

OPINION and ANALYSIS

Vol 1, Number 29: 1 February 2013

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local and international writings on the Middle East**

<http://www.sazionfed.co.za>

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A native and a Zionist

Ryan Bellerose, The Metropolitain, 24 January 2013

<http://www.themetropolitain.ca/articles/view/1235>

I am a Métis from Northern Alberta. My father, Mervin Bellerose, co-authored the Métis Settlements Act of 1989, which was passed by the Alberta legislature in 1990 and cemented our land rights. I founded Canadians For Accountability, a native rights advocacy group, and I am an organizer and participant in the Idle No More movement in Calgary. And I am a Zionist.

Let me tell you why.

I grew up on a Métis colony in what many would say are rough conditions: we had no electricity, running water or telephone. When it rained, the dirt roads that linked us to the highways flooded and we were stranded. I lived in a bunkhouse with my two stepbrothers, while my father and stepmother lived in a small cabin nearby. We raised a garden, hunted and fished, picked berries and made the odd trip to town to buy supplies. My father worked construction and lived in camps for long stretches and I would often stay at relatives' to escape my stepmother's abuse. Still, I considered my childhood normal.

My interest in Israel started at a young age. My father gave me a set of Encyclopedia Britannica for my 5th birthday and, from there, a passion for history was born. I would sit and read whenever the weather was bad. In fact, it was a family joke that taking away my books for a few hours was a better way to discipline me than a spanking. One entry that caught my eye was that of Israel's birth in 1948. It struck me as the ultimate David and Goliath story: Israel, a tiny country that had fought for independence from the British Empire, was forced from its first moments to defend its existence against the combined armies of the Arab world. Israel survived against all odds, and did so in a truly epic story of will and heroism. This story inspired me.

Growing up, I was a very small child. (I am called "Tiny Ryney" to this day, though I play defensive tackle for the Calgary Wolfpack). I was called a "half-breed" and other slurs by white kids while the children in my colony made fun of my paler skin. I didn't belong anywhere. And I had to be resourceful to protect myself, since I was weaker than the others. Being the victim of bullying shaped who I am and my sense of right and wrong. It is one reason that I support Israel, a country that has faced bullying and manipulation since its birth. Israel too has had to be resourceful to defend itself against enemies that dwarf it. And, like me, it overcame.

Noticing my curiosity about Israel, my father bought me as a birthday gift a book about the 1976 Raid on Entebbe, a brilliant rescue by Israeli commandos of hostages taken by Palestinian terrorists to Uganda. Again, this impressed me. Israel was willing to do the impossible to rescue its people, regardless of the political fallout. This pushed me to read more about the Arab-Israeli conflict. In so doing, I learned about the '72 Munich Olympic Games, where Palestinian terrorists massacred 11 Israeli athletes during an event meant to be a celebration of brotherhood and peace. I wondered why more people weren't as upset as I was.

It was during this time, while visiting relatives working oil rigs, that I learned while watching a hotel TV of the horrific 1972 Lod Airport massacre where terrorists shot dead 26 civilians waiting for their flights, including 17 Christian pilgrims. I also remember the 1985 attack by Yasser Arafat's forces on the Achille Lauro cruise ship, where an old disabled man was thrown overboard in his wheelchair for the crime of being a Jew. The more I saw, the more I needed to understand why such things were happening. The more I learned, the more I grew to appreciate Israel's moral

integrity in the face of brutal hatred. And I came to believe that the Jewish people and Israel should serve as an example to indigenous people everywhere. It is with the Jews – and their stubborn survival after being decimated and dispersed by powerful empires -- that we have the most in common.

My people, the Métis, came to Alberta after the American Revolution, at the government's request, to prevent the settling of the Americans in western Canada. We settled the land and followed the white man's rules. But we were eventually evicted, our homes given to white pioneers. No one wanted us. We were forced to live in hiding, on road allowances, in the bush. We had no rights, and we were killed out of hand, as "nuisances". Exile fractured our nation. Our people wandered with no hope and no home. Then, in the mid 1900's, our leaders managed to secure land for us, not the land we had wanted but land that would nonetheless allow us to build a better future. We took it, built our settlements and formed a government to improve the lives of our people. We still have many problems to solve, of course, but we also have more educated people than ever and are slowly becoming self-sufficient, as our leaders envisioned. In this, the Jewish people and the Métis have walked the same road.

