

OPINION and ANALYSIS

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local and international writings on the Middle East**

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

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The Fate of Syria

Raymond Ibrahim, Stonegate Institute, 8 March 2012

<http://www.meforum.org/3192/syria-christians-fate>

What is the alternative to Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria? A simple if indirect way to find out is to consider which groups in Syria are especially for or against Assad—and why.

Christian minorities, who, at 10% of the Syrian population, have the most to gain from a secular government and the most to suffer from a Sharia-state, have no choice but to prefer Assad. They are already seeing aspects of the alternative. A recent Barnabas Fund report titled "Christians in Syria Targeted in Series of Kidnappings and Killings; 100 Dead," tells of how "children were being especially targeted by the kidnappers, who, if they do not receive the ransom demanded, kill the victim." In one instance, kidnappers videotaped a Christian boy as they murdered him in an attempt to frame the government; one man "was cut into pieces and thrown in a river" and another "was found hanged with numerous injuries."

Accordingly, it is understandable that, as an earlier report put it, "Christians have mostly stayed away from the protests in Syria, having been well treated and afforded a considerable amount of religious freedom under President Assad's regime." After all, "Should Assad fall, it is feared that Syria could go the way of Iraq post-Saddam Hussein. Saddam, like Assad, restrained the influence of militant Islamists, but after his fall they were free to wreak havoc on the Christian community; hundreds of thousands of Christians were consequently forced to flee the violence. Many of them went to Syria."

In short, should "rebels" get their way and topple the Assad regime, the same brutal pattern experienced by Iraq's Christian minorities—who have been liked to, and killed off like, dogs, to the point of nearing extinction—will come to Syria, where a preacher recently urged Muslims to "tear apart, chop up and feed" Christians who support Assad "to the dogs." From last week alone, some 70 additional Christian homes were invaded and pillaged, and "for the first time in the history of the conflict in Syria, an armed attack has been made on a Catholic monastery," partially in search of money.

And who are these "rebels" who see and treat Christians as sub-humans to be exploited and plundered to fund the "opposition" against Assad? In fact, many of them are Islamists, internal and external, and their "opposition" is really a jihad; moreover, they are acting on anti-Christian *fatwas* that justify the kidnapping, ransoming, and plundering of "infidel" Christians.

As in Libya, it is a fact that al-Qaeda is operating among the Syrian opposition; Ayman al-Zawahiri himself "urges the Syrian people to continue their revolution until the downfall of the Assad regime, and stresses that toppling this regime is a necessary step on the way to liberating Jerusalem." Even the influential Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Hamas, the

latter supported by Iran—Assad's ally—both back the "rebels." All these facts should place the "opposition"—who they are, what they want—in better context.

Meanwhile, U.S. President Obama, who was remarkably reticent when Iranians seeking Western-style freedom tried to revolt against the oppressive Islamist regime of Iran, made it a point to single out Assad by name as needing to go at his recent State of the Union Address (not that the Republican presidential candidates seem to know any better; see Andrew McCarthy's recent article where, drawing on America's other misadventures in Islamic nations, he shows how the U.S. has little to gain and possibly much to lose by supporting the anti-Assad opposition).

The lesson here is clear: while it is true that not all of Assad's opposition is Islamist—there are anti-Assad Muslims who do not want a Sharia-state—the Islamists are quite confident that the overthrow of Assad equates their empowerment. And why shouldn't they be confident? Wherever Arab tyrants have been overthrown—Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Yemen, etc.—it is Islamists filling the power-vacuum. Just ask Syria's Christian minorities, who prefer the dictator Assad remain in power—who prefer the devil they know to the ancient demon their forefathers knew.

Hamas welcomed at UN headquarters in Geneva

Anne Bayefsky, Jerusalem Post, 20 March 2012

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-EdContributors/Article.aspx?id=262666>

On March 19, 2012 the UN Human Rights Council and its UN staff in Geneva advertised and facilitated an event featuring a representative of the terrorist organization Hamas. Facing an immediate outcry, a massive misinformation campaign is now underway to protect the already discredited UN body. But there is no avoiding the facts: the UN handed a UN entrance pass and a UN microphone, in a UN room, to Hamas's own Ismail al-Ashqar.

