

NEWS & POLITICS

Why Israel Is Target #1 of the Global Left

The attack on Israel's legitimacy is part of a larger assault by the global left and global capital on the democratic nation-state

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Antisemitism has evolved through a breathtaking dialectical leap: It is now conveyed through the lingo of human rights. This is how a host of liberals and progressives—many of them Jews—have been seduced into supporting NGOs that claim to promote human rights, but are in fact promoting a racist view of the Jewish people. They do so by singling out the Jews as the one people not partaking in the universal right to self-determination, and Israel alone among the nations as

the one state which has no right to exist. Singling out the Jews for special hostile treatment is, of course, the very definition of antisemitism.

How has this old-new antisemitism become a legitimate, even respectable position once again? And how did the idea of human rights, which purports to serve as a universal standard, get distorted so badly as to yield an argument for the targeting and exclusion of Jews?

One part of the answer is that academia and the media have created an *Industry*

of Lies, as the title of Israeli leftist journalist Ben-Dror Yemini's book accurately called it. By using gross double standards, this industry portrays Israel as a uniquely monstrous violator of human rights. The world's actual egregious violators of human rights—such as China, North Korea, Cuba, Iran, and most of Israel's neighbors—don't receive a fraction of the moralizing attention that Israel gets.

But that is not the whole story. Another part of the answer lies in the way the human rights agenda has been channeled globally into undermining

national democracies in general. This trend usually presents itself as a critique of nationalism, understood by the global left as proto-fascism permanently poised to break into actual fascism at any moment. The argument is admittedly catchy: If nationalism is particularistic and exclusive, then human rights, which are universal, are the answer. Catchy, that is, only if you conceive of nationalism as a “negation of others,” as opposed to the particular manifestation of a universal right to national self-determination.

What is more troubling is that behind the declared critique of nationalism lies the undeclared attack on democracy. Because to “transcend” nationalism is to “transcend” the nation-state. When those nation-states are democracies, that means “transcending” democracy too. It means undermining the one effective framework by which citizens exercise political control over their common fate. Imposing a universal regime of human rights from above, through international institutions, is therefore a direct attack on the right to elect the government under which one lives—a right which is the single most

effective check against tyranny, and therefore the linchpin of liberty and all other human and civil rights.

Both parts of the answer—the demonization of Israel and the attack on democracy—were clearly manifest in the Durban conference of 2001, beginning with its Orwellian title: World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. The conference turned into a festival of blood libels against the Jewish nation-state—in the name of tolerance, of course. But it also exhibited the rising trend of using the

idea of human rights to undermine democracy.

John Fonte was the first to point out, a year after the conference, that the new transnational globalist agenda was utilizing the United Nations and the conference to undermine the principle of government by the consent of the governed. Forty-seven American human rights activists, Fonte noted, sent a petition to the UN's high commissioner for human rights, under the title "A Call to Action to the United Nations." The petition demanded that the U.N. impose on the U.S. an agenda

that the U.S. government rejected. Fonte went on to write a landmark book, *Sovereignty or Submission: Will Americans Rule Themselves or Be Ruled by Others?*, detailing the many ways in which new globalist elites are bypassing democratic sovereignty in pursuit of policies that the citizens of democratic nation-states have not consented to.

The case of Israel is most instructive because the general trend of anti-democratic liberalism acquires special poignancy in the one instance where a nation-state's very right to exist is being questioned. The effort to

undermine the Jewish nation-state does not therefore need to camouflage itself. It can be explicit about both its aim and its means: the destruction of Israel in the name of human rights.

The argument against Israel's right to exist is multifaceted, but it does have a central theme. That theme is not the occupation, though confusing it with the occupation is convenient for the purpose of propaganda. It is also not the issue of church and state, since

despite some idiosyncrasies, Israel does not have an official religion or a state church such as the United Kingdom, for example. Israel is Jewish in the national sense but not the religious sense: It is Jewish like Italy is Italian, not like Italy is Catholic. And therefore, the question of nationalism is the heart of the argument against the existence of the Jewish state.

Israel cannot be fully democratic, the argument goes, so long as it remains a Jewish state, since by definition a Jewish state excludes its non-Jewish citizens. Since the problem is Israel's

national character, no provisions for religious freedom will solve the problem. Nor will a wall of separation between church and state alleviate it. At its extreme, this argument identifies nationalism with ethnicity, which adds a racial ring, and then—though the Jews of Israel are one of the most multiracial national groups on earth—the argument proceeds to assert that a Jewish state is necessarily a racist state. This is the infamous “Zionism is racism” trope. The solution, those critics of Israel suggest, is denationalizing Israel, making it a non-national “state of all its citizens.”

If, by these standards, Israel is “racist,” or even just not democratic, then most nation-states are racist and not democratic. Most of them have national minorities whom, by definition, by virtue of being *national* minorities, do not partake in the collective national identity of the state, even though, as individuals, they are citizens with the right to vote and enjoy all other basic rights under law, as Israel’s non-Jewish minorities do. Yet no one demands that Italy renounce its Italian national identity to accommodate the German-speaking minority among its citizens in the region of South Tyrol, nor does

anyone ask Romania to renounce its Romanian character on account of its Hungarian minority.