The Jews also suffered genocide and were expelled from their homeland. They were also rejected by everyone and forced to wander. Like us, they rebelled against imperial injustice when necessary and, despite their grievances, strived for peace whenever possible. Like us they were given a tiny sliver of their land back after centuries of suffering and persecution, land that nobody else had wanted to call home until then. Like us, they took that land despite their misgivings and forged a nation from a fractured and wounded people. And like us, they consistently show a willingness to compromise for the good of their people.

I hope the Metis keep walking the same road as the Jewish people. Through their efforts, the Jews were able to preserve their identity despite terrible persecution and to revive their culture and language once back in their homeland. They never lost their sense of who they were, but neither did they lose sight of the importance of looking forward. Given their history, it would have been natural for them to become insular and reactionary. But instead, they work hard to be productive and are friendly even to countries that have caused them tremendous suffering. I want us to similarly make education and the preservation of our ancient culture a priority. I want us to continue to strive for peace and productivity.

Many claim that we Natives have more in common with the Palestinians, that their struggle is our struggle. Beyond superficial similarities, nothing could be farther from the truth. Beyond the facile co-opting of our cause, the comparison with the Palestinians is absolutely untenable. It trivializes our suffering.

Co-opting today's native struggle to the Palestinian propaganda war is a fallacy. Though the Palestinians have undeniable ties to the land, first hand accounts by Mark Twain and countless other travelers to the Holy Land through the ages suggest that a large percentage of the Palestinian people immigrated to Palestine in recent decades. And for 65 years, the Palestinians have convinced the world that they are worse off than many other stateless nations, despite all evidence to the contrary. The Palestinians claim to have been colonized but it was their own leaders who refused to negotiate and who lost the land that they want by waging a needless war on Israel. They claim to have faced genocide but they suffered no such thing: their population has exploded from a few hundred thousand in 1948 to over 4 million today. They claim deprivation but their elites live in luxury while their people live in ramshackle poverty.

What's more, the Palestinian leaders have never been interested in a peaceful solution for their people. They were given several opportunities to have their own state – for the first time in history -- and refused each time, choosing war over peace because the offers were never deemed sufficient. They have persistently used terrorism to bring attention to their cause and their leaders have celebrated the killing of civilians by naming parks and schools after murderers. And any

Palestinian that questions the maximalist rhetoric or who suggests real compromise is immediately ostracized, branded a traitor, or killed.

The Palestinians are not like us. Their fight is not our fight. We natives believe in bringing about change peacefully, and we refuse to be affiliated with anyone who engages in violence targeting civilians. I cannot remain silent and allow the Palestinians to gain credibility at our expense by claiming commonality with us. I cannot stand by while they trivialize our plight by tying it to theirs, which is largely self-inflicted. Our population of over 65 million was violently reduced to a mere 10 million, a slaughter unprecedented in human history. To compare that in whatever way to the Palestinians' story is deeply offensive to me. The Palestinians did lose the land they claim is theirs, but they were repeatedly given the opportunity to build their state on it and to partner with the Jews -- and they persistently refused peace overtures and chose war. We were never given that chance. We never made that choice.

Why Middle East Muslims are taught to hate Jews

Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Christian Science Monitor, 24 January, 2013

<http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Global-Viewpoint/2013/0124/Why-Middle-East-Muslims-are-taught-to-hate-Jews>

Egypt's newly elected president, Mohamed Morsi, was caught on tape about three years ago urging his followers to "nurse our children and our grandchildren on hatred" for Jews and Zionists. Not long after, the then-leader of the Muslim Brotherhood described Zionists as "bloodsuckers who attack the Palestinians," "warmongers," and "descendants of apes and pigs."

These remarks are disgusting, but they are neither shocking nor new. As a child growing up in a Muslim family, I constantly heard my mother, other relatives, and neighbors wish for the death of Jews, who were considered our darkest enemy. Our religious tutors and the preachers in our mosques set aside extra time to pray for the destruction of Jews.