US, European and Israeli laws designate Hamas as a terror group. Hamas's hate-filled Charter advocates genocide, or in its words: "Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it...The Day of Judgment will not come about until Muslims fight the Jews (killing the Jews)..." The organization is pursuing that goal on a daily basis.

Nevertheless, the Council published a formal UN "Bulletin" – with the Council's name splashed across the top and a formal UN symbol number – containing the following message. Anyone wanting to catch a lecture by a Hamas human rights authority should head off to Meeting Room XXVII in the UN's Palais des Nations from 10 to 12 Monday morning.

Or in more formal UN-eze "Human Rights Council, Nineteenth session, Geneva, Bulletin of informal meetings, Held in parallel to the session, Monday, 19 March 2012...Subject: Arrest of parliamentarians, Public. A/HRC/19/BI/16."

Sent out to face the subsequent barrage of criticism, Director of the United Nations Information Service in Geneva Corinne Momal-Vanien told AP that the meeting was "on the sides of the Human Rights Council session" and any UN-accredited group "can organize side events and invite speakers of its choice."

Indeed, the event featuring the Hamas member of the Palestinian Legislative Council was organized by the UN-accredited NGO "Maarij Foundation for Peace and Development." But here are a few facts Momal-Vanian managed to leave out.

UN facilities would only have been available to a non-governmental organization that had been awarded UN accreditation and then only after they had requested the services from the UN secretariat. Though the UN bulletin carries a standard disclaimer for what may or may not be said during such events, the application to hold the meeting in the first place must have been vetted and approved by UN staff.

Moreover, locating meetings on the "side" of the Human Rights Council's regular session – which is now in full swing – is a deliberate attempt to influence information flow to Council participants. And while in theory any UN group can ask permission to hold a side event, it is no accident that approval is actually granted to a raft of Israel-bashing NGOs.

This week alone radical organizations with extreme ideologies are scheduled to hold two more two-hour sessions on UN premises: "Human rights in Palestine" and "Follow-up to the Goldstone Report." The organizing NGOs, including Al Haq, BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, and Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples, all hold official UN accreditation. Standard fare is to claim that Israel's creation was a catastrophe that has to be walked back; Israel is an apartheid state; Israelis are foreigners transplanted onto Arab land; Israel should be subject to debilitating sanctions. BADIL's website and activities, for example, are studded with antisemitic images and rants.

The controversy comes at an inopportune moment for the Obama administration, which is in the middle of a drive to renew its three-year term on the Human Rights Council. So somehow a twitter campaign joined Monday's effort to ward off the public relations disaster of a terrorist UN human rights buff.

Some examples. Tweet: "NGOs can invite people without the UN being aware or responsible." In fact, no person can get through UN security at the Palais des Nations without their name being provided to UN officials in advance; officials must then grant access and issue a UN pass. Even the UN spokesperson has not alleged that al-Ashqar evaded security and snuck in.

Then there was this tweet: "Hamas representative invited by NGO is distraction." Welcoming a terrorist into the midst of a facility supposedly dedicated to human rights is indeed a distraction – from the UN's *raison d'être*. Another read: "Contrary to Hamas boast, its representative spoke to empty room." Photos of the audience posted on the web contradicted that tweet. And then there was the bleat: "Invited not by UN but Sudanese group." Except that the Sudanese group was not just any bunch of hate-mongers, but UN-accredited, and nothing would have prevented UN staff from turning al-Ashqar away at the door.

According to Momal-Vanian, however, what worried the UN most about the Hamas agent's visit was this: "the global body assessed the possibility of security threats in connection with the event and allowed it to go ahead."

A perversion from beginning to end. Only the UN could twist the security threat so that the terrorist front man became the victim.

Investment in Iron Dome is investment in peace

Michael Oren, Politico, 18 March 2012

<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0312/74149.html>

Last week, the Middle East nearly plunged into new crisis. The cause was not the civil war in Syria or ethnic strife in Iraq but, again, terrorism from Gaza.

Islamic jihad terrorists fired more than 250 rockets, missiles and mortar shells at civilian neighborhoods in Israel. A million Israelis — including 200,000 schoolchildren — showed courage under fire, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu displayed restraint. Still, as the fire intensified, the government had to consider ground action.

Israel conducted such an operation in Gaza in 2008, but since then, the entire Middle East has become a powder keg. Syria and Iran reportedly were colluding to exploit Israeli-Palestinian tensions to distract attention from their internal turmoil. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah has urged his followers to “liberate Jerusalem.” Israel could have to defend itself on multiple fronts.

