a sign that the United States will accept a renewal of terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians.

What is now known as the second intifada, or uprising, began in 2000 and went on for five long years, during which time civilian men, women and children in Israel were targeted by Palestinian terrorists. Fully 70 percent of the Israelis killed during that five-year period were civilians.

Mr Kerry will, of course, be shocked if his words lead to such violence, but the words of one in his position have real world consequences. Decades ago, a man who occupied the office he now occupies made an offhand comment during an interview that precipitated a war in Asia that no one wanted and cost tens of thousands of American lives.

It happened in the summer of 1950, when President Truman's secretary of state, Dean Acheson, suggested that the Korean Peninsula didn't fall within what he called the United States' "defense perimeter." North Korea took this to mean America didn't much care what happened in Korea and, as a result, communist troops marched south, precipitating a war that no one, including Mr Acheson, wanted.

Maybe Mr Kerry will be luckier than Mr Acheson. Maybe the Palestinians will realize that as a former senator, his statements should be heavily discounted. But if the chaos he predicted and appeared to threaten in that interview comes to pass, history won't be kind to him or to the Americans who allow it.

(3) It's not anti-Jewish to oppose Israeli occupation of Palestine

Being opposed to Israeli occupation of Palestine is not anti - Jewish

The Ahmed Kathrada Foundation notes with concern the views expressed in the article, '*Call for Jews to Flee SA for Israel*' (*Cape Times*, November 6, 2013). This call was made by the former Israeli Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Avigdor Lieberman.

His statements come after comments from the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation's Minister, at a Cosatu conference, that South African Ministers do not visit Israel currently. The Minister also expressed concern about the ongoing occupation in the West Bank and the consequences thereof for negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

The statements of Minister Maite Nkoane-Mashabane, echo the sentiments of many South Africans, leaders and citizens alike, and cannot be misconstrued as being anti-Jewish. Mr Lieberman clearly has no idea of the non-racial character of the South African liberation struggle and the fact that there have been no "pogroms" against any group because of their views in post-apartheid South Africa. Freedom of speech is a constitutional value that is cherished and protected here, as is the commitment against racism, hate-speech and ethnic hatred.

In his address at the launch of the campaign for the "Freedom of Marwan Barghouthi and All Palestinian Political Prisoners", Ahmed Kathrada said, "While we disagree with the policies and practices of Israel, we have never been and will never be anti- Jewish."

As the various Palestinian solidarity campaigns gather momentum in South Africa and across the globe, it would do Mr Lieberman, and those who share his views, good, to focus on the issues that have given rise to the necessity for the campaigns in the first place. This reflection would allow Mr Lieberman and others, the opportunity, to take up the call to end injustice, which is the responsibility of all good leaders.

As South Africa's history has demonstrated, retreating into ethnic laagers does not make the issues go away. At some point, they will have to be dealt with. It is our wish that the substantive issues of the conflict in that part of the world should be dealt with sooner rather than later. Until then, we will continue to voice our disapproval of the Israeli occupation of Palestine and will also continue to call for the freedom of the political prisoners.

Statement issued by Neeshan Balton, Director, Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, November 8 2013

(4) The looming bad deal on Iran

The nightmare scenario of a "bad deal with Iran" looms for three reasons.

First, the West is not putting Tehran under enough pressure from sanctions to get it to accept what would be a bad deal for them on their nuclear program. And now the "Rouhani narrative" surrounding Iran's new president is persuading the EU and the US to go soft on sanctions with the hope that by doing so they will be bolstering moderates.

Second, Iran has a strategy to keep its nuclear weapons program capacity. President Rouhani – a regime insider and no rebel - will accept greater transparency (short of complete transparency, of course, which would reveal the covert weapons program the

regime has long denied), sign an additional protocol, maybe accept 24/7 remote monitoring, but keep the Fordow facility and its enrichment capacity. He will also try to keep alive the plutonium option - an alternative nuclear path that Iran is also pursuing, centred at a facility in Arak.

Rouhani is, to quote Michael Herzog, "the flesh and blood of an Iranian system which has heavily invested in its nuclear program and is unlikely to give up on it." He will not accept zero enrichment. As for Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, he does not trust the West. His reading of the lesson from Libya was that the West made Muammar Qaddafi give up his nuclear program then, a few years later, removed him from power. So Iran seeks a grey area in which to work, staying just the right side of the red lines set by Israel (a bomb's worth of uranium enriched to 20 percent) and the US (a decision to build the bomb), while increasing enrichment capability, immunizing facilities from attack, and shortening the time necessary for breakout (or weaponizing) after a decision to do so is taken. As former Israeli Minister of Defence Ehud Barak used to say, the international community's position may end up being a case of "too early, too early, to early ... too late."

Third, America is blowing an uncertain trumpet. There is widespread concern – in Israel, the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, and beyond - that President Obama did not enforce his own red lines on Syria, and thus can't be trusted on Iran. One day Obama was ready to move against Syria, with Secretary of State John Kerry touring Europe in anticipation of a strike, the next he was deferring to a mistrustful Congress. Even those in Washington who previously believed Obama would be willing to attack the nuclear sites in Iran are now unsure.

The Syrian example has heightened fears that the US will accept a bad deal - one that leaves Iran in control of critical nuclear production capabilities and does not set them far enough back from breakout capacity. The key question not being asked is this: what happens if Iran breaks any deal they enter into - what capabilities are they left with?