For far too long the pervasive Middle Eastern qualification of Jews as murderers and bloodsuckers was dismissed in the West as an extreme view expressed by radical fringe groups. But it is not.

All over the Middle East, hatred for Jews and Zionists can be found in textbooks for children as young as 3, complete with illustrations of Jews with monster-like qualities. Mainstream educational television programs are consistently anti-Semitic. In songs, books, newspaper articles, and blogs, Jews are variously compared to pigs, donkeys, rats, and cockroaches, and also to vampires and a host of other imaginary creatures.

Consider this infamous dialogue between a 3-year-old and a television presenter, eight years before Mr. Morsi's remarks.

Presenter: "Do you like Jews?"

-year-old: "No."

"Why don't you like them?"

"Jews are apes and pigs."

"Who said this?"

"Our God."

"Where did he say this?"

"In the Koran."

The presenter responds approvingly: "No [parents] could wish for Allah to give them a more believing girl than she ... May Allah bless her, her father, and mother."

This conversation was not caught on hidden camera or taped by propagandists. It was featured on a prominent program called "Muslim Woman Magazine" and broadcast by Iqraa, the popular Saudi-owned satellite channel.

It is a major step forward for a sitting US administration and leading American newspapers to unequivocally condemn Morsi's words. But condemnation is just the first move.

Here is an opportunity to acknowledge the breadth and depth of the attitude toward Jews in the Middle East, and how that affects the much desired but elusive peace process between Israel and the Palestinians.

So many explanations have been offered for the failure of successive US administrations to achieve that peace, but the answer is in Morsi's words. Why would one make peace with bloodsuckers and descendants of apes and monkeys?

Millions of Muslims have been conditioned to regard Jews not only as the enemies of Palestine but as the enemies of all Muslims, of God, and of all humanity. Arab leaders far more prominent and influential than Morsi have been tireless in "educating" or "nursing" generations to believe that Jews are "the scum of the human race, the rats of the world, the violators of pacts and agreements, the murderers of the prophets, and the offspring of apes and pigs." (These are the words of the Saudi sheik Abdul Rahman al-Sudais, imam at the Masjid al-Haram mosque in Mecca.)

In 2011, a Pew survey found that in Turkey, just 4 percent of those surveyed held a "very favorable" or "somewhat favorable" view of Jews; in Indonesia, 10 percent; in Pakistan, 2 percent. In addition, 95 percent of Jordanians, 94 percent of Egyptians, and 95 percent of Lebanese hold a "very unfavorable" view of Jews.

In recent decades Israeli and American administrations negotiated with unelected Arab despots, who played a double game. They honored the formal peace treaties by not conducting military attacks against Israel. But they condoned the Islamists' dissemination of hatred against Israel, Zionism, and Jews.

As the Islamists spread their influence through civil institutions, young people were nursed on hatred.

In the wake of the Arab Spring, as the people take a chance on democracy, they and their new leadership want to see their ideals turned into policy.

For too many of those who fought for their own liberation, one of those ideals is the end of peace with Israel. The United States must make clear to Morsi that this is not an option.

This is also a crucial opportunity for the region's secular movements, which must speak out against the clergy's incitement of young minds to hatred. It is time for these secular movements to start a counter-education in tolerance.

Radical Islamists vs the people of Mali

Max Boot, *Commentary Magazine*, 24 January 2013

<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2013/01/24/radical-islamists-vs-the-people-of-mali/>

Law professor Karima Bennouna has an important op-ed in the *New York Times* today that should be required reading for all those who think that Muslims are somehow different from “you and me” and actually enjoy living under a tyrannical regime as long as its diktats are justified by a twisted reading of Sharia law. Based on her interviews with Malians fleeing the Islamists who have taken over the northern part of the country, Bennouna shows it just isn't so—tyranny is unpopular no matter how it is packaged and justified. As she notes:

First, the fundamentalists banned music in a country with one of the richest musical traditions in the world. Last July, they stoned an unmarried couple for adultery. The woman, a mother of two, had been buried up to her waist in a hole before a group of men pelted her to death with rocks. And in October the Islamist occupiers began compiling lists of unmarried mothers.

