

OPINION and ANALYSIS

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

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

1. Simon Deng Israel, Sudan and Me

Simon Deng, a former South Sudanese slave taken by a neighbor as a young boy to Islamist Northern Sudan, gave this impassioned speech at the Durban Watch Conference in New York, Sept 22, 2011.

2. Steven M. Cohen Liberal, but still pro-Israel

The policy view of the rabbis and students tends to resemble those of Israel's Zionist opposition parties. Almost two-thirds of them favour a settlement freeze.

3. Leon Hadar Overhauling U.S. Policy in the Middle East

The changes emerging from the so-called Arab Spring go beyond a clash between pro-Western movements and Islamist groups. The shifting balance of power in the Middle East - triggered in part by eroding USA influence in the region - is bringing to the fore realpolitik concerns that likely will overcome ideological considerations in the new Middle East.

Israel, Sudan and Me

Simon Deng; Durban Watch Conference; 21 September 2011

http://www.aish.com/jw/me/Israel_Sudan_and_Me.html

"I want to thank the organizers of this conference, The Perils of Global Intolerance. It is a great honor for me and it is a privilege really to be among today's distinguished speakers.

I came here as a friend of the State of Israel and the Jewish people. I came to protest this Durban conference which is based on a set of lies. It is organized by nations who are themselves guilty of the worst kinds of oppression.

It will not help the victims of racism. It will only isolate and target the Jewish state. It is a tool of the enemies of Israel. The UN has itself become a tool against Israel. For over 50 years, 82 percent of the UN General Assembly emergency meetings have been about condemning one state - Israel. Hitler couldn't have been made happier.

The Durban Conference is an outrage. All decent people will know that.

But friends, I come here today with a radical idea. I come to tell you that there are people who suffer from the UN's anti-Israelism even more than the Israelis. I belong to one of those people.

Please hear me out.

By exaggerating Palestinian suffering, and by blaming the Jews for it, the UN has muffled the cries of those who suffer on a far larger scale.

For over fifty years the indigenous black population of Sudan -- Christians and Muslims alike --- has been the victim of the brutal, racist Arab Muslim regimes in Khartoum.

In South Sudan, my homeland, about 4 million innocent men, women and children were slaughtered from 1955 to 2005. Seven million were ethnically cleansed and they became the largest refugee group since World War II.

The UN is concerned about the so-called Palestinian refugees. They dedicated a separate agency for them. and they are treated with a special privilege.

Meanwhile, my people, ethnically cleansed, murdered and enslaved, are relatively ignored. The UN refuses to tell the world the truth about the real causes of Sudan's conflicts. Who knows really what is happening in Darfur? It is not a "tribal conflict." It is a conflict rooted in Arab colonialism well known in north Africa. In Darfur, a region in the Western Sudan, everybody is Muslim. Everybody is Muslim because the Arabs invaded the North of Africa and converted the indigenous people to Islam. In the eyes of the Islamists in Khartoum, the Darfuris are not Muslim enough. And the Darfuris do not want to be Arabized. They love their own African languages and dress and customs. The Arab response is genocide! But nobody at the UN tells the truth about Darfur.

In the Nub Mountains, another region of Sudan, genocide is taking place as I speak. The Islamist regime in Khartoum is targeting the black Africans - Muslims and Christians. Nobody at the UN has told the truth about the Nuba Mountains.

Do you hear the UN condemn Arab racism against blacks?

What you find on the pages of the New York Times, or in the record of the UN condemnations is "Israeli crimes" and Palestinian suffering. My people have been driven off the front pages because of the exaggerations about Palestinian suffering. What Israel does is portrayed as a Western sin. But the truth is that the real sin happens when the West abandons us: the victims of Arab/Islamic apartheid.

Chattel slavery was practiced for centuries in Sudan. It was revived as a tool of war in the early 90s. Khartoum declared jihad against my people and this legitimized taking slaves as war booty. Arab militias were sent to destroy Southern villages and were encouraged to take African women and children as slaves. We believe that up to 200,000 were kidnapped, brought to the North and sold into slavery.