Professor Uzi Rabi, director of the Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, predicts the worst: "Some of the sites will be open for inspection. Everything will be partial. This is convenient for the Iranian and the American presidents [but is] a certified recipe for creating a nuclear Iran in the intermediate future,"

The "bad deal" is a nightmare scenario for the Arab Gulf states, and even more so for Israel. There is a dialogue between US and Israel but no apparent consensus on what is an acceptable deal. The US is not ready yet to define the number of centrifuges Iran will be allowed to keep. Most people, even in Israel, recognize a deal for zero enrichment is unlikely. But Israel does not trust Obama and fears that if it makes any public concessions on enrichment, those concessions will become the new baseline for negotiations - hence the hard line in public on no enrichment.

In reality, Israel would probably be able to live with a deal that leaves a small enrichment capacity, but which sets the breakout clock back to one or two years, as opposed to one or two months, as it reportedly is now. Israel will not accept Iran keeping a large number of centrifuges and the capacity to quickly complete Arak. There is currently no meeting point between this and the Iranian position.

If talks continue without resolution while Iran continues to develop its program, or if a "bad deal" makes for essentially the same result, it would seem that Israel would be left with only one choice regarding unilateral military action. Prime Minister Netanyahu is not bluffing about his willingness to act. Israel was very close to a decision in summer of 2012, in run-up to the US elections, but Netanyahu could not rally a political consensus in the Cabinet or the support of the security chiefs. There is no "containment school" in Israel, but not enough

decision-makers were convinced that this was really the last opportunity to strike. If diplomacy does not succeed now, that decision will be reconsidered.

(5) The idea of a Jewish state is itself democratic: an interview with Tal Becker

INTRODUCTION

When Israelis talk about Israel as a Jewish state, what do they mean? In this wide ranging interview conducted for BICOM, first published in March 2012, Dr. Tal Becker (Deputy Legal Advisor in Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and a lead negotiator during the Annapolis talks in 2008), explains the idea of the Jewish state in legal, historical, and democratic terms. He argues that Israel's definition of itself as a Jewish state, far from being a unique case, is an expression of the universal legal right to self-determination.

Since the resumption of direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in August 2013, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has continued to stress the importance of Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state. Israelis debate internally whether such an explicit recognition is necessary, but almost all Jewish Israelis agree that the status Israel has today – as the nation state of the Jewish people – must be preserved by any future agreement.

The Palestinian Authority have resisted acknowledging Israel's character as a Jewish state. Among their objection is the claim that this might adversely affect the status of Israel's Arab minority. Many Israelis see this refusal as indicating Palestinian unwillingness to recognise Jewish national rights as part of a peace agreement based on 'two states for two peoples' – a recognition they feel is essential for ending the conflict. Israelis also feel the Palestinian claim for the right of return for Palestinian refugees and their descendants to Israel is an implicit threat to Israel's Jewish majority, and therefore its very existence as a Jewish state.

But what does the Jewish state which Israelis refer to look like in practice? Some observers misinterpret the notion to mean a Jewish religious state. Others claim that Israel's self-definition as a Jewish state must necessarily discriminate against its non-Jewish citizens.

However, most Israeli Jews see the Jewish character of the State of Israel primarily in national and cultural terms. They want Israel's character preserved as it was conceived by Israel's Declaration of Independence in 1948 and the UN Partition Plan of 1947. That is a Jewish majority state in which non-Jewish citizens enjoy full and equal citizenship, as befits a democracy.

Tal Becker argues that, "Israel is Jewish in the sense that it is the place where the Jewish people, as a people, express their right to self-determination. That is itself a democratic idea." At the same time Becker goes on to stress that as in any other nation state, the principles of democracy must be paramount. According to Dr. Becker, "we get to be as Jewish as a democracy allows, not as democratic as being Jewish allows."

For anyone wanting to understand Israel's perspective in the negotiations to reach a final status agreement with the Palestinians, this is vital reading.

Toby Greene, November 2013

PART I: ISRAEL AS A JEWISH AND DEMOCRATIC STATE

Toby Greene: Is Israel really a democracy as it claims or is it, as some critics say, an ethnocracy, which privileges the interests of its Jewish over its Arab citizens?

Tal Becker: Every democracy struggles with the challenge of living up to its principles and ideals. Israel is not unique in that sense. It has much to be proud of, and much it struggles with. In many democratic societies, the tension between majority and minority communities raises difficult issues. In Israel, this is more complicated because of the regional context and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But I think the charge that Israel is fundamentally not democratic because of its flaws does not stand up to scrutiny, certainly not in any comparative sense. This is not an excuse for Israel to avoid correcting where it falls short, or for Israel's democracy not to be subject to criticism. But the labels and demagoguery that one sometimes hears are misleading and unhelpful for a serious discussion.

Greene: But how do you explain Israel's claim to be both a Jewish state and a democracy?

Becker: Let's start with some basics. From the outset, Israel committed itself to be both Jewish and democratic. What does that mean in practice? When we say Israel is a Jewish state, we mean that it is the national home of the Jewish people, where the Jewish people realise their right to self-determination. The Jewish people realising their right to self-determination is not a principle that is contrary to democracy. It is a universal legal principle. Many states around the world are both national homelands for a majority ethnic or racial group and democracies. In fact, I think most democracies are nation states in this way. These states realise and express the rights of the ethnic majority to self-determination, but they are still democracies because of their systems of government and because the rights of the minority are protected in terms of equality before the law and so on.

Something that is often not recognised is that the right of the majority to have its identity reflected in the public square, in the public culture of the state, is as much an expression of democratic principles as the need to preserve minority rights. This is true in Israel no less than any other state that has ethnic minorities, be it Britain, Germany, Italy, France or any other country.

In our case, people are often under a misapprehension, in that they think a 'Jewish state' means a theocracy based on the Jewish religion in the way that Iran is a Muslim state. When we talk about a 'Jewish state', we do not mean a theocracy and the laws in Israel make that clear. This is a misunderstanding of the peculiar character of the term 'Jewish' as referring both to a religion and to a people. But anyone visiting Israel will appreciate immediately that most Israelis relate to the Jewish identity primarily in national and cultural terms. Israel is Jewish in the sense that it is the place where the Jewish people, as a people, express their right to self-determination. That is itself a democratic idea, but it also must be balanced by a duty to respect minority rights both individual and collective.