Even holy places are not safe. These self-styled “defenders of the faith” demolished the tombs of local Sufi saints in the fabled city of Timbuktu.

Such draconian decrees are hardly popular with ordinary Malians who practice a tolerant brand of Islam. Bennouna quotes the acting principal of a coed high school “who had been attending public punishments to document the atrocities. This meant repeatedly watching his fellow citizens get flogged. He has seen what it looks like when a ‘convict’ has his foot sawed off. Close to tears, he said: ‘No one can stand it, but it is imposed on us. Those of us who attend, we cry.’ ”

Such sentiments are hardly surprising to anyone who has ever visited Afghanistan or Iraq's Anbar Province—two more places where a harsh brand of Salafism was once imposed at gunpoint. In both places the people turned against the self-proclaimed religious enforcers of the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Iraq, respectively. Now in Mali they are happy to turn against Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and other groups, provided the French army protects them from the terrorists' retribution.

The only way that such extremists can gain power is at gunpoint—something that is unfortunately easy to do in countries such as post-Saddam Hussein Iraq, post-Taliban Afghanistan, and post-coup Mali where the security services are weak to nonexistent and social order is breaking down. In such circumstances Islamists can at least claim that they are restoring law and order. But when the people see what their “law and order” consists of, they invariably recoil and pray that someone will rescue them from these theocratic tyrants.

Disrupting the ecosystem of extremism

Ron Prosor, *Jerusalem Post Opinion*, 23 January 2013

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-EdContributors/Article.aspx?id=300594>

There is a specific kind of ecosystem that creates terrorism. Terrorism is rooted in hate, watered with instability and state support, and then planted in the next generation.

Every roadside bombing, every suicide attack, and every act of terrorism begins with words and thoughts of hate. It begins with al-Qaida websites that turn suicide bombers into jihadi celebrities. It begins with Hezbollah summer camps that use arts and crafts to glorify martyrdom and teach bombmaking skills to children.

It begins with statements by Hamas leaders like Atallah Abu al-Subh, who recently said on public Palestinian television (and I quote) "The Jews are the most despicable and contemptible nation to crawl upon the face of the Earth." This is the poison that is being fed to people across the Middle East, day after day.

So I want to take the opportunity of this debate to ask the simple question: how do we truly counterterrorism? Yes, we must combat terrorists wherever they seek to strike. Yes, we must attack terrorist infrastructure, and go after those who support and finance terrorism.

However, true counterterrorism must also begin by disrupting the ecosystem of extremism in which terror thrives. It means advancing education that teaches peace, not hate, and mutual understanding, not martyrdom. It means speaking out against incitement and all forms of terrorism, even when it is politically inconvenient.

We are far from that reality. In too many corners of the planet, extremists have the tools to grow the next generation of terrorists. In this very council, some states offer justification for certain terrorists, while condemning others.

The Counter-Terrorism Committee, the Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, and the 1540 Committee all remain essential parts of the global effort to isolate terrorists and deny them the means to inflict harm.

Israel appreciates the work of the UN's counterterrorism agencies. The UN has expanded its counterterrorism efforts over the past decade – in particular by coordinating and facilitating technical assistance to member states.

Israel is proud to be an active partner and donor in these efforts. We continue to share the knowledge and experience that comes through years of combating terrorism. We remain committed to implementing the relevant Security Council resolutions, and to that end, we recently submitted our periodic report, in accordance with Resolution 1540. We also support the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. All four pillars of this strategy must be treated as a whole.

Israel is working closely with many states and regional organizations to advance counterterrorism cooperation in areas from aviation security to border protection to terrorist financing. These activities reflect our fundamental belief that terrorism can only effectively be confronted through international cooperation.

No state should stand alone.

It takes a network to beat a network.

The challenge we face is growing as a result of an increasingly linked network of smuggling rings, transnational criminals, and terrorists. Ayman Juma was recently indicted in a US court for smuggling 85 tons of cocaine into the US and for laundering \$850 million for a Mexican drug cartel. He took a 14 percent commission for these efforts on behalf of his bosses, the Hezbollah terrorist organization.