But the crisis was averted, thanks to a technological marvel. Israel’s Iron Dome anti-missile system succeeded in preventing almost all the terrorist rockets from hitting populated areas in Israel. Progressing from drawing board to deployment in only four years, Iron Dome became the first anti-ballistic system in history to succeed in real combat conditions, intercepting 11 Hamas rockets in April 2011.

That August, Iron Dome destroyed almost 90 percent of the rockets from Gaza, relieving Israel of the need to send troops into the Strip. Iron Dome not only saved lives, it prevented wars.

Designed to take out short-range projectiles, Iron Dome is part of a multitier defense that eventually will include David’s Sling and the Arrow, capable of intercepting medium-range and intercontinental missiles. Israel has developed these systems with the United States — and through the generous assistance of Congress and the Obama administration.

We are profoundly appreciative of this bipartisan support and are deeply grateful for the more than two decades of U.S.-Israel cooperation on missile defense. These pioneering and proven systems represent a win-win accomplishment: Iron Dome, David’s Sling and the Arrow can also help defend U.S. facilities and interests around the world.

Three Iron Dome batteries are currently stationed in southern Israel. They are capable of interdicting multiple targets and of determining whether the rockets will hit urban areas or crash harmlessly into empty fields. The interceptors, which are expensive, are fired only at those rockets deemed likely to cause far more costly damage to civilian areas. As such, the system is economically efficient.

Yet an additional 10 batteries, at least, will be necessary to protect the entire country. Hezbollah's rockets, for example, would terrorize Israel's northern cities, while those of Syria and Iran could strike the center.

This need was profoundly demonstrated by last week's events. By denying Islamic jihad the ability to kill and maim Israeli civilians, we gained precious time for effective Egyptian mediation. Another round of painful house-to-house fighting in Gaza — and possibly a devastating war — was avoided.

But the dangers persist. Indeed, while I was writing this article, another terrorist rocket was launched at Be'er Sheva. Fortunately, Iron Dome was able to intercept and destroy it.

Of course, we remain committed to resolving the conflict based on the principle of two states for two people. But until that is achieved, we have no choice but to rely on both our defensive and offensive capabilities. For America, as well as for Israel, an investment in the Iron Dome system is an investment in diplomacy — helping to create the conditions conducive to peace.

The Global March to Jerusalem: Part of the international campaign to delegitimise Israel

Ehud Rosen, Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs, March 2012

[http://www.jcpa.org/JCPA/Templates/ShowPage.asp?DRIT=2&DBID=1&LNGID=1&TMD=111&FID=443&PID=0&IID=13056&TTL=The Global March to Jerusalem: Part of the International Campaign to Delegitimize Israel](http://www.jcpa.org/JCPA/Templates/ShowPage.asp?DRIT=2&DBID=1&LNGID=1&TMD=111&FID=443&PID=0&IID=13056&TTL=The+Global+March+to+Jerusalem:+Part+of+the+International+Campaign+to+Delegitimize+Israel)

- Over the past few years there has been a Palestinian campaign focusing on the so-called "Judaization" of Jerusalem. A number of related topics have been raised recently in what appears to be an orchestrated campaign initiated by leading figures in the PA, Hamas, and Muslim Brotherhood.
- In January 2012, the European Preparatory Committee for the Global March to Jerusalem published an invitation for participation and support. The organizers are aiming to hold marches to Jerusalem "or the nearest point to it" on March 30, to coincide with the annual Palestinian "Land Day." Originally, marches were planned in Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and the four neighboring countries: Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria.
- The European Preparatory Committee is comprised of members of UK Muslim Brotherhood circles and a member of the Free Gaza movement (founded by the International Solidarity Movement, ISM), this time joined by the anti-imperialist camp. The original idea is said to have come from participants in the December 2010 "Asia to Gaza Solidarity Caravan."
- In February 2012, various national committees began their preparations, including in Jordan, Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, and Iran. More than twenty Palestinian organizations have endorsed the march.
- It is hard to predict the results of these preparations. However, the participation of Sunni-Islamist circles is increasing, encouraged by their rise due to the Arab

Spring. Fatah, the PLO, and the PA are becoming more involved as well, as are more Islamist jihadi forces and far-right European elements.