Greene: How do you respond to those who suggest that the Jews are not a people?

Becker: That is a position based on ignorance. I think it is not just contrary to the historical record but, even more importantly, to the way Jews perceive themselves. We recently heard Newt Gingrich saying similar things about the Palestinians. In the past, some Israelis have unfortunately also said this. To me, the claim that either the Jews or the Palestinians are not a nation is not just offensive to those people, but it is unhelpful in finding a way forward that advances coexistence. A people is a group who sees itself as a people and who believe that their identity is expressed as part of a collective. You are not going to convince a people that conceives of itself as such that they are not in fact a collective. Once that is the case, they have a right to self-determination. It is not an absolute

right. It is a right balanced against the rights of others. But it is both morally and practically problematic to deny the legitimacy of the right itself.

Greene: But is there something distinct in Israel's case? Critics of Israel argue that the Jewish majority is only maintained by laws which give preference to Jews that who don't live in Israel to immigrate under the 'Law of Return'.

Becker: A country that has a majority of a certain ethnicity has the right to regulate its immigration policy in a way that protects that majority. That is done by many states. If you take seriously the idea that people have a right to self-determination, then a state has the right to preserve its collective identity, including through immigration policy, to ensure that there is one place on the planet where that identity is preserved. In the Israeli case, the law of return also reflects Israel's *raison d'être* as a national home for the Jewish people, which ends the historical problem of Jewish persecution and statelessness.

Of course, there are limits to what you can do to preserve the demographic balance. You cannot compromise the basic rights of the minority in order to preserve that balance. I would put it this way: we get to be as Jewish as a democracy allows, not as democratic as being Jewish allows. It's the same principle which applies to any nation state that claims to be democratic – it gets to express and preserve its national identity and culture to the extent that democracy allows. Regulating immigration is not in principle a violation of that idea, but other measures might be.

PART II: THE QUESTION OF HISTORICAL JUSTICE

Greene: How do you respond to those who argue that the Jews never had the right to establish a country on what they consider 'someone else's land', and that the state is established inherently on the dispossession of the Palestinians in 1948?

Becker: First of all, I am somewhat reluctant to go into the historical story, because I feel like we need to deal with the situation we have today, and what is best for the future of millions of Palestinians and Jews. As much as we Israelis believe in the justice of our cause and our own historical narrative, the idea of spending time convincing our neighbours that our narrative is correct doesn't appeal to me. That's much more a mode of trying to win theoretical arguments and I'm more interested in reconciling interests. I don't need the Palestinian people to accept that I'm right and I don't need to accept that the Palestinians are right. I need us to share the fact that we want a better future for our children.

But at the same time, it's important to say from a Jewish perspective that our positions are rooted in historical and legal rights. Beyond our unbroken historical, religious and cultural connection to this land, there is a basic fact that the 1922 League of Nations Mandate turned the idea of establishing a Jewish national home from a desire of the Zionist movement and then a policy preference of the British, into an international legal obligation. The League of Nations Mandate is an international treaty that said that the Jewish national home would be established here without prejudice to the civil and religious rights of the local inhabitants who were not Jews. That in turn developed into the UN Partition Plan of 1947 that the Jews accepted and the Arabs didn't accept. It was this Arab rejection of partition which contributed decisively to the war of 1947-8 and the Palestinian refugee problem that followed.

It is on the strength of the Jewish people's right to self-determination, which was also acknowledged by the world, that Israel established a state here. We are not saying there should be the Jewish people's right to self-determination to the exclusion of Palestinian self-determination. But I cannot

see the moral basis for arguing vehemently for Palestinian rights without arguing for Jewish rights in parallel.

Now whether or not people agree that the international decisions which affirmed the Jewish people's right to establish a national home here were justified is frankly irrelevant at this point. The Jewish people acted on those international decisions. In their multiple hundreds of thousands, they invested their energies – in many cases gave their lives – to build a Jewish and democratic nation state that is, for all its imperfections, an extraordinary success against the odds. The Jewish people are here, they have a state which is not going away, and people just have to come to terms with it.

If you are on a university campus you can imagine how you undo history and everyone can choose to go back in time, until you get to Adam and Eve. But in practical terms, there is no way to move forward on the basis that every wronged individual, on either side, should be able to undo everything that was done in history. There is no way to fundamentally undo the historical dispossession of Jews from this land and their yearning for it for thousands of years, or the dispossession of Palestinians. Similarly, we cannot undo the Arab rejection of the UN Partition Plan in 1947, or the expulsion of Jews from Arab lands following 1948. What we can do is imagine how we create a better reality for both peoples than the one we now know.

Greene: This forward-looking approach seems different to the emphasis on the idea of 'historical justice' that we often hear spoken of in relation to a peace agreement.

Becker: I think the idea of justice in its complete and absolute sense is an illusion when it comes to conflict resolution. It is not going to be possible to reach absolute justice because Israeli and Palestinian conceptions of justice are founded on historical narratives that are not reconcilable. Therefore, the idea that there is no peace without justice, when conceived in absolutist terms, is a recipe for never having peace in any meaningful sense.

I think instead we should aspire to an agreement that resonates with fairness, and that aspires to give both peoples as much dignity and security and respect as possible. Each people must feel they are better off as a result of the agreement. They may not have reached all of their expectations but they must feel like an agreement respects their rights and their dignity in a fair way. It will come with costs to both sides. No agreement that feels like victory only for one side is going to last. If a two-state agreement is ever reached, Israel will be asked out of necessity to cut itself off in some way from much of Judaea and Samaria, the areas where its history as a people was created. The Palestinian people will need to irreversibly come to terms with the fact that places where they lived, the Palestinian villages before 1948, are not places where their sovereignty will extend to.