In fact, the Council of Europe explicitly recognizes the legitimacy of national states when their national character is based on the majority's identity, as the council made clear in its Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The convention does not demand renouncing the majority's right to self-determination in order to accommodate the minority, nor does it ask them to invent a more inclusive identity in order to fully

assimilate the minority. Rather it demands that such states furnish their national minorities with the means to protect their separate identities (such as schools in their native tongue, proportional share in cultural budgets, proportional access to any support the state may give to religious institutions, etc.).

This is more or less the approach Israel chose from its inception, long before the European Union existed. Israel's 1948 Declaration of Independence, besides proclaiming equal individual rights for all citizens, Arab and Jewish

alike, also asserts the legitimacy of collective minority rights by proclaiming the right to “religion, conscience, language, education and culture.” That Israel has not always fully lived up to this standard is lamentable, though not entirely surprising, given the bleeding national conflict with the very people to which much of Israel’s Arab minority purports to belong. Yet there are also ways in which Israel is more accommodating to its national minorities than most democracies are, and this too is not unconnected to the special circumstances of the conflict.

Israel allows, for example, Arab parties which explicitly seek the destruction of the Jewish state to sit in its parliament, despite the fact that formally, the law in Israel, like that of other democracies, forbids running on such platforms.

The only way to make Israel renounce its Jewish national character is to overthrow its democracy. Since as long as there is universal suffrage and a large Jewish majority that cherishes its Jewish culture, then Shabbat will be

Israel's day of rest, Jewish holidays will structure its calendar, Hebrew will be its first official language, and its public symbols will draw predominantly on the Jewish tradition. This makes clear why the post-national globalist Jewish elite (in Israel and no less importantly outside it) must work to undermine democracy if it seeks to make Israel a non-Jewish state. Nowhere is the connection between the critique of nationalism and the assault on democracy—through the use of human rights—as clear and explicit.

And it is not only clear in theory, it is also manifested institutionally.

Consider the rise of Israel's Supreme Court to the status of an uber-government. It usurped power by means of reinterpreting two of Israel's semiconstitutional Basic Laws, which sought to secure "human dignity and liberty" and "freedom of occupation." These laws, the court argued—without any explicit authorization in the language of the law—granted it the power of judicial review. It has since used these laws mostly to overrule the executive and the legislative, but when it comes to the rights of individuals, the

court is sensitive to the rights of suspects almost only when they belong to minorities and the issue has a political aspect (illegal immigrants, Arab citizens, terrorists native or foreign). In ordinary criminal cases, where citizens are most vulnerable to the abuse of power by the state, the court is almost entirely indifferent to their rights and mostly serves as a rubber stamp for the prosecution.

The usurpation of power took some decades to mature, but it has finally reached a state in which there is no formal limit to the court's power, no

area of politics over which it does not assert jurisdiction, and no checks or balances able to counter it. Of course, it also helps that the decidedly progressive court has veto power over the nomination of its own judges. It is thus able to impose a progressive agenda, subverting the democratic mechanism of decision-making.

Though the case of Israel is extreme, in this too it is not unique. Courts, as John Fonte noted, are the common portals through which the globalist agenda is imposed on democratic nation-states, often against the will of the majority of

their citizens, via the endorsement of “international law” and international agreements. The original petition submitted by American human rights activists to the U.N.’s high commissioner for human rights with which Fonte opens his book, demanded that the U.S. “remove its restrictions” from full adoption of the “UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).” Chief among these restrictions is the caveat that says the implementation of any international covenant is limited by the U.S. Constitution.

Yet increasingly, Fonte shows, U.S. courts have eroded this principle and begun considering cases in light of foreign norms. This has brought about a subtle but important shift in American jurisprudence, where the authority of human rights, formerly derived from their endorsement by the American people, now resides above the people, in “international norms” poised to subdue the will of the people in case of a conflict between them.

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Israel has gone even further down that road, as demonstrated most clearly by the court's repeated interception of any attempt by the state to curtail illegal immigration. Immigration laws are of course central to a society's ability to preserve its national identity. In Israel this is perhaps even more pronounced because of its Law of Return, which grants automatic citizenship to any Jew immigrating to Israel. The law is, of

course, central to the Zionist enterprise. Its logic is what originally animated the Balfour Declaration of 1917, as well as the Partition Plan adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in 1947. The U.N. Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) understood that Jewish immigration was the heart of the controversy, since Arabs feared they would become a minority in the land of Israel. Partition was designed to allow the Jews, a stateless people, more or less unlimited immigration to a Jewish state, to be created on part of the disputed territory, leaving the other part with a secure Arab majority. It can

be said, then, that the Law of Return was the original intention of the U.N. Assembly's Partition Resolution.

Though the court has never dared to strike down the Law of Return, it repeatedly extrapolated from the idea of universal human rights a general idea of equal rights, which frowns upon attempts to insist on the difference between the rights of citizens and the rights of illegal immigrants. Social benefits are generously extended to people who broke the law entering the country, the definition of refugee protection is stretched, and even mild

measures encouraging illegals to leave —such as a small deposit by both employer and employee, to be collected upon leaving the country—are off-handedly struck down. In all this the court is prodded on and cheered by NGOs, a good number of which deal specifically with illegal immigrants, offering them legal assistance, contributing expert opinions in the press, and taking part in agitation in the name of human rights.