I am a living proof of this crime against humanity.

I don't like talking about my experience as a slave, but I do it because it is important for the world to know that slavery exists even today.

I was only nine years old when an Arab neighbor named Abdullahi tricked me into following him to a boat. The boat wound up in Northern Sudan where he gave me as a gift to his family. For three and a half years I was their slave going through something that no child should ever go through: brutal beatings and humiliations; working around the clock; sleeping on the ground with animals; eating the family's left-overs. During those three years I was unable to say the word "no." All I could say was "yes," "yes," "yes."

The United Nations knew about the enslavement of South Sudanese by the Arabs. Their own staff reported it. It took UNICEF – under pressure from the Jewish-led American Anti-Slavery Group -- sixteen years to acknowledge what was happening. I want to publicly thank my friend Dr. Charles Jacobs for leading the anti-slavery fight.

But the Sudanese government and the Arab League pressured UNICEF, and UNICEF backtracked, and started to criticize those who worked to liberate Sudanese slaves. In 1998, Dr. Gaspar Biro, the courageous UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Sudan who reported on slavery, resigned in protest of the UN's actions.

My friends, today, tens of thousands of black South Sudanese still serve their masters in the North and the UN is silent about that. It would offend the OIC and the Arab League.

As a former slave and a victim of the worst sort of racism, allow me to explain why I think calling Israel a racist state is absolutely absurd and immoral.

I have been to Israel five times visiting the Sudanese refugees. Let me tell you how they ended up there. These are Sudanese who fled Arab racism, hoping to find shelter in Egypt. They were wrong. When Egyptian security forces slaughtered twenty six black refugees in Cairo who were protesting Egyptian racism, the Sudanese realized that the Arab racism is the same in Khartoum or Cairo. They needed shelter and they found it in Israel. Dodging the bullets of the Egyptian border patrols and walking for very long distances, the refugees' only hope was to reach Israel's side of the fence, where they knew they would be safe.

Black Muslims from Darfur chose Israel above all the other Arab-Muslim states of the area. Do you know what this means!!!!?? And the Arabs say Israel is racist!!!!?

In Israel, black Sudanese, Christian and Muslim were welcomed and treated like human beings. Just go and ask them, like I have done. They told me that compared to the situation in Egypt, Israel is "heaven."

Is Israel a racist state? To my people, the people who know racism – the answer is absolutely not. Israel is a state of people who are the colors of the rainbow. Jews themselves come in all colors, even black. I met with Ethiopian Jews in Israel. Beautiful black Jews.

So, yes ... I came here today to tell you that the people who suffer most from the UN anti-Israel policy are not the Israelis but all those people who the UN ignores in order to tell its big lie against Israel: we, the victims of Arab/Muslim abuse: women, ethnic minorities, religious minorities, homosexuals, in the Arab/Muslim world. These are the biggest victims of UN Israel hatred.

Look at the situation of the Copts in Egypt, the Christians in Iraq, and Nigeria, and Iran, the Hindus and Bahais who suffer from Islamic oppression. The Sikhs. We – a rainbow coalition of victims and targets of Jihadis -- all suffer. We are ignored, we are abandoned. So that the big lie against the Jews can go forward.

In 2005, I visited one of the refugee camps in South Sudan. I met a twelve year old girl who told me about her dream. In a dream she wanted to go to school to become a doctor. And then, she wanted to visit Israel. I was shocked. How could this refugee girl who spent most of her life in the North know about Israel? When I asked why she wanted to visit Israel, she said: "This is our people." I was never able to find an answer to my question.

On January 9 of 2011 South Sudan became an independent state. For South Sudanese, that means continuation of oppression, brutalization, demonization, Islamization, Arabization and enslavement.

In a similar manner, the Arabs continue denying Jews their right for sovereignty in their homeland and the Durban III conference continues denying Israel's legitimacy.

As a friend of Israel, I bring you the news that my President, the President of the Republic of South Sudan, Salva Kiir -- publicly stated that the South Sudan embassy in Israel will be built--- not in Tel Aviv, but in Jerusalem, the eternal capital of the Jewish people.