PART III: MINORITY RIGHTS IN PRACTICE

Greene: Does Israel in practice preserve the rights of the minority?

Becker: There are standards set out in international treaties and in Israel's internal legal system for the protection of national minorities. One of the most advanced, for example, is the Council of Europe's 'Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities'. In some areas, Israel goes beyond what is required in this convention. On education, eg, the Arab minority gets state funding for separate education. In terms of the right to vote, to formal equality before the law, and to freedom of assembly, expression, conscience and religion, Arabs have equal rights.

In other areas, Israel falls short and it's an ongoing exercise in Israel as elsewhere to balance majority and minority rights and improve the standards of equality. Fortunately, Israel has

mechanisms that, while certainly not perfect, do enable improvements. There is an independent court system allowing appeals, and there is an electoral system that enables governments to change and coalitions to change.

It is also worth pointing out that Israel's challenges regarding minorities go beyond the question of the Palestinian Arab minority. There are other minority groups in Israel, including Ethiopians and Russians, as well as other non-Jewish minorities, and we face an ongoing obligation to confront the discrimination that these groups can face.

Greene: Some people today claim that Israel's democratic character is diminishing, following various recent attempts by some members of the Knesset to pass legislation that has been described as illiberal and undemocratic.

Becker: I find that it's not helpful to have these discussions in the abstract. You have to really pick apart every piece of legislation and draft legislation and examine it, rather than speak in generalisations. Some of the draft laws that have made international headlines were indeed problematic; others I think have been misunderstood. There are members of the Knesset, not unlike parliaments in other parts of the world, who have views which do cross the line, and who have proposed legislation that in my view is harmful to Israel's democracy.

But most of these draft laws have not and will not be adopted. Most generated a lot of noise but were actually blocked at different stages of the legislative process, which is itself evidence that Israel is not quite the 'failed democracy' that some critics suggest. In general, legislation that contravenes basic democratic rights will not pass in the Knesset, or will be struck down by the Supreme Court. We do not have a fully written constitution but we do have the Basic Laws, including the Basic Law of Human Dignity and Liberty which enshrines Israel's status as a Jewish and democratic state. In addition, we have one of the most respected and renowned supreme courts in the world. That court has not been shy to strike down legislation that crosses that line. Just recently, it struck down the Tal Law, which it found to be unequal in the nature of the exemption from army service it established for the ultra-orthodox.

Israel is a democracy and we should be proud of the fact that we open ourselves up to scrutiny. We need to constantly be vigilant against any efforts to weaken Israel's democratic character, but the extreme terms one often hears are often disconnected from the reality of what is actually taking place.

Greene: Is there more that Israel can or should be doing to improve the equality of its Arab minority?

Becker: Undoubtedly, especially at the level of social integration, distribution of resources and combating acts of violence and discrimination. But understanding the context is important. When you talk about the status of minorities in any country, there is a difference between their status legally – whether they have equality before the law and so on – and then the social dynamic within a country. The state first and foremost is responsible for the formal, legal status of the minority, but there are limits to what the state can do to actively create and encourage a fully integrated society, to encourage equality and tolerance at the societal level. At this level, too, the state has responsibilities, but there is a context in which these efforts are made that needs to be taken into account.

The social dynamic in Israel between the majority and minority is made problematic by a few factors. The first is the conflict. It is very hard to imagine how attitudes can change in a dramatic way when

many within the Arab minority feel so connected to a people with whom the state is in conflict and to a region which is largely hostile to Israel. It's important to understand that from a Jewish Israeli perspective, the Arabs are a minority in Israel but they are an overwhelming majority in the region. That affects the mindset of Jews and Arabs in Israel. It makes things much more complicated and impacts the psyche of both communities quite deeply.

Second, part of the leadership of Israel's Arab minority is really quite radical. Important elements of it sided with Hamas and Hezbollah in wars against Israel and that has understandably angered many among the Jewish majority.

The third aspect is that there are elements within Jewish Israeli society who fuel a discriminatory mindset for populist political gains. We have to be very vigilant not to allow our admittedly complex security situation to justify unequal treatment or inflammatory rhetoric against the Arab minority as a collective inside Israel.

Greene: It is unfortunate that there are individuals in both Jewish and Arab populations that seem to play to the script for each other so conveniently. The anti-Arab rhetoric of some elements in Jewish Israeli society helps justify [Arab Knesset Member] Haneen Zoabi's claim that the Jews are all racist and Zoabi's support for Hamas helps them in return to justify their claim that the Arabs are disloyal and a fifth column. It seems in that sense that each helps provide the justification for the other.

Becker: A lot of Jewish Israelis, when they hear Arab Knesset members express support for Hamas or say that Israel shouldn't be a Jewish state, are outraged. They can't understand how we allow this. But I am actually quite proud that we have such an open and vibrant society where a member of the Knesset can stand against everything the majority believes in, in such an outrageous way. To me, that is one of our greatest badges of honour as a democracy – even if the sentiments expressed are unfortunate.

PART IV: ISRAEL'S DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY, THE OCCUPATION AND THE PEACE PROCESS

Greene: You were heavily involved as one of Israel's lead negotiators in the Annapolis process in 2007-2008. What is the relation between the two-state model and Israel's character as a Jewish state? Is Israel's right to define itself as a Jewish state and a democracy dependent on reaching a two-state agreement with the Palestinians?