Juma is one of many thousands of Hezbollah operatives in a network that spans from West Africa

to the Middle East to Latin America to Europe. This global criminal network funds Hezbollah's terrorist activities, and provides the logistical support to carry them out.

Make no mistake. There is a direct connection between powder cocaine smuggled from Latin America and the gunpowder of Hezbollah weaponry in Lebanon.

CRIMINALS ARE not the only supporters of terrorists. Many states – including some in this hall – work hand-in-hand with them as well. Iran stands chief among these nations.

Across the African continent, Iranian weaponry has become the tool of choice for some of the region's bloodiest insurgencies and terrorists.

In Gaza, Iran is funding, training and arming Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other terrorists, giving them the capabilities to strike Israel's largest cities. Iran's politicians and military commanders boast about providing terrorists with this assistance. The head of Islamic Jihad in Gaza said last November (and I quote) "The entire world knows that Iran is the main source of our weapons."

Iran has also helped Hezbollah to build its arsenal to unprecedented levels in Lebanon, amassing 50,000 deadly missiles – in flagrant breach of resolution 1701. These weapons can reach all of Israel and well beyond. Hezbollah intentionally stores its weapons in civilian areas. Just last month, a large Hezbollah weapons storage facility exploded in the Lebanese village of Tair Harfa, just 300 meters from a school.

The people of Lebanon are more valuable to Hezbollah and Iran as human shields than as human beings.

We face the frightening possibility that Hezbollah could soon get its hands on Assad's vast stockpiles of chemical weapons. This council must act today, not tomorrow. We have a responsibility to prevent the world's most dangerous weapons from falling into the hands of the world's most dangerous actors.

This council cannot turn a blind eye to those states that sponsor, support and arm terrorists. The international community must hold them accountable for the violence that they spread – and the lives that they have taken.

We have passed many resolutions in these halls in the global fight against terror. Our collective efforts cannot end there. The voices of the victims of terrorism call to us. They demand our united action.

We must take the words from the printed page and breathe life into them every day. We must be steadfast.

We must be strong. We must, as Churchill said, "seek victory however long and hard the road may be." We cannot rest until the evil ideologies that fuel terror become nothing more than relics of the past.

Why I voted for Yair Lapid

Yossi Klein Halevi, Tablet Magazine, 23 January 2013

<http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/122304/why-i-voted-for-yair-lapid>

When Yair Lapid's father, the well-known journalist and politician Tommy Lapid, was on his deathbed, he said to his son: I'm leaving you the state of Israel.

Tommy, a Holocaust survivor, meant that metaphorically; the generation of survivors was entrusting the gift of a Jewish state to its children. But with the rise of Yair Lapid, head of Yesh Atid (There Is a Future), which emerged from nowhere to become Israel's second-largest party in yesterday's election, Yair's "inheritance" could become literal. More than any other politician aside from Prime Minister Netanyahu himself, Yair may now determine the next phase of Israeli politics.

"Yair," not Lapid: We call our politicians Bibi and Shelly and Tzipi with a misleading intimacy, when in fact we can't bear most of them. But even Israelis who wrongly dismiss him as a lightweight—a former TV talk show host and heart-throb, with no government or combat experience—tend to like Yair.

That's because he is frankly, unapologetically, in love with the state of Israel. There is nothing complicated about Yair's Israeliness. He is not a hyphenated Israeli, whose loyalty to the state depends on its fulfillment of an ideological agenda. Yair conveys the impression of a man comfortable in all parts of Israel. He is a secular Israeli who has shown increasing interest in Judaism. He supports a two-state solution and opposes settlement construction outside the large settlement blocs. Yet he launched his campaign from the West Bank city of Ariel, sending the message that settlers are part of Israel too. He opposes the wholesale draft exemption of ultra-Orthodox young men, but he advocates a gradualist approach and has an ultra-Orthodox rabbi on his Knesset list. He emerged as the voice of middle class disaffection, yet included in his list two Ethiopians, representatives of one of the country's poorest constituencies. (Other parties tend to include a token Ethiopian.)

Some see Yair's Israeli eclecticism as an expression of ideological immaturity, of indecisiveness. In fact it reflects his ability—alone among today's leaders—to define the Israeli center.