I also want to assure you that my own new nation, and all of its peoples, will oppose racist forums like the Durban III. We will oppose it by simply telling the truth. Our truth.

My Jewish friends taught me something I now want to say with you.

AM YISROEL CHAI!

The people of Israel live!

Liberal, but still pro-Israel

Steven M. Cohen ; Haaretz; 4 November 2011

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/liberal-but-still-pro-israel-1.393615>

Ask yourself the following:

- 1) What group of American Jews lobbied for a UN resolution calling for a Palestinian state?
- 2) Shortly after the Six-Day War, which Israeli leader advised his country to relinquish control of the territories?
- 3) Which American president called for establishing a Palestinian state on the basis of the 1967 boundaries?

The answers: 1) U.S. Zionist leadership in 1947; 2) David Ben-Gurion; 3) every president since Lyndon Johnson.

Support for partitioning Eretz Israel has a long pro-Israel pedigree. But not according to some critics of a study I conducted this past summer among the students and alumni of the rabbinical school of the Jewish Theological Seminary, the flagship institution of higher education for Conservative leaders.

Unhappy with the rabbis' views, the critics apparently believe that vigorous support for a two-state solution is incompatible with being truly pro-Israel, let alone a Zionist. In their view, some claims

of support for Israel do not deserve to be taken at face value, and Jews who veer from the current government's policies are charged with being insufficiently attached to Israel and Jewish peoplehood. More than one commentator blames the rabbis for an excess of "universal" values and liberal political views, arguing outright that liberal universalism is inherently incompatible with passionate attachment to Israel.

The actual data from the study tell quite a different story. We learn that the vast number of current and former JTS rabbinical students see themselves as very attached to Israel, as Zionists, as Israel-engaged and, yes, as pro-Israel. Of the current crop of rabbinical students, 92 percent agree that, "Caring about Israel is a very important part of my being a Jew." For those ordained since 1995, the figure reaches 94 percent; for those ordained earlier, it's nearly universal (99 percent). One-hundred percent of the 317 rabbis and students surveyed claim to "have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish People," and 98 percent feel they "have a responsibility to take care of Jews in need around the world." Fully 89 percent believe that "Israel's very existence has significantly contributed to the vitality of American Jewry," with only 4 percent disagreeing.

As we learn from earlier studies, these figures vary sharply from much lower levels of pro-Israel sentiment among American Jews in general. And they hold these strongly pro-Israel views notwithstanding their liberal political identities, as self-described liberals heavily outnumber conservatives, 58 percent to 8 percent.

The rabbis and students exhibit high levels of pro-Israel sentiments partially as a result of their considerably widespread experience living and studying in Israel. Almost all (91 percent) have conducted some of their rabbinical training in Israel, and most (63 percent) have attended an Israeli university. Around two-thirds have given serious thought to making aliyah, or already have done so.

With so many of the respondents having lived and studied in Israel, it's no surprise that their attitudes cover the full spectrum of views within the country, largely resembling those held by Israel's highly educated, non-Orthodox Zionist public. On whether "the current Israeli government truly wants peace," 36 percent agree, with 34 percent not sure and 30 percent disagreeing. They are divided as well (37 percent / 35 percent / 28 percent) over whether Israel's government "really wants to prevent the emergence of a Palestinian state."

The policy view of the rabbis and students tends to resemble those of Israel's Zionist opposition parties: Almost two-thirds of them favor a settlement freeze, and 71 percent favor "Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on the basis of the 1967 borders with land swaps." Now, among Israelis, such a broad range of contesting views is not at all exceptional. Nor are they widely branded as "anti-Israel."

But things are a bit different among American Jewish leaders, many of whom will be attending the 2011 General Assembly of the Jewish Federations of North America beginning on Sunday. Even if they agree in principle with the positions of the more "dovish" JTS rabbis and students (and many leaders do), many feel they lack the moral standing to voice them. Nor are they comfortable with others expressing dismay with the Israeli government, even when that dismay echoes that expressed by Israel's highest security officials, opposition parties, leading writers - and, in truth, their own private views. Apparently, the legitimacy of criticizing Israel's government extends to the Israeli public, but is a matter of contention and contestation in the American Jewish public.