Becker: What lies at the heart of the two-state model is that this conflict is about two peoples, each with rights to self-determination in this place, and that the only way to balance those demands is through partition. This proposal began with the Peel Commission in 1937 and then the UN Partition Plan in 1947.

This is what makes it paradoxical that Israel's claim to be recognised as the Jewish state by the Palestinians in a final agreement is so controversial. The UN Partition Plan, which both Israelis and Palestinians cite today as part of their claims to statehood, says the term 'Jewish state' over 30 times. This doesn't mean that such recognition has to be a precondition for negotiations: even those who advocate for this recognition generally accept that it would need to be part a comprehensive agreement, not a precondition for it. The idea, I think, is that in the context of an agreement that would resolve all of the issues, establish a Palestinian state and resolve the refugee issue, it would make sense to include recognition of both Jewish and Palestinian rights to self-determination, each in a state of their own without prejudice to the rights of all citizens and minority groups. If it could be reached, this would be an important message that each side recognises the other's legitimacy and that the conflict was resolved. I think it is also important for the international community, from

its perspective, to insist on recognising the legitimacy of the Jewish and Palestinian connection to this land and their respective rights to self-determination at this stage as well.

However, I do not think that the legitimacy of a Jewish state depends on the establishment of a Palestinian state. On the one hand, sovereign Israel has a responsibility, according to its own laws and founding instruments, to be both Jewish and democratic. Alongside that, I believe we have an obligation to do everything we can to enable the responsible realisation of Palestinian self-determination. But Israel's government also has a clear responsibility to its citizens to do that in a way that is not suicidal for Israel and doesn't create a failed state or a terrorist state on our border. Reaching an outcome that accommodates both Jewish and Palestinian rights is a shared obligation of the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships – neither can do it alone.

Greene: Some argue that in the absence of a peace agreement, Israel is required just to withdraw unilaterally.

Becker: Yes, you sometimes hear that view, especially in Europe. But this ignores the moral and legal obligation Israel has to its own people to preserve the basic security of the state. The idea of just getting out of the West Bank and throwing away the key may lead to the same kind of aggression against us which brought us to be there in the first place. The consequences of Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza unfortunately illustrate that simply 'ending the occupation' does not end the problem or bring peace.

So 'just getting out' is not an obligation that we have either morally or legally. Our presence in the West Bank is the consequence of a defensive war in 1967. We have an obligation to bring an end to that presence, but in a way that negotiates a secure and defensible border and doesn't fundamentally jeopardise our future. This is part of UN Security Council Resolution 242, which both sides have accepted as a guiding principle in a negotiated settlement. We have a moral responsibility to the Palestinian people, but they have a moral responsibility to us as well. We are at the moment stuck with a situation we don't want, but we Israelis cannot end it on our own. Overcoming this deadlock in the current regional environment is very complicated. But any chance to do so will begin with both sides genuinely coming to terms with the legitimacy of the other's collective rights. Both sides, Israeli and Palestinian, will need to see the fair realisation of the other side's rights, not as something they should undermine if possible, or tolerate if necessary, but as something which is actually in their enlightened self-interest.

(6) Only talking heals wounds of war

It's hard to believe now – hard, I daresay, for young people to credit and hard for us who are older to remember – but at the time of the Six Days War in 1967 public opinion in Britain was overwhelmingly in favour of Israel. The Israelis were defending their freedom and the right of their state to exist, and we were mostly delighted to see "gallant little Israel" win such a swift and comprehensive victory.

Now the wheel has turned. There are still of course foreign policy hawks here who are pro-Israel, and many more of them in the USA, in Congress, the Pentagon and think-tanks, but public opinion has swung round, and even though we are now distrustful of trends in the Muslim world, the Palestinians are seen as victims, oppressed by the Israeli army and security forces. Meanwhile Israel, still confident of American support, defies UN Resolutions, assassinates those whom it perceives as enemies, and in the last few days has once again launched bombing raids on Syria, ostensibly – and perhaps genuinely – to prevent missiles from being passed on to Hezbollah.

Before 1967 Israel was strategically in a very weak position. It was a tiny state. You could cross it at its narrowest point in less than an hour.

Victory in war has consequences, not all of which are favourable, some storing up trouble for the future.

The outcome of the Six Days War strengthened Israeli's strategic position, but weakened its political and moral one. The endangered nation, admired as the only democracy in the Middle East, was now an Occupying Power, holding the Palestinians in subjection. What could Israel do? Withdrawing from the West Bank and the Golan Heights would have returned it to a position of strategic weakness, surrounded by states which still refused to recognize its right to exist. So it held on to them.

Gradually it did more than hold on. In the face of Palestinian hostility, manifest in the two intifadas (1987-2003 and 2000-5) and acts of terrorism, it tightened its grip. It pursued a policy of colonisation. Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem were built and then expanded. The process continues, in defiance of UN resolutions and widespread international condemnation. Only this week prime minister Netanyahu has given his approval to still more settlement-building. And to protect Israel from terrorism, a wall was built between Israel proper and the West Bank. Security checks were established throughout the Occupied Territory.

Meanwhile, there was international pressure for the creation of a Palestinian state. The issue was complicated, and for Israel made more alarming, by what followed its withdrawal from Gaza ten years ago, an initiative undertaken by its hard-line prime minister Ariel Sharon. This did nothing to ease Israel's security. On the contrary, elections in Gaza in a victory for Hamas, regarded by Israel, with reason, as a political party which denies Israel's right to exist and also as a terrorist organisation.

Hamas is certainly less amenable, to put it mildly, than the Palestinian Authority, headed by Mahmoud Abbas, which exercises a degree of self-government in the West Bank territories. The PA, though regarded by the UN as the government of an embryonic Palestinian State, remains shackled by the Israeli Occupation, its freedom of action severely limited.