A vast number of other NGOs—which include “human rights” in their mission statements—operate freely inside

Israel, with the aim of changing Israeli society and subverting its democratic modes of governance. As Swedish journalist Paulina Neuding aptly put it, Israel is a virtual Disneyland for NGOs. Many of these are bent on inflaming the conflict, defaming Israel by documenting the human rights violations of one side only, real and imagined, with the explicit intention of drawing outside pressure to force Israel into making concessions to its foes. A 2021 report by B'Tselem titled "A Regime of Jewish Supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This Is Apartheid," clearly aims at

world public opinion, which B'Tselem hopes to leverage in order to bully Israel into doing its bidding. B'Tselem director, activist Hagai El-Ad, has already taken the case against his own country to the U.N. Security Council in 2016. This is the kind of anti-democratic strategy in the name of human rights that Fonte first identified in the wake of the Durban conference.

Anti-Zionists who think Israel is an “apartheid” state are a minority in Israel. But they wield influence far beyond their numbers. They have *Haaretz*, Israel’s most important daily,

which energetically promotes their case, and they are disproportionately represented in academia, the bureaucracy, and the courts. They are also supported by a seemingly limitless stream of cash from abroad from NGOs and private donors, including George Soros' Open Society Foundations, international institutions and, strikingly, foreign governments, too.

This deluge of cash is aimed at changing Israel in the spirit of the progressive globalist elite, in ways its citizens have clearly rejected. Those

include the usual anti-religious, anti-national, and anti-family agendas, with the additional goals of fostering Palestinian nationalism and political Islam (and pushing Arab citizens of Israel in these directions). Some of that money comes from Jews in the diaspora: B'Tselem, for example, is heavily subsidized by the New Israel Fund, whose donors are largely American Jews.

Matan Peleg's book *A State for Sale: How Foreign Countries Interfere with Israeli Policy* documented funds furnished by states and associations of

states to campaigns designed to change the social, political, and cultural fabric of Israel. Among these are a campaign to negatively influence the public perception of settlers, a campaign to expunge Jewish religious content from Israel's education system, and another aiming to naturalize illegal immigrants.

Topping the list of state actors who have poured money, over the last decade, into trying to change Israel are Germany, with over 154 million shekels, the EU with over 152 million, the U.S. with over 61 million, the U.N. with 59.4 million, and with Holland,

Switzerland, and Norway trailing not far behind. There is also Turkish money harnessed to promote the Muslim Brotherhood among Israel's Arab citizens.

All this money is used to undermine the rights of Jews to self-determination in their own nation-state, by creating levers that can subdue the democratic will of Israel's citizenry.

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Zionism and assimilation were always two alternative strategies for Jewish life that existed in permanent tension.

Jews who sought to assimilate into other national societies were mostly uneasy with the reformulation of Jewish identity in national terms. For if Jews are a nation they would necessarily face the suspicion of dual loyalty, which has long been a useful trope in the hands of antisemites.

But Zionism, as Shlomo Avineri observed, has set Jews free not only within Israel, but outside it too. For the first time in two millennia, diaspora became a choice, not a fate. Yet the tension persists in other ways. The controversy survived the success of

Zionism, though it may have metamorphosed: Progressive Jewish detractors of Zionism, such as the donors who sponsor B'Tselem, seem to be bothered less by the specter of dual loyalty accusations—since the same crowd that despises Israel's nationalism often sneers at American patriotism as well. One suspects that distancing oneself from Israel is a badge of progressivism not only among gentiles but among Jews seeking less to be accepted into American society at large and more to be seen as adherents of progressive transnationalism—and thus part of the globalist elite. This too is

not entirely new. There was a disproportional representation for Jews among the adherents of another kind of internationalism—that of communism. And just like transnational progressivism, Soviet communism wished to undermine the Jewish state in the name of lofty-sounding ideals.

With a view to the future of the Jewish people, this rift—this cultural war turned political struggle—should be taken seriously. Instead of kicking shins under the table, we need to set this controversy, as the Jewish tradition has

richly taught us to do, squarely onto the table, where we can debate it honestly and openly. In doing so, we must be ready for the possibility that the rift may not be bridgeable in the foreseeable future, since the ideals of post-national globalist progressive organizations, whether funded by Jews, wealthy non-Jewish philanthropists, or foreign states, may not be compatible with Israel's thriving Jewish democracy.

In such a case, Israel would need to defend itself more vigorously than it has to date against its progressive

Jewish detractors. As a nation-state sworn to protect the rights of its citizens, Israel must protect itself from anti-democratic influences while respecting the choice of Jews in the diaspora to live their own versions of their own Jewish identities, and to keep the door of the Law of Return open even for those Jews who are now still trying to deprive their own people of the right to self-determination in their national homeland.

A shorter version of this essay appeared in Jewish Priorities, a recently-published

collection.

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