To understand Yair's Israeliness one needs to understand his father, who emerged as a teenager from the Budapest ghetto committed to a single act of faith: The Jews need a home. Tommy's Zionism was simple. It was about gratitude to Israel for helping heal him from the extremities of exile. Tommy's Israel didn't need to be territorially whole, or a light to the nations. It simply needed to be.

Yair's biography of his father, *Memoirs After My Death*—one of the best books to emerge from the "second generation"—is written in Tommy's voice, as if from the beyond. (Tommy was a famous atheist, and Yair ends the book with these words: "And then I stopped breathing. ... After that there is nothing. I told you so.") That is more than a clever device: It is an expression of the near-total identification of a son with his father, and with his father's history. So deeply has Yair internalized his father's story that he can write Tommy's "autobiography" in a voice that Israelis will recognize as unmistakably that of Tommy Lapid.

And yet, as Yair has insisted since entering politics, he is not his father. I've learned from my father, he's repeatedly said, but also from his mistakes. Tommy's biggest political mistake was his divisiveness: His party, Shinui (Change), was aggressively secular, not only attacking ultra-Orthodox separatism but mocking ultra-Orthodox beliefs and lifestyle.

By contrast, Yair has sought dialogue. Last year, in an address at the ultra-Orthodox campus of the Kiryat Ono College, Yair conceded that the ultra-Orthodox had won. Secularists, he said, thought we could create a state that would marginalize you, while in reality we can't make any major political decision without your input. But, he added pointedly, secularists also won: We've created a modern state with a thriving Hebrew culture. And so, he concluded, both camps have to choose between continuing their culture war or jointly taking responsibility for the state they share.

More than any other party, Yesh Atid defines the country's emerging cultural center. The son of Tommy Lapid has included no fewer than two rabbis on his list. But that list also includes Ruth Calderon, a leader of the growing movement of secularists seeking a new Jewish identity outside of Orthodoxy. The message is radical diversity within a shared Israeliness.

Yair's ideological challenge will be to clarify the political center and give coherence to the instincts of a majority of Israelis. That centrist majority seeks a politics that isn't afraid to acknowledge the complexity of Israel's dilemmas. These voters agree with the left about the dangers of occupation and with the right about the dangers of a delusional peace. Centrists want a two-state solution and are prepared to make almost any territorial compromise for peace. But they also believe that no concessions, at least for now, will win Israel legitimacy and real peace. Centrists want to be doves but are forced by reality to be hawks.

I voted for Yair because, as a centrist Israeli, I have no other political home.

Netanyahu, who accepted a two-state solution in principle and then imposed a 10-month settlement freeze, tried to turn the Likud into a center-right party, more pragmatic than ideological and able to attract voters like me. But the ideological right within the Likud revolted. Today's Likud appears more hospitable to the far rightist Moshe Feiglin than to centrists like Dan Meridor, denied a safe seat in the Likud primaries.

The Israeli media is speaking relentlessly of an even divide between the left-wing and right-wing blocs. That's nonsense. Yesh Atid isn't a left-wing party; half of its voters define themselves as right of center. Instead, the rise of Yesh Atid affirms the vigor of the center. Despite the historic failure of every centrist party—Kadima, the last attempt, virtually disintegrated in this election—centrist Israelis continue to seek a political framework.

Will Yesh Atid be different from its failed centrist predecessors? How will the inexperienced Yair Lapid withstand the brutalities of Israeli politics?

I think Yair will continue to surprise us. What has taken him this far is his straightforward thinking, precisely what Israeli politics so desperately needs. (And his political adviser happens to be his father's closest friend, Ehud Olmert, the ultimate politician.) If Yair remains true to his ideologically simple but emotionally profound Zionism, he could help lead us to an Israel less at war with itself.

The left in Israel is its own worst enemy

Rachel Shabi, The Guardian UK, 21 January 2013

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/jan/21/left-israel-own-worst-enemy>

Israelis have rarely seemed so despondent. During a recent trip ahead of the impending elections, the popular sentiment I kept hearing was of Israel as a country that screws its citizens. There's a paucity of hope, a frustrated paralysis over corruption, cronyism and ego-driven politics. Nobody believes voting will change anything. Sadly, some Israelis told me their best case scenario was that their children emigrate.