Israel remains officially committed to what is called the Two-State Solution, but only if it can be assured that this will not impinge on its own security and freedom of action. Meanwhile, the Occupation is so onerous and restrictive that the Palestinians remain a subject people. Right-wing Israeli parties have indeed abandoned any commitment to this solution and claim the whole Biblical Land of Israel as their rightful territory. This would mean the permanent subjection of the Palestinians, or preferably the expulsion of many of them.

Mr Netanyahu stops short of this. He knows that even the Americans, conscious of the importance to them of allies in the Arab world, can't countenance it. But his latest plan demonstrates very clearly just what sort of future he envisages for the Palestinians. Israel, he says, must continue to regard the Jordan as its frontier, and he proposes to build a defensive wall there, just as soon as the similar wall on the Sinai frontier has been completed. Any autonomous, or semi-autonomous, Palestinian state would therefore be hemmed in by the Israeli military; it would be a state with no control over its own frontiers. Meanwhile the continued building of settlements deepens the Israeli penetration of Palestinian land, often controlling the supply of water to Palestinian towns, villages and farmers. The outlook is grim.

For Israel the problem remains what it has been since 1967. Every extension and intensification of the Occupation strengthens Israel's security but makes a resolution of the Palestinian problem more difficult, while damaging Israel's reputation and losing friends.

Back in 1986 the Irish politician, journalist and historian Conor Cruise O'Brien wrote a book, *The Siege*, in which he defended Israel's Occupation of the conquered territories. He compared Israel to two other "embattled tribes", white South Africans, still operating the policy of apartheid in self-defence, as he saw it, and the Northern Irish Protestants. These two tribes have since accepted reality and come to terms with those whom they then saw as enemies. Someday, surely, Israel must do the same.

This however requires action or concessions from the other side too, as happened in South Africa and Northern Ireland. Only when the Arabs recognise and genuinely accept Israel's right to exist can the Occupation be relaxed, even brought to an end, and a Palestinian state exist peacefully side by side with Israel. But that day seems a long way off; meanwhile Netanyahu and his successors will continue to play hard-ball – and make the life of the Palestinians miserable.

(7) Yes, Minister Lapid, Israel can be both Jewish and democratic

Something about Israel prompts even sophisticated people to make simplistic statements. Last week's most sophisticated simpleton was Finance Minister Yair Lapid. While pleading eloquently for Arab equality at the "Prime Minister's Conference on Arabs in the Economy" at Tel Aviv University last Tuesday, Lapid claimed a Jewish democratic state posed an impossible contradiction.

As a columnist, Lapid's job was to provoke controversy, occasionally. As a statesman, Lapid should be less inflammatory and more accurate, especially regarding his country's character and democracy's meaning.

Most of Lapid's speech was courageous and constructive. True, Israelis frequently rely on tokenism, pretending "that if there's a successful Arab soccer player, then we don't have a problem." Lapid's admirable solutions include implementing local policing – which would protect all citizens better – integrating women into the labor force, national service for all, and "education, education, education."

He spoke movingly about Jews' "moral obligation" given our unhappy past as the oft-oppressed people "to always remember what it is to be a minority... to feel alien in the land you were born in."

Nevertheless, Lapid stumbled when claiming Israel cannot be democratic and Jewish because "significant parts" of the democratic idea "stand in contradiction to Judaism."

Addressing the Arab participants, he reasoned: "The meaning of democracy is equality before the law. How can Israel say that everyone is equal before that law – that you're equal before the law – when the law defined Judaism as the cultural, national and legislative basis for the state?" Lapid made three fundamental mistakes. First, he offered a reductionist, one-dimensional definition of a complicated phenomenon. Democracy involves majority rule not just equality and minority rights. Even American democracy is rife with contradictions.

In any democracy, a minority can call any majority expression anti-democratic while a majority can override any minority claim. Healthy democracies try to balance majority rule

with minority rights, popular rule with equal protection for all.

Second, Lapid has been listening to too many reactionary rabbis. “Judaism” is not the unchanging monolith countering democracy he described. Traditionally, rabbis described Judaism as an “etz chaim,” a Tree of Life but also a living tree, growing imperceptibly yet steadily. Thus, Judaism can welcome democracy today more than it did 3,000 years ago. In fact, many theorists root democracy in Judaism and the Bible.

So, again, we are talking creative tension, not contradiction.

Say a finance minister, using his legitimate democratic power, imposed a harsh Value Added Tax on basic staples like vegetables. In a healthy Jewish democracy, critics could invoke Jewish values promoting sensitivity to the poor to challenge said minister to seek less Grinchlike approaches in balancing the budget.

Finally, Zionist history, including Israel's Declaration of Independence, proves that “Judaism” is not the basis for the state – “Jewishness” is. In Israel's governing DNA the peoplehood aspect of Jewish identity trumps the religious aspect.

If Judaism were just a religion, then a Jewish state could not be democratic; it would be a theocracy. Because the Jews are a people with a particular religion, Jews can establish a Jewish democratic state, just like the British, the French and others have established states expressing their particular national identity which includes a religious heritage, while following democratic processes.

Examine the cross-laden Crown Jewels in the Tower of London. Salute the flags of Greece, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom – with their crosses.

Even visit the US and Canada on Christmas Day. All these democracies have different degrees of Christian influence woven into their governing and social fabric.

So, yes, Minister Lapid, Israel should treat its Arabs equitably.

But that can happen in a Jewish democratic state, which, like all pluralistic democracies, must navigate in a complex world and calibrate different dimensions of that miraculous messy mechanism called democracy.

Absolutist statements misreading democracy, Judaism, and implicitly Zionism, from a government minister, make this noble work of bridge-building harder.

