

# Congress Again Rewards Israel's Misdeeds

To judge by what Congress is up to these days, one would think that it *wants* to reward Israel for its relentless confiscation of Palestinian land and continued ethnic cleansing.

Congress — which is not *only* interested in “the Benjamins,” that is, Israel Lobby contributions — is surely operating in what Yakov Hirsch calls “hasbara culture,” according to which anyone who objects to any action of the state of Israel, especially where the Palestinians are concerned, is *without question* an anti-Semite. In this view, the presence of anti-Semitism is a certainty; the only question is how it manifests itself in any given situation. (The resemblance to critical race theory is striking.)

How do hasbara culturalists know that Israel's critics are anti-Semites?

They know because, by unexamined yet indefeasible assumption, *no other explanation is conceivable*. If you offer an alternative, good-faith explanation for the objection, then *you too* must be an anti-Semite. After all, again by indefeasible assumption, if Israel is the paragon of virtue, if its military is the most moral military on earth, how *could* any objection be made in good faith? It certainly can't be that Zionists, whether acting individually or through the Jewish State, could have done anything wrong. That would be blaming the victim, which is (in this case only) is strictly forbidden. (I say *Zionist* because not all Jews are Zionists — far from it — and not all Zionists are Jews, even if most are. And yet even that term is unsatisfactory because some self-identified “liberal Zionists,” like Peter Beinart, strongly condemn Israeli apartheid.)

Of course, the flip side of hasbara culture is the dehumanization of Palestinians, who are *always* to blame — even when they appear to be victims. (Readers can sort out that horrifying irony for themselves.) One must never regard the Palestinians as bonafide rights-bearing individuals and members of an ethnic group who could have *real* century-old grievances against the Zionist movement, the group of European Jews who settler-colonized Arab-majority Palestine. Rather, the Palestinians are merely the latest rightless embodiments of a permanent and evil almost nonmaterial historical force — anti-Semitism — that has taken different physical forms throughout history. By that assumption, Palestinian anger at the self-proclaimed Jewish State can be nothing but anti-Semitism, full stop.

The Viennese social critic Karl Kraus (1874-1936) once said that you can identify a madman by how agitated he becomes when locked up in a madhouse. By the same token, you can identify an anti-Semite by how agitated he becomes when dispossessed by a Zionist settler. Only an anti-Semite would fuss about that rigged game.

Anyway, though the year is still young, members of the House and Senate have been busy finding ways to help Israel. Understanding hasbara culture helps us make sense of it.

Just a few days ago the House and Senate passed the Israel Relations Normalization Act of 2021 (H.R. 2748). Writing at [Mondoweiss.net](https://mondoweiss.net), the invaluable watchdog site for Israel's apartheid oppression of Palestinians, Nadya Tannous and Cat Knarr point out that the US Campaign for Palestinian Rights has dubbed the bill "the Normalizing Israeli Ethnic Cleansing Act."

The bill would accomplish several things. For example, Tannous and Knarr write, it

expands the Abraham Accords, Trump-era weapons and business deals between apartheid Israel and other authoritarian regimes. These deals bribe Arab countries in the region to both ignore Israel's settler colonialism and constant human rights violations and, indeed, to regionally align with the US and Israeli policy and aspirations for the region in exchange for large weapons packages.

You'll recall that when Donald Trump and his underachiever son-in-law, Jared Kushner, failed to broker the "real estate deal of the century" between the Israelis and Palestinians — because it ignored Palestinians' rights — Team Trump tried something else: so-called peace deals between Israel and (so far) these Arab states: the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco. These are the Abraham Accords, which entail allegedly breakthrough mutual diplomatic recognition. Saudi Arabia already has a close working relationship with Israel.

How did Trump do it? As Tannous and Knarr note, by offering arms and business deals to the participants. The Trump administration, in other words, bought the cynical Arab regimes, which have always been ready to sell out the Palestinians for the right price. And what did Israel get? Further Arab acquiescence in its intolerable treatment of the Palestinians.

The Abraham Accords just happen to be one Trump accomplishment that most Democrats, including Joe Biden, love. In January the House and Senate both created bipartisan Abraham Accords Caucuses "to build on the success of the historic" agreements. According to the House news release:

For decades, Congress [back pat] has played a key role in promoting peace between Israel and its neighbors. The Caucus will provide an opportunity to strengthen the Abraham Accords by encouraging and [sic] partnerships among the existing Abraham Accords countries and expanding the agreement to include countries that do not currently have diplomatic relations with Israel.