Israel is expected to elect the most rightwing government in its history on Tuesday – a coalition that will make the current prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, look like a man of peace.

His Likud party is running ever more extreme candidates and is outflanked to the right by Jewish Home, a rapidly rising, Palestine-denying, new settlers' party that is predicted to play a key role in coalition. But alongside the headlines heralding a rightward lurch, voter turnout is expected to plunge. That has prompted ubiquitous, state-sponsored commercials with the tagline: "Vote now; moan later."

Low motivation is highest among centre-left voters. Endemic levels of misery and apathy are tied to a popular conviction that Israeli politicians of all stripes will continue to serve an elite while ignoring everybody else, except to expose the wider population to constant fear and endless war.

The increasingly splintered centre and left parties are predicted to win up to 57 out of 120 Knesset seats. That sounds good, but no one party will have significant clout on its own, and they don't seem able to agree enough to form a strong, combined force (some of these left and centre parties might even join Bibi's coalition).

As the nation's mood seems to slide ever rightwards, polls still show majority support for the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state. And the mass social movement of 2011, a united cry against the nation's crippling neoliberal economics, brought 500,000 of the nation's 8 million on to the streets – the largest protests in Israel's history. How is it possible, in this context, for the left to be so powerless in politics?

The straight answer is that the Israeli left has never really been leftwing. Labour has long been the elite, establishment party, dominated by Jews of European origin who monopolised power and discriminated against Jewish communities from Muslim and Arab countries (labelled "Mizrahi" or "Eastern"). Such discrimination – the lopsided allocation of resources, such as land or education; the cultural negation – was so bad that ethnicity is now too often synonymous with class.

In the late 1970s, the rightwing Likud exploited this to win a landslide victory. Its leader at the time, Menachem Begin, toured city slums and peripheral towns proclaiming his party would never dishonour or deprive the majority Mizrahi population like Labour did. The wealth gap widened under Likud's naked capitalism, but mistrust of a condescending, Eurocentric left wing still holds sway – especially as ethnic discrimination remains an unacknowledged divide.

In a new documentary about the left, which recently aired on Israeli TV, the Iraqi-born Israeli author Sami Michael explains this crucial, myopic contradiction within the pro-peace left: "They see [Mizrahis] as a danger, because we bring Arab culture, enemy culture which the Israeli left hates," he says. "It's nice for them to be photographed with Arabs, to say that they have Arab friends, that they want peace. But peace with whom? First of all make peace with your own people!"

But the Israeli left can't make peace with the Palestinians, either – not even with the Palestinians who make up 20% of Israel's population, but are second-class citizens because of systemic discrimination. No Israeli government has included Arab political parties. Even in 1999, after gaining 94% of the Palestinian vote in Israel, Labour snubbed this sector and built a coalition without even a token Arab party. When peace talks with Palestinians at Camp David failed, the then Labour prime minister, Ehud Barak, proclaimed that Israel had "no partner for peace" – a cowardly own goal that kicked away a political foundation-stone.

"This is what made the right wing stronger," says Asma Aghbaria-Zahalka, leader of Daam, the Jewish-Arab workers' party. Although unlikely to gain a Knesset seat, she has gained many column inches for her fresh, charismatic socialism. "The Israeli left has no future without the Arabs, and the right will stay in power for ever," she says.

Therein lies another problem with the Israeli left: it doesn't really do equality. As Sami Michael (who is also president of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel) points out in the TV documentary, this should be the starting point of any leftwing party. While the right dominates identity politics with its ultra-patriotic Jewish nationalism, the supposed left can't provide a more inclusive, democratic alternative.

As Anat Saragusti, director of the social change communications centre Agenda explains: "My Israeli nationality is much larger and broader than my Jewish nationality. I have more in common with Arab citizens of Israel than with Jews in Guatemala or New York." A truly leftwing party would rise above the choking patriotism test of Jewish ethnocentrism and find a better alternative.