The Political Struggle Against Israel

The political element has always been part of the struggle against Israel, yet less attended to than other, mainly violent sides. However, for more than a decade, the centrality of this element has expanded among those fighting against the existence of Israel as the Jewish state. Two parallel perceptions are gradually becoming the focus of the international campaign to delegitimize Israel - "international mobilization" ("direct action") and the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. As previously demonstrated in our research which focused on Britain - one of the main "hubs" of this campaign - these efforts are being undertaken by groups that were never in the center of politics or mainstream public opinion, and therefore turn to places that might serve as bases of mainstreaming and recruitment - the academic world, a natural place for radical views and student activism;¹ the widely developing NGO community and "civil society" organizations; trade unions, which by their nature appeal to the more leftist side; various political echelons, sectorial and mass media, as well as religious institutions when relevant.

Several factors have contributed to the advancement of the political struggle:

- The "Durban route" that surfaced at the September 2001 UN-initiated "World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance," in which Israel was accused of committing genocide. The parallel NGO Forum gave birth to the "NGO Declaration" that spoke about Israel in terms of apartheid and ethnic cleansing.² The Durban Conference was followed by other UN-led conferences, as well as more joint cooperation among international NGOs where the concept of boycotting Israel, first suggested by South African politicians, was gradually developed.
- The advance of Sunni Islamism in Europe, and its ascendance to the political stage in the second half of the 1990s; the Arab Spring that brought about the rapid rise to power of Sunni Islamism across the Middle East, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, which has already made significant gains in Tunisia, Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, Libya and Yemen; and simultaneously the growing involvement of Qatar and Turkey which support it in regional and international politics.
- The route taken by Fatah and the Palestinian Authority (PA) in recent months, with attempts to bypass the Oslo Accords and gain international recognition on the path to independence.
- Growing activism of far-left elements around the world, especially (but not exclusively) anarchists, which is intensifying in light of the global financial crisis.
- The ongoing development of social media that facilitates the forging of connections and coalitions.

The result of all this is widening the circles of these coalitions, increasing the role of the Islamist element, while facilitating its fundraising and administrative abilities around the world, alongside the growing involvement of Fatah and Palestinian officials in the same causes. A forthcoming Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs research paper reveals the growing adoption of the BDS movement by European Muslim Brotherhood affiliates, as well as by Fatah and senior PA officials. Both groups started to expend more effort on

the political/civilian sides of the struggle immediately following Israel's Gaza Operation in 2008-2009.

A Focus on Jerusalem

Over the past few years there has been a Palestinian campaign which focuses on the so-called "Judaization" of Jerusalem. A number of related topics have been raised recently in what appears to be an orchestrated campaign initiated by leading figures in the PA, Hamas, and Muslim Brotherhood.

On February 24, 2012, Gaza Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh delivered a sermon in Cairo at the prominent Al-Azhar Mosque, in which he reportedly stated: "We paid a lot in blood in order to keep Jerusalem an Arabic and Islamic city. The Arab Spring brought the Islamic nation to the threshold of the city of Jerusalem."³

On the same weekend, a large conference on the defense of Jerusalem was held in Qatar under the patronage of the Arab League⁴ featuring what has been called "an unprecedented coalition against Israel."⁵ This is the second Arab League conference on the topic; the first took place in Sirte, Libya, in March 2010, hosted by the country's late president Gaddafi.⁶ The current conference reportedly⁷ featured the Qatari emir, politicians, and diplomats from other Middle East countries, secretaries-general of both the Arab League and Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), Sheikh Qaradawi and various other figures from the Middle East, Europe, and the U.S. affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood,⁸ Arab-Israeli MKs, senior Fatah and PA figures including President Abbas, and several rabbis from the anti-Zionist Neturei Karta group. In addition, eight UN officials from various departments attended, as well as Western politicians and academics, representatives of far-left political groups, and at least one Western individual, Prof. Hans Köchler, president of the Vienna-based International Progress Organization (IPO), tied to both the European far-right and far-left.⁹

Iran is also involved more than usual, through three delegates representing the Tehran-based Neda Institute for Scientific Political Research. Since at least 2001, Neda has served as the major point of contact bringing together Western Holocaust deniers with their Middle East counterparts. Known Neda activity has included the publication of journals and media articles, sponsorship of conferences, and probably the funding of Holocaust-denial activity in the West.¹⁰