In the last few years, some of Israel's most ardent supporters have been working to narrow the definition of "pro-Israel," calling into question the loyalty of those holding pro-conciliation and anti-settlement positions. Some hope to conflate "pro-Israel-government" with "pro-Israel," posing a false and dangerous dichotomy between a commitment to universal values and loving Israel.

Insofar as such ideas take root, they will only serve to silence and drive away many of Israel's most passionate and well-informed supporters - including not only many Jewish young people, but, it seems, a good portion of their own spiritual leaders as well.

Overhauling U.S. Policy in the Middle East

Leon Hadar, The National Interest, 2 November 2011

<http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/overhauling-us-policy-the-middle-east-6087>

The prevailing American narrative about the political upheaval in the Middle East maintains that the collapse of authoritarian regimes in the region would lead to a collision between democratic forces and Islamist movements and that the United States and its allies—including Israel—have an interest in ensuring that the former gain the upper hand in this power struggle.

But the changes emerging from the so-called Arab Spring go beyond a clash between pro-Western movements and Islamist groups. The shifting balance of power in the Middle East—triggered in part by eroding American influence in the region—is bringing to the fore realpolitik concerns that likely will overcome ideological considerations in the new Middle East. The Israel-Hamas prisoner exchange, the U.S. role in Libya's civil war and the end of the U.S. military presence in Iraq all point in that direction.

Let's begin with the prisoner exchange. The interesting thing about the exchange of one Israeli soldier for more than 1,000 jailed Palestinians was not that it happened, but that it happened now, when Islamist influence seems to be on the rise in Egypt.

Israeli leaders, with the support of most of the public and the elites, have been negotiating a deal along these lines for the last five years with Egyptian security officials playing the main role as mediator.

But following the fall of Hosni Mubarak's pro-American in Egypt, the conventional wisdom in Cairo and Jerusalem was that the Israeli-Hamas negotiations would collapse. Pundits were predicting that the fall of a pro-American leader committed to the peace accords between Israel and Egypt would make it difficult for any new government to embrace policies perceived as beneficial to Israel.

In fact, anti-Israel rhetoric and demonstrations emanating from Tahrir Square and elsewhere—coupled with the growing diplomatic strains between the ruling Israeli Likud government and Islamist Turkish leaders and the continuing military tensions between the Jewish state and the Ayatollahs in Tehran—seemed to play directly into Israeli fears of being surrounded by a hostile Muslim entity.

Yet this nightmare scenario assumed that the Muslims in the Middle East—Egyptians, Turks, Iranians and Saudis as well as multiple tribes, sects and ethnic groups—were going to form a unified political and military front to confront Israel. This scenario is based in part on real fears about the policies of Iran and Turkey and the rhetoric emanating from the Arab Street. But such fears have been amplified by Israeli ultra-nationalists and American neoconservatives with an agenda: They want to resist any serious challenge to the Israeli-Palestinian status quo and mobilize Israelis and their Washington supporters into new confrontations in the Middle East.

That the current Egyptian military leaders have decided to help the Israelis gain the release of Sergeant Gilad Shalit was clearly not a reflection of dormant pro-Israeli inclinations in Cairo. Neither was the freedom of the Palestinian prisoners a reflection of any support for the Palestinian cause. Like Anwar Sadat and Mubarak, these leaders operate based on what they

consider Egyptian national interests. And those interests include preserving the peace agreement with Israel and avoiding a military conflict with that country for the foreseeable future.

Indeed, contrary to what some Americans seem to believe, it is not the Egyptian-Israeli treaty agreement of 1979 or the billions of dollars in U.S. economic and military assistance to Egypt that have induced the Egyptians to refrain from going to war with Israel. The 1979 accord reflected the reality that the evolving power balance led both Israel and Egypt to conclude that a war between them would be too costly and detrimental to their interests.