Lapid's caricature is particularly problematic because he launched it into an atmosphere already polluted by the delegitimization of Israel. His rhetoric reflects that noxious nexus wherein Zionist perfectionism, Jewish self-criticism and Israeli bluntness meet global antagonism, creating a destructive multiplier effect.

The “Israel's-an-oppressive-apartheid-state” folks will quote his inflammatory remarks to “prove” Israel's perfidy.

Their contempt makes most Israelis defensive. Tragically, precisely where they need to be expansive, in dealing with Israeli Arabs – and the Palestinians – Israeli Jews are pilloried. Especially given the Jewish history Lapid knows so well, the attacks send most Israelis into a rigid clinch.

That is why Lapid also erred in disputing Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's demand that Palestinians recognize Israel as a Jewish state. The Palestinians have spearheaded this

delegitimization campaign for decades, inflaming tensions. There will not be peace until both peoples respect each other's legitimate national rights.

Next time, rather than making sweeping simplifications that spur stalemates, Lapid should toast Israel's kooky contradictions that reflect the kind of creative tension which could help Israel's Arabs.

In Israel, supposedly "anti-democratic" ultra-Orthodox Jerusalemites vote in greater numbers than the supposedly democratic "Zionist sector." In Israel, the head of the supposedly democratic Labor Party, Shelly Yacimovich, dodges her rival Isaac Herzog's debate challenge – and resists his demand that she open enough polling places in development towns, kibbutzim, moshavim and Arab villages, even if they oppose her.

And, in Israel, both the non-populist Supreme Court and popularly elected Israeli governments have advanced Arab rights; not enough yet, but much more than there was half a century ago.

In short, Israel, like all democracies, is a constructive hypocrite – at least articulating ideals it should fulfill. Israel, like all democracies, is in formation. Israel, like all democracies, is awash in tumultuous tensions, which may look like impossible contradictions to simpletons or enemies, but often trigger creative and inspiring leaps forward.

(8) Holocaust remembrance: New tool for anti-Semitism?

"[N]o, we are not living in a new dark age and, no, the lights are not going out all over Europe." — Jonathan Freedland, *The Daily Beast*.

"When faced with examples of atrocious behaviour, we must learn from them. It appears that the suffering of the Jews has not transformed their view on how others should be treated." — David Ward, MP; Member, Education Committee, British Parliament

Anti-Semitism has now become mainstream not just in France, as Guy Millière wrote recently on the Gatestone website, but all over Western Europe. One shocking aspect of the new wave of anti-Semitism is that the remembrance of the Holocaust is being abused to propagate anti-Semitism and feelings of hatred against Israel -- the state that the Jewish people established in order to protect themselves against future holocausts.

A September 2013 article on the website explained how history lessons and so-called remembrance education about the Holocaust in Belgian schools are being used to infuse school children with hatred against Israel. The historical existence of the Holocaust and the Nazi extermination camps is not denied, as some anti-Semites try to do, but the reality of the Holocaust and the extermination of the Jews is trivialized -- especially by equating the current treatment of the Palestinians by Israel with the Nazis' treatment of the Jews.

As noted in the September article, to debunk this equivalency myth it would suffice to point out that the Jews arriving in Auschwitz had only a few hours, or at most a few weeks, to live, while life expectancy for the Palestinians in Gaza or on the West Bank is 72 years. It would suffice to point out that more Jews were murdered in Auschwitz during one single month than Palestinians have died during the entire 65 years of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These simple facts are, however, never pointed out to the children that are being indoctrinated with hatred against the Jewish State.

In response to the article, *Klascement*, the educational organization subsidized by the Belgian government and that posted an anti-Semitic cartoon comparing the situation of the Palestinians in Gaza with that of the Jews in the Nazi extermination camps, removed this cartoon from its website. However, as *Joods Actueel*, the largest Jewish magazine in Belgium pointed out, the organization refuses to apologize. Neither has anything been done about the anti-Israeli disinformation propagated in Belgian schools and the abuse of Holocaust remembrance for this purpose.

The problem, unfortunately, is not specifically Belgian. In other countries, as well, the remembrance of Nazi atrocities, such as the *Kristallnacht*, the Warsaw Ghetto massacre or the Holocaust in general, are being abused to foment hatred against Israel.

Earlier this year, David Ward, a British MP and a member of the Education Select Committee in the British Parliament, bluntly juxtaposed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with the Holocaust.

Upon signing the Holocaust Educational Trust's Book of Commitment in the House of Commons, Mr. Ward stated: "Having visited Auschwitz twice – once with my family and once with local schools – I am saddened that the Jews, who suffered unbelievable levels of persecution during the Holocaust, could within a few years of liberation from the death camps be inflicting atrocities on Palestinians in the new State of Israel and continue to do so on a daily basis in the West Bank and Gaza. ... When faced with examples of atrocious behaviour, we must learn from them. It appears that the suffering of the Jews has not transformed their view on how others should be treated."

Earlier, the same British MP had called Israel an "apartheid regime." On his website, he has also accused the Jewish State of "ethnic cleansing." It is illuminating to learn that this man is accompanying British schoolchildren on their educational visits to Auschwitz. Given his bias, it would not at all be surprising that, in Auschwitz, where millions Jews were exterminated, he indoctrinates British schoolchildren with his hatred of Israel. It is an insult to the Jews who died in Auschwitz that people such as David Ward are filling the minds of schoolchildren with hatred of the very state in which the children and grandchildren of many Holocaust victims have found a safe haven.

Six years ago, a delegation of German Catholic bishops visited Israel and the Palestinian territories. During this visit, Mgr. Gregor Maria Hanke, the Bishop of Eichstätt, also compared Israel to Nazi-Germany. "This morning [we saw] in Yad Vashem the photos of the inhuman Warsaw Ghetto, and this evening we travel to the ghetto in Ramallah. That makes you angry," the Bishop remarked. His colleague, Mgr. Mixa, Bishop of Augsburg, added that the Palestinians live in "ghetto-like" situations and that their treatment by Israel is "almost racism."