Lately, the emir of Qatar has been enjoying the rise of Sunni Islamism across the region, and the growing acceptance of the Muslim Brotherhood by Western officials. The Qatar Foundation (known for its sponsorship of the Barcelona soccer team), chaired by the emir's second wife, Sheikha Mozah, also launched a second Islamist center in the Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies, headed by prominent Brotherhood figure Tariq Ramadan (the first center is headed by Sheikh Qaradawi). The launch ceremony of the new center was attended by representatives of U.S. universities as well as many Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated figures, including those close to circles of Union of Good (UoG), Hamas, and al-Qaeda funding.¹¹

Qatar, probably the most important country standing behind Sheikh Qaradawi and the global spread of the Muslim Brotherhood in the last few decades, also currently serves as president of the Arab League. Qatar has been acting as chief mediator between Fatah and Hamas, and it is not far-fetched to assume that it chose to reunite both sides on the basis of attacking Israel. This was hinted at in the first conference held in Libya, in which many Arab leaders were reported to have called to "set aside feuding and unite against Israel." During the Qatar conference, changes of approach between Fatah and the Islamists were demonstrated when Abbas called on Arabs and Muslims to come visit Jerusalem, while Hamas and Qaradawi stated that non-Palestinian Muslims are not allowed to visit Jerusalem while it remains under occupation. This already raised controversy between the two sides, and PA ministers are now asking Qaradawi to annul this *fatwa*.¹²

Parallel to the Qatar conference, a meeting took place in Jordan of the International Committees of the Global March to Jerusalem.¹³ This, and also the attendance of central British figures previously tied to land convoys to Gaza and flotillas in Qatar, strengthen the impression that the conference in Qatar was timely and had been scheduled to coincide with preparations for the march. It is also noteworthy that several British politicians, like Baroness Jenny Tonge (who quit her position as the Liberal-Democrat Party whip after refusing to apologize over her remarks about Israel),¹⁴ were listed as representatives of the Council for European-Palestinian Relations (CEPR), a Belgian-based political front established in 2010 by European Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated figures connected to the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE), including Dr. Arafat Shukri, head of the European Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza (ECESG) and director of the London-based Palestinian Return Centre (PRC), which Israel sees as affiliated with Hamas.¹⁵

The Global March to Jerusalem

In mid-January 2012, the European Preparatory Committee for the Global March to Jerusalem published an invitation for European participation and support, stating: "We say no to Zionism; and to an exclusive Jewish colonial state, which reacts to the legitimate struggle of the indigenous Palestinian people with the expansion of its Apartheid rule."¹⁶

The organizers of the march, which they describe as a "pluralistic initiative transcending cultural and religious borders on a simple political platform," and was also described elsewhere as a "groundbreaking nonviolent civil resistance initiative,"¹⁷ are aiming to hold marches to Jerusalem "or the nearest point to it" on March 30, to coincide with the annual Palestinian "Land Day." Originally, marches were planned in Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and the four neighboring countries: Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. From Europe they state: "We join this; carrying further ahead past initiatives. Our intention is to build a bridge for peace between the Arab region, Europe and other parts of the world."

Unsurprisingly, the European Preparatory Committee is comprised of members of UK Muslim Brotherhood circles and a member of the Free Gaza movement (FGM, founded by the International Solidarity Movement, ISM), this time joined by the anti-imperialist camp. The original idea is said to have come from participants in the December 2010

"Asia to Gaza Solidarity Caravan,"¹⁸ which included various anti-Israel, far-left, and Islamist activists from Asia, as well as the FGM's liaison in India.¹⁹

Later in January, the Central Committee for the march, comprised of 40-42 members, held a conference in Beirut. The committee is headed by anti-imperialist former Lebanese Prime Minister Salim el-Hoss, who also served as honorary president of the International Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza (ICESG).²⁰ The closing statement of the committee's first meeting highlighted the political and cultural importance of Jerusalem for the Palestinians and all humanity; called on all "free people of the world" to protect Jerusalem, its sanctuaries, and historical sites; stated that the attempt to change Jerusalem's Arab, historical, and cultural identity is a "crime against humanity"; condemned the "Judaization" of Jerusalem and "ethnic cleansing" performed by Israel in the city and the ongoing building of the "racist separation wall"; and restated the Palestinians' right of return and self-determination. Further, the declaration emphasized the "non-political" and "diverse" nature of the march's participants, and its commitment to non-violence.²¹