The global and regional developments since 1979 have strengthened the determination of both sides to maintain peace. Egypt, economically bankrupt and unable to feed and educate its own people, is certainly not positioned to pursue military confrontation with Israel.

Moreover, the rise in power and influence of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood makes it more likely that future governments in Cairo will have an interest in co-opting Gaza Strip Hamas leaders, whose movement is a political offshoot of the Islamist party founded in Egypt in 1928.

In a way, Hamas may be evolving into a client (mini)state of a more Islamist-oriented Egypt. In that context, Egypt's interest would be in providing Hamas with enough support to prevent it from coming under the influence of the more radical players in the region, such as Iran. At the same time, driven by the kind of calculus that affects any relationship between leading powers and client states, Cairo would need to ensure that Hamas's policies would not draw Egypt into a military conflict with Israel. Helping negotiate the Hamas-Israel deal fits nicely into such a strategy. It encourages Hamas to start reorienting its foreign policy from Syria, and by extension Iran, and more towards Egypt. That could create conditions for more pragmatic deals between Israel and Hamas, negotiated with Egyptian assistance. These wouldn't likely bring about a peace accord between the two sides but might allow the ministate in the Gaza Strip to become an Egyptian protectorate of sorts that could coexist with Israel for some time to come.

That Turkey has also played an active role in negotiating the Israel-Hamas prisoner exchange is also an encouraging sign, notwithstanding the stresses in the relationship between Ankara and Jerusalem. The Turks have no interest in exacerbating tensions between Israel and its Arab neighbors because that could destabilize the Middle East, Turkey's new diplomatic and economic frontier.

It's probably not realistic to expect the emergence of a diplomatic and military axis between Egypt and Turkey that would join with Saudi Arabia and the other Persian Gulf oil sheikdoms to counter the influence of Iran and its satellites in Iraq and Lebanon and to manage the power transition in Syria. Turkey and Iran, after all, share common interests in curbing Kurdish irredentism inside their borders. Unlike the Saudis and the Israelis, Turkey wants to avoid a military confrontation between the United States and Iran.

But the reemergence of new cooperative and competing centers of power in the Middle East—Egypt, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia—provide the United States, the European Union (EU) and Israel with new strategic opportunities. Instead of wasting time and resources on fantastical freedom agendas and countering the imaginary or real influence of political Islam, a more effective policy would be to hedge one's strategic bets by forming ad hoc partnerships with these players to advance concrete interests.

Hence, in the aftermath of the agreement with Hamas, Israel could improve its relationship with Cairo and Ankara and perhaps even create the conditions for some sort of coexistence with Hamas-ruled Gaza. This could, not coincidentally, put more diplomatic pressure on the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

Indeed, the Israeli-Egyptian-Turkish collaboration that led to the prisoner exchange is one example of such a creative strategic approach that seeks new opportunities rather than fixating on old threats.

What this suggests for the United States is that there may be cost-effective ways of securing American interests in the Middle East at a time of political change there and of diminishing American military and economic resources. Libya offers a better approach than Iraq. Rather than pursuing hegemonic and ideologically driven policies, the United States could provide incentives for other players to handle some of the heavy lifting.

Indeed, the Iraq War could provide a case study of how *not* to pursue U.S. interest in the Middle East. President George W. Bush and his neoconservative advisers disregarded the ethnic and sectarian realities in Iraq and the balance of power in the Persian Gulf. Thus they helped shift power in Iraq from the Arab-Sunnis to the Arab-Shiites, all the while strengthening Iran.

That policy only harmed U.S. interests while failing to advance democratic values in Iraq, and it antagonized regional partners (Saudi Arabia; Turkey) as well as global players with interests to protect. The EU, for example, might have provided military and financial support to a more modest project aimed at containing Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

In Libya, on the other hand, it was the European powers that took the military lead in bringing about regime change. America encouraged Britain and France to do so while it accepted a supporting military role.

The Obama administration's policy in Libya, coupled with the announcement on withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq by year's end, may not signal that Washington is about to embrace a grand new strategy for the Middle East. But it does suggest it is beginning to adapt its policies to the changing balance of power in the region.

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

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