One dreads to imagine what Mgr. Hanke and Mgr. Mixa would tell German schoolchildren if they were to accompany them on a visit to Yad Vashem or on a tour of the former Warsaw Ghetto.

In the Netherlands, too, the remembrance of the Nazi atrocities is being abused to foment hatred against Israel. Five years ago, the *Kristallnacht* commemoration in Amsterdam was abused by official speakers, including the former Socialist Mayor of Amsterdam, who compared "Islamophobia" and the "discrimination against immigrants" in the Netherlands today with the Nazi excesses during *Kristallnacht*.

One of the most transparent examples of Holocaust abuse is perhaps the abuse of the suffering of Anne Frank. Last April, Giulio Meotti opined in the Israeli publication *Arutz Sheva*, that Amsterdam's Anne Frank Museum would be better off closed because it "is now a place rampant with anti-Semitism."

The Anne Frank Museum, located in the house where the Jewish Frank family hid in a secret annex until they were arrested in 1944, is the most visited Holocaust memory site in Europe. The museum, however, is run by the Anne Frank Foundation which apparently sees its goal not just (1) to combat anti-Semitism, but also (2) to propagate "equal rights," (3) a "pluriform society" and (4) "active citizenship" as a defence against "prejudice, exclusion and extremism."

The latter three objectives have completely subverted the former: the Anne Frank Foundation is pro-Palestinian and a vociferous critic of Dutch politicians who are critical of Islam and defenders of Israel. The Foundation has also warned that "Islamophobia" and "negative opinions" about Muslims are growing in the Netherlands.

The Anne Frank Museum, writes Meotti, has "sanitized Anne Frank's story of almost all its Jewish references ... The result is that the public is now completely desensitized to the unique catastrophe that was the destruction of European Jewry. The Museum has also turned into a powerful source of criticism of Israel in Europe." "Israel," the Anne Frank Foundation wrote in a report, "pushes Palestinians economically into a corner and humiliates them psychologically."

In 2004, an exhibition in the Anne Frank Museum compared former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to Adolf Hitler. The former Soviet dissident, Natan Sharansky, then a Israeli government minister, reacted indignantly, saying the museum was "showing contempt for the memory of the six million who were murdered in the Holocaust."

Since 2004, however, the situation Anne Frank Foundation has not changed; it is still permeated with anti-Israeli bias. Although Anne Frank was murdered by the Nazis because she was Jewish, since then, Belgian educational organizations, British MPs, German Bishops and even the museum established to honor Anne Frank, attempt to convey the message that today's Anne Franks are Palestinian girls about to be murdered by Israelis.

Not everyone agrees with this view of the state of anti-Semitism in Europe. Writing in *The Daily Beast*, Jonathan Freedland, while conceding that "There are troubles for Jews," writes: "[N]o, we are not living in a new dark age and, no, the lights are not going out all over Europe." He mentions that in Britain, while "Jews here can feel unease at the tenor of the national conversation on Israel—a newspaper cartoon here, a politician's turn of phrase there—but they also enjoy a Jewish life that is in many ways richer than ever before." He goes on to mention a "festival of Jewish learning" called *Limmud*; Jewish Book Week, two sitcoms based on Jewish family life, and that "if the current polls hold till 2015", Ed Milliband, "who repeatedly stresses the pride he takes in his Jewish roots," is set to become Britain's next Prime Minister under the Labour Party.

(9) Total frustration

Every word, every sentence uttered by the Palestinians strongly suggest abject frustration in their ranks with the Middle East peace talks. Started last July after five months of arduous efforts that included a number of visits to the region by US Secretary of State John Kerry, the talks seem to be going nowhere. This miserable scenario is primarily due to the position that the Israelis have taken on a number of crucial issues.

"The current Israeli negotiating position is the worst in more than 20 years," said Yasser Abed Rabbo, a top PLO official, the other day. In other words, the Israelis have never taken such a tough position ever since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. Rabbo also added that "no tangible progress" had

been taken in the talks.

Rabbo revealed that a number of other problems, created entirely by Israel, have snagged the talks. One of them pertains to the Zionist state's security. The PLO official said that Israel wants the borders of the state of Palestine to be according to its security requirements. Israel has also made other demands that are unacceptable to the Palestinians. One is its insistence on a military presence in the Jordan Valley region of the West Bank, once a Palestinian state become a reality.

To put it succinctly, Israel does not want a viable free Palestinian state. Israel wants Palestine to be its colony with its people at its mercy forever. Adding to all these monstrous demands are the continuing Israeli provocations by building more settlements.

While the Palestinians are deeply pessimistic about the talks, the United States seems to be exuding a lot of confidence. Some days ago, Kerry said that the discussions are on in full swing and the focus is on the core issues. This is certainly misinformation.

Of course, the Americans have ample reasons for spreading such falsehoods. They would not want anything negative to destroy the talks. But the truth is that their unrealistic overviews will not help the Middle East peace process in any way. Instead, Kerry should exert pressure on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his representatives at the negotiating table to take a more realistic stance that recognises the separate identity of the Palestinians and their right to live in an independent state devoid of any kind of Zionist shackles. Otherwise, a total failure of the talks is not too far away.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas had left the negotiating table once already about three years ago. And he will have no qualms about walking out of the conference room again. That would be disastrous for American prestige in the region. It would be equally bad for the region, which will be plunged into high tension once again. And not many want such a bleak scenario.

NOTE: The views expressed in certain articles are not necessarily those of the SAZF