This failure to support an inclusive Israeli identity in part explains the factionalism that typifies Israeli left politics – without binding progressive ideals, every party has its pet issues to peddle. Ahead of this election, the Israeli centre-left sub-split into a baffling number of atomised parties – now including Labour, Kadima, Hatnuah, Meretz, Yesh Atid – which then polluted media coverage with childish squabbles about who wants to join whose gang. Small wonder that centre-left Israelis can't be bothered to vote.

However abhorrent, the far-right of "greater Israel", ultra-nationalism, no Palestine and pure neoliberalism is, at least, ideologically true to itself – which brings continuity and political traction. As long as the scattered Israeli left can't be properly leftwing, it's hard to see the point of it – much less it having any meaningful success at the polls.

Egypt's US-subsidised politics of hate

Jonathan Tobin, Commentary Magazine, 16 January 2013

<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2013/01/15/egypts-u-s-subsidized-politics-of-hate-mohammed-morsi/>

Better late than never is the only way one can describe the *New York Times's* decision to run an article about Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi's history of anti-Semitic slanders. As we wrote here on Contentions two weeks ago, a video of an Egyptian TV interview with the Muslim Brotherhood leader from 2010 has surfaced in which he describes Israelis as "the descendants of apes and pigs" and called for a boycott of the United States. As I noted at the time, revelations about the nature of what passes for rhetoric about Israel and the Jews might come as a shock to readers of the *Times*—since much of their news coverage, as well as the work of op-ed columnists like Nicholas Kristof, had sought to portray the Brotherhood as moderate and friendly people who just happen to be Muslims—but not to those who have been following these developments without the rose-colored glasses that liberals seem to require to discuss the Arab world. The conceit of the piece about Morsi's comment is, however, to call attention to the difficult position the Egyptian president has been placed in by reports about his despicable language.

Egyptian figures quoted by the *Times* get the last word here, as they seem to argue that it isn't reasonable to expect Morsi to apologize since to do so leaves him vulnerable to criticism from his Islamist supporters and their allies who like that kind of talk. The conclusion seems to be that Americans should judge Morsi only by his recent behavior that has been aimed at least partly at ensuring that the flow of billions of dollars of U.S. aid should continue.

The problem is that Morsi's use of a phrase that is commonly employed throughout the Muslim world to describe Jews as well as other comments that are straight out of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion is so common in Egypt as to make it almost unexceptionable. That is no small measure the result of Brotherhood propaganda and mainstream Islamist thought in which demonization of Israelis, Jews and Americans is commonplace. Try as writers like Kristof might to

paint the Brotherhood as a responsible political movement, Jew-hatred is one of its core beliefs. The question here is not so much whether Morsi will publicly disavow these slurs but whether the Obama administration will continue to buy into the myth that Morsi is some kind of a moderate whose government deserves to continue to be treated as an ally.

The administration has tread carefully with Morsi over the last several months, even as he moved quickly to consolidate power in Egypt. With the apparent approval of Washington, Morsi has sought to eliminate any possible check on his ability to govern more or less in the same fashion as deposed dictator Hosni Mubarak. Though the *Times* more or less admits that Morsi's rhetoric provides us a window as to how he would govern were he not restrained by his need for U.S. cash and Egypt's relative military weakness, the underlying assumption seems to be that it is America's interest to prefer him to any possible alternative. It also assumes that Morsi's influence on events in the region, such as Hamas's missile offensive against Israel last November, has been entirely benevolent.

In fact, Hamas's aggressive attitude and risk taking as well as its attempt to increase its influence in the Fatah-controlled West Bank is directly related to the rise of the Brotherhood in Cairo. It is true that President Obama cannot be entirely blamed for the creation of this mess since Mubarak would have fallen no matter what the U.S. did. But his subsequent coddling of Morsi and the Brotherhood as well as the rebukes issued to the Egyptian military set the stage for a situation in which the most populous country in the Arab world is run by a raging anti-Semite who is working to undermine U.S. influence in the region and to strengthen radical forces while being subsidized by American taxpayers.

Morsi's talk about "apes and pigs" is not a side issue to be ignored in the name of stability or preserving an American ally. It goes straight to the heart of whether Egypt should be treated as a nation ruled by a radical and hostile government that is confident that nothing it does will cause it to lose its American subsidy.

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

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