In the committee's second meeting, the Jordan-based Dr. Rebhi Halloum was elected to head the global march. Halloum is a former Fatah and PLO senior official, who left due to his rejection of the Madrid peace talks and the Oslo Accords.²² The committee's coordinator is Mohammed Sawalha, who previously filled such positions in the flotillas and was also connected to the land convoys as deputy head of the ICESG. The meeting was also attended by others who took part in organizing the land convoys and flotillas²³ including former UK MP George Galloway, Dr. Paul Larudee, one of the original founders of the ISM, and delegates from Europe, India, and the U.S. It was agreed to change the concept of the previous "mobilizations" in the Viva Palestina and Miles of Smiles land convoys and the flotillas from "breaking the siege on Gaza" to "breaking the occupation." Halloum asserted that masses of people coming from all sides will render the Israeli army unable to decide on a course of action. He also stressed that peaceful mobilization is not a substitute for resistance [*muqawama*].²⁴

Another important figure who attended is Dr. Mustafa Barghouti, a PA oppositionist who heads the Palestinian National Initiative. Barghouti is deeply involved in promoting the BDS movement and has had ties with European Muslim Brotherhood circles for many years. Barghouti was quoted by *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* in April 2008 sending his blessings to the residents of the West Bank village of Bilin and the foreign activists who take part in demonstrations against Israel's security fence, stating that the struggle has to continue until the entire "separation wall" is taken down. In the same article, published at the peak of peace talks between PA President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, the intentions of PA figures and NGOs to open a third "peaceful intifada" in case the talks fail - "under the patronage" of Israeli and international peace activists - were presented. Those behind the initiative were said to have taken an example from Bilin, whose struggle led to changing the route of the fence next to the village, unlike the armed intifada that led to no achievements.²⁵

In February 2012, various national committees began their preparations for the march, whether in Jordan, where the Syndicates (professional associations that are Muslim Brotherhood strongholds) seem to be taking the lead again;²⁶ in Turkey, as reported by a Union of Good website, where a two-day conference on the "Arab-Turkish Spring" also "explored avenues and mechanisms to support Al-Quds [Jerusalem] and its people and

to break the blockade on Gaza people";²⁷ Pakistan, in which the Mawdudist Jamaat-e-Islami held a conference on the subject;²⁸ or Lebanon, in which more meetings were held with representatives of far-left elements in the country like the Nasserist militia Al-Murabitun.²⁹ At least some of these meetings were held in local Fatah headquarters, also featuring representatives from the PLO, *jihadi* movements like Ansar Allah, and more.³⁰ An advisory board for the march was also formed in Iran.³¹ Interestingly, the march's official web domain also connected with the UK-based Shiite missionary organization AhlulBayt Islamic Mission,³² part of the UK "red-green alliance." Among more than twenty Palestinian organizations endorsing the march³³ are the "popular resistance committees" that come under the umbrella of the Ramallah-based Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign.³⁴ The committees stand behind the demonstrations and clashes with the IDF in various Palestinian villages, with the participation of Israeli anarchists, movements such as Taayush, and others. Jamal Jum'a, head of that campaign, is also the registrant of the domain of the BDS National Committee, BNC.³⁵ Other groups include the Palestinian ISM branch, the Badil Resource Center, involved in organizing Israel Apartheid Week in Europe, and the Israeli Alternative Information Center (AIC).

The Global March now has a twelve-member International Executive Committee (IEC), featuring Halloum, Sawalha, and others connected to Islamist and Muslim Brotherhood Middle Eastern, European, Asian, and South African circles, as well as leading far-left Western figures connected to the "red-green alliance" like Sarah Colborne, director of the UK Palestine Solidarity Campaign, and Paul Larudee, a founder of the ISM.³⁶ Above it stands an International Central Committee (ICC) consisting of 35 members, including the IEC members "representing the five continents."³⁷

It is hard to predict the results of the preparations for the march. A few points, however, are noticeable, reflecting the structure of the international campaign to delegitimize Israel:

1. For most participants in the campaign, the gradually adopted idea of "non-violence" does not replace its violent nature, rather it is in addition to it.
2. The participation of Sunni-Islamist circles, bringing in their resources, is increasing, encouraged by their rise due to the Arab Spring. On the other hand, Fatah, the PLO, and the PA are also becoming more involved in the campaign, both officially and unofficially, as part of their encouragement of any civilian, non-violent efforts.
3. The circles of those taking part in the campaign are widening to include more Islamist *jihadi* forces, more far-right European elements than before, and new participants from more countries.
4. These tendencies and the coalition-structured nature of the campaign are also bringing about growing disputes between various elements.

