



PERSPECTIVES

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Netanyahu's Sound Decision to Bar Congresswomen Omar and Tlaib

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Israeli PM Netanyahu was right to bar the entry of Muslim Congresswomen Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar. Both are radical anti-Israelis and supporters of the BDS movement, whose end goal is Israel's destruction. Their visit to the territories would have been an anti-Israel circus goaded on by the international media. Leaders of the Democratic Party understand that if their party moves toward the radical left, as exemplified by Tlaib and Omar, they will lose their chance to reclaim the White House next year.

PM Benjamin Netanyahu's decision to bar US Congresswomen Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar from entering Israel was sound policy.

Rashida Tlaib is a Muslim Democrat from Michigan of Palestinian origin. She is now in her first term in the US House of Representatives. Tlaib has declared that she opposes US aid to "Netanyahu's Israel" and supports the "right of return" for Palestinians as well as a one-state solution – the standard Palestinian/Arab euphemisms for Israel's destruction through demographic subversion. She also backs BDS, which works for the same ultimate objective, and voted in July against a House resolution condemning BDS.

Ilhan Omar is a Muslim Democrat from Minnesota and a native of Somalia. She, too, is in her first term in Washington. She often criticizes Israel and the influence of the "Jewish lobby" (AIPAC) on the US. She is also a BDS supporter, and like Tlaib voted against the House resolution that denounced the movement. In February of this year, during a debate about AIPAC, she tweeted that "It's all about the Benjamins" (a slang term for money). She was castigated for doing so by her own party and by Jewish organizations, which rightly saw the tweet as antisemitic.

The pair referred to their intended trip as a “delegation to Palestine.” They had planned to tour Palestinian cities in the West Bank as well as East Jerusalem and meet with Palestinian figures and international “human rights organizations.” The trip, which would have been covered intensively by the international media, would have been an anti-Israel circus.

It was precisely to avoid situations of this kind that the Knesset passed a law more than two years ago prohibiting entry visas for foreign citizens who call for boycotting Israel. These two BDS-supporting congresswomen certainly fall in that category. But was preventing their entry wise? Many claim its damage exceeded its benefit. But is that the case?

A few weeks ago, the Israeli ambassador to the US, Ron Dermer, a close confidant of Netanyahu, announced that the two Congresswomen would be granted visas. But pressure from President Trump, who declared that granting them entry to Israel would indicate weakness (the ultimate sin in his world), prompted a reversal. Ultimately the drama turned farcical: Tlaib said she only wanted to visit her grandmother, permission to do so was granted, and she said she still wasn’t coming.

The accusation now being hurled at Netanyahu is that he harmed Israel’s interests by giving in to Trump. *Haaretz* commentator Chemi Shalev (who harshly criticized Netanyahu for defying the previous occupant of the White House) even compared the PM to a borrower on the grey market whose debts to Trump have grown to the point that he can no longer say no to him.

Indeed, Netanyahu had no choice but to say amen. Israel needs the US president, whoever he may be, and generally accedes to requests from the White House. A notable case was during the Gulf War (1991), when President George H.W. Bush asked PM Shamir not to respond to 39 missiles that Saddam Hussein had launched at Israel. Although the entire defense establishment, fearing a loss of deterrent power, pushed for a massive response, Shamir opted to go along with the president’s demand. Israel did not respond.

The reversal in favor of barring the entry of the two US legislators predictably upset some members of the Democratic Party, a factor that was probably taken into account when the decision was made. But the Democratic Congressional leadership is worried about the shift toward the radical left that the “squad” represents (which, in addition to Tlaib and Omar, includes Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez). The leadership fears that if the party moves along with the squad, it will cost them the White House next year.

Israel’s quarrel with the Democrats will likely be brief – not only because the Democratic leadership is not entirely behind the squad, but because it

understands Israel's need to stay on the good side of the American president. That is how it has always been, and it will remain that way if and when a Democratic president is elected. The recent visit to Israel by 41 Democratic members of the House, most of them newcomers to Washington, was much more indicative of Israel's relations with the Democratic Party than the visit that did not materialize.

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