I can hear the cha-ching already. American arms makers must be whooping it up. But hang

on: how can one hope to have peace in the region when the Palestinians remain oppressed in what Israeli journalist Gideon Levy calls a “Jewish supremacist” apartheid state? (Human Rights Watch, the Israeli human-rights group B’Tselem, and Amnesty International all agree with that description.) That question, I’m sure means nothing to the American, Israeli, and Arab ruling elites. They plan to just power on through, Trump-style.

It’s also worth remembering that Israel’s newest best friends, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, are committing genocide against Yemen with indispensable help from the indispensable nation — that’s us! — despite Biden’s apparent promise to end that assistance.

Tannous and Knarr also note that H.R. 2748 encourages Israel’s continued Palestinian land theft, which is now being rationalized in the name of environmentalism and economic development. The “bill expressly outlines Israeli environmentalism and technological developments as two ways to stabilize the region. The term stability in this case is well-selected, to imply peace, meaning silencing of Palestinian voices, protest, and dissent to Israeli campaigns of ethnic cleansing.” Moreover, “Democratic leadership dug in their heels ... to guarantee further funding [the \$4.8 billion just passed] of the Israeli regime’s brutal violence.”

As though all that wasn’t enough, House Republican Israel Caucus Rep. Lee Zeldin (R-N.Y.) has introduced the latest effort to quash the BDS (Boycott Divestment Sanctions) movement, which seeks to hold businesses and others accountable for facilitating Israel’s *de facto annexation* and Zionist settlement of the West Bank, which was seized by war in 1967 along with East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights. (Fifty-five years is too long to call those territories occupied.) The Jewish News Syndicate reports:

The Anti-Boycott Act, which has 46 Republican co-sponsors, would amend the Export Administration Act of 1979 to prohibit boycotts or boycott requests imposed [sic] by international governmental organizations against Israel. The act would also hold accountable individuals who attempt to violate the act. It also affirms Congress’s opposition to the BDS movement and considers the U.N. Human Rights Council’s creation of a database of companies doing business in the West Bank, eastern Jerusalem and the Golan Heights to be an act of BDS.

One is tempted to ask where Congress gets the authority to do these things, but that’s a silly question. Congress and presidents do pretty much what they want, especially in foreign affairs. Nevertheless, if an international organization wants to compile a database of companies that do business in the West Bank, Congress has no good reason to meddle, unless politics is counted as a good reason. Nor should it do anything to stop anyone from boycotting such companies or Israel on their own initiative.

Note Zeldin's masterful misdirection:

In the past year alone, we have witnessed an alarming rise in anti-Semitic and anti-Israel hate and violence in the United States and around the world. Whether it's Hamas's terror attacks on Israel, well-known companies embracing the BDS movement, anti-Semitism in academia, discrimination against Israel at the U.N. or congregants of a Texas synagogue being held hostage, there is no denying that anti-Semitism is a persistent problem in our society that needs to be identified, called out and crushed in all forms....

Too many — even in the halls of Congress — have emboldened anti-Semitic and anti-Israel rhetoric by accepting the BDS movement.... This legislation not only reinforces congressional opposition to the BDS movement but protects American companies from being forced to provide information to international organizations that peddle this hate-filled movement and holds those who attempt to violate that protection accountable.

There's hasbara culture in action. For Zeldin, violence against Jewish worshipers and peaceful demonstrations against Israeli apartheid are cut from the same anti-Semitic cloth; critics of Zionism are effectively Nazis no matter what's going on. Israel and its champions have the exclusive license to define anti-Semitism, and if you object to that, then *you* are anti-Semitic. Fortunately, fewer Americans — including younger Jewish Americans — buy that shameful demagoguery these days.

Americans should be free of government penalty or harassment to choose not to associate with Israel or companies that do business with it. Boycotts and divestment are exercises of freedom. I do, however, part ways with BDS over sanctions. Government sanctions are acts of war that are both *double-edged* because they harm people in the country that imposes them, and a form of *collective punishment* because they harm innocents in the targeted country and elsewhere. (See Gary Chartier's excellent "The Case for Sanctions Fails at Every Turn.")

Because governments should not impose sanctions on anyone, I proposed changing the S in BDS to: Stopping All Government Aid.

In the meantime, let's see hasbara culture for what it is: an attempt to inoculate the people of an ethno-supremacist/apartheid state against all criticism and consequences of its misdeeds.