Lara Friedman of Americans for Peace Now, who attended the aforementioned conference in Qatar, said after its first day that she came to the conference thinking that the Arab League wanted to look into the full complexity of the issue, and include "openly pro-Israel, pro-peace voices." "However, it seems that virtually every conversation I am

having here involves me, to a greater or lesser degree, having to defend the two-state solution and having to assert and defend the Jewish stake in Jerusalem."³⁸

Furthermore, Norman Finkelstein, one of the most vocal critics of Israel, recently stated that the BDS movement was a "cult" and that those who run it are dishonest. He concluded by saying: "At least be honest what you want - 'we want to abolish Israel and this is our strategy for doing it.'"

The inconvenient truth about refugees

Richard Chesnoff, New York Daily News, 14 March 2012

http://articles.nydailynews.com/2012-03-14/news/31183347_1_refugee-camps-palestinian-refugees-arab-world

New York's Sephardic Jewish Film Festival — which opens on Thursday at the Center for Jewish History on E. 16th St. — provides more than just a delicious array of cinematic creations.

Yes, it tells tales of the exotic life and rich history of those hundreds of thousand of Jews who fled the Inquisitions of Iberia for forced exile in the Americas, North Africa and the Arab world — and even China and the Philippines — with many eventually reaching Israel.

But the festival also teaches us valuable lessons about radically different ways to either solve — or dangerously prolong — one of the most threatening problems haunting the Middle East: refugees.

Some 700,000 Palestinian Arabs fled their homes during the war that Arab armies launched to prevent Israel's birth in 1947-48. Some were forced from their homes and villages by Israel's young army. Many more simply fled in fear of war or because they had been convinced it would soon end with total Arab victory.

It never worked out that way. More than 60 years and several generations later, Palestinian refugees now number close to 4 million.

And throughout the Arab world, because nations have systematically ignored their plight, they remain refugees.

With the limited exception of Jordan, no single Arab state has ever granted citizenship, or even normal residence and job rights, to Palestinian refugees. As a result, the vast majority of these Palestinian Arabs remain in refugee camps (not literal "camps" anymore), living on the international dole. Even on the West Bank and in Gaza, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are still caged in restricted areas.

Compare that with the fate of the 800,000 Sephardic Jews who in the years that followed 1948 were either deported or forced by anti-Jewish law and pogroms to flee the Arab world. They and their millions of descendants were not indefinitely kept in refugee camps as political pawns.

Rather, with Jewish communal helping hands, most Sephardic Jewish refugees soon managed to build full new lives in Israel, the U.S., Canada, South America and Europe.

Not that their new lives were problem-free. Many of the films in this, the 16th annual Sephardic Jewish Film Festival, tell just that type of tale. One of the finest is “Mabul” (“Flood”), which stars one of Israeli and French cinemas’ most popular femme fatales, Ronit Elkabetz — herself the daughter of Moroccan Jewish immigrants to Israel’s Negev city of Beersheba.

Elkabetz plays the wife of an Israeli airline engineer. The two struggle with a deeply troubled marriage amid plans for their youngest son’s bar mitzvah. The sudden return home of an elder, severely autistic son merely adds to the approaching deluge.

“Tinghir” retraces the Judeo-Berber cultural ties between Jews and Muslims who once lived together in the Moroccan mountains and have begun to rediscover each other.

“The Last Jews of Libya” is a striking documentary by New York filmmaker Vivienne Roumani-Denn, whose own family was among the final 36,000 Jews forced to leave Libya after 2,300 years of Libyan Jewish life.

Palestinian leaders who complain constantly about Israel and demand the “right to return” to parts of Palestine that are not theirs to return to might learn a few things from New York’s Sephardic Jewish Film Festival.

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This is just in: Our enemies hate us

David Suissa, JewishJournal.com. 14 March 2012

http://www.jewishjournal.com/david_suissa/article/this_just_in_our_enemies_hate_us_20120314

I never thought I’d ever be texting with one of my kids about bombs and bomb shelters. But there I was last week, texting back and forth with my daughter, Shanni — who is studying at the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) in Herzliya and was driving with friends to a Purim event in the south when Palestinian bombs started falling. I was pleading with her to be careful and only go where there was a bomb shelter.

For years I’d tried to imagine what my friends in Israel go through when their children are fighting in wars or are exposed to terror. Now I was experiencing, on a much smaller scale, my own little “Israeli moment.” It had a clarifying effect.

Here’s what it clarified: Fear for my daughter’s safety makes me long for a war that would eliminate the threat once and for all, but also for a peace that would do the same.

In other words, I long for anything — war or peace — that will keep my daughter safe.

But there's a difference between the two sentiments: When I long for war, I am saddened, even slightly depressed, that it might come to that. Still, I feel like a grown-up facing up to a very painful reality.

When I long for peace, I feel elevated to the highest ideals of my tradition, like a poet dreaming great dreams, or a preacher appealing to the divine in all of us.

But I also feel like an idiot, like a spoiled kid banging on the table and screaming: "Why won't our enemies make peace with us?"

Well, kid, maybe because they really, really hate us.

There was plenty of Jew hatred on display last month when Lara Friedman, one of the leaders of Americans for Peace Now, attended the Arab League's conference on Jerusalem in Doha. I wonder if Friedman felt like that frustrated kid as she walked around the conference and asked herself: "Why do they hate us so much?"

As she wrote in *The Forward* about her experience: "All throughout the day, it was unfortunately the same story. Participants talked about Jerusalem as if Jewish history did not exist or was a fraud — as if all Jewish claims in the city were just a tactic to dispossess Palestinians."

She seemed especially disappointed that the Israel hate fest included the "moderate" Mahmoud Abbas: "If President Abbas cannot acknowledge Jewish claims in Jerusalem, even as he asserts Palestinian claims (a problem Yasser Arafat suffered from), he should not be surprised if it is more difficult for Israelis and Jews, wherever they are, to believe that he can be trusted in a peace agreement that leaves Jerusalem sites precious to Jews under Palestinian control."

Jonathan Tobin, in the *Commentary* blog, gave Friedman credit for "having the wit to notice that just about everybody else there was focused on delegitimizing Israel, denouncing its existence within any borders and denying thousands of years of Jewish history." But then he asks: "What will it take to convince supporters of Peace Now the imperative of their organization's name depends on the Arabs rather than the Jews?"

Tobin adds: "She [Friedman] and her group had so convinced themselves all it will take to create peace 'now' was for Israelis to support a two-state solution and negotiate, it appears they never took the time or effort to realize the other side has little interest in peace, now or at any other time."

I also wonder what went through the mind of professor Norman Finkelstein, one of Israel's harshest critics and a passionate advocate for the Palestinian cause, when he lashed out last month at a Palestinian activist who was interviewing him about the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement.

In the video, Finkelstein has a "dayenu" moment when he challenges the goal of the BDS movement: "They're not really talking about rights. They are talking about destroying Israel. In fact, I think the Israelis are right. That's true. I'm not going to lie."

For anyone who has cringed over the years at the nastiness of Finkelstein's verbal assaults on Israel, the video is a remarkable portrayal of what happens when an ugly truth simply can no longer be ignored. Finkelstein, despite his support for the BDS movement, is forced to admit this painful reality: "We have to be honest, and I loathe the disingenuousness. They don't want Israel."

That's right, they don't want Israel, just like Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad doesn't want Israel, and just like Mahmoud Abbas rejects any Jewish connection to Jerusalem.

But what should we do with such inconvenient truths?

For starters, we should call them what they are: truths. The deep-seated Arab animosity toward the Jewish state is a painful truth that predates the settlements by decades. Let's hope it is not a permanent truth, but for now it is profoundly relevant and must be integral to Israel's strategic thinking.

Also, we must recognize that desire and hope are not truths — they're feelings.

Yes, I fervently desire and hope that Palestinian terrorists stop dropping bombs where my daughter travels in Israel, and that Ahmadinejad stops his nuclear program and that Israel's enemies stop hating Israel and start respecting the 3,000-year Jewish connection to the Holy Land.

But while the child in me longs for this new reality, the father in me knows better.

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

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