



The Tlaib-Omar Show Was a BDS Masterstroke

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The recent farce surrounding the non-visit of US Congresswomen Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar to Israel highlighted the pernicious self-delusion and zero-sum exclusion of the BDS worldview, which polarizes American politics regarding Israel.

It is a great and quintessentially Israeli irony that Arab members of the Knesset have repeatedly proposed establishing an official Nakba Day – in other words, a day that commemorates the founding of the state as a catastrophe of historic proportions. While the Knesset's Ministerial Committee on Legislative Affairs eventually banned such proposals, their persistence up to that point indicates how deeply ingrained 1948 is in the Arab psyche, including among modern day elected representatives.

The Nakba Day proposals were by no means unique. The Knesset has allowed Arab members to express anti-Israel views for decades, including calls for the country's destruction and denials of its right ever to have existed at all.

Former Arab MK Hanin Zoabi consistently called for the termination of the state of Israel and sailed on the Mavi Marmara in its 2010 bid to break Israel's security blockade of Gaza. In April 2018, she once again [called for the State of Israel to be dissolved](#) and replaced with either two states – one secular and one Palestinian – or one binational secular state.

Shortly after the second Lebanon War, MK Azmi Bishara expressed sympathy for Hezbollah, defining it as a resistance movement. According to Bishara, Hezbollah was fighting a war brought on by an Israeli government led by "mediocrities, cowards and opportunists" who were responsible for "barbaric vandalism and the deliberate targeting of civilians."

Israel affords these opportunities in its Parliament to its democratically elected officials. It is unlikely that the US Congress would stand for calls by its members to give aid and comfort to its enemies and, indeed, to destroy America completely.

Congresswomen Tlaib and Omar have taken it upon themselves to question Israel's right to exist and to promote its destruction through BDS. To put it bluntly: it is apparently bad form to advocate anti-American positions in Congress (other than to question the legitimacy of President Trump), but a Congressperson can express views that seek the destruction of American allies and still come off as a patriotic.

In BDS World, where there is no room for facts, supporters strive to create an appealing political façade for the benefit of left-wing progressive circles. Israel scored no points for denying entry to the Congresswomen, or even for showing a humanitarian gesture toward one of them. This was a lose-lose scenario that dealt in relative outcomes. Had Tlaib and Omar made the trip, Israel could have taken control of the story. Instead, Israel allowed it to be told by the BDS movement and its leaders.

US-Israel relations have been through worse, and they will survive this too. But the incident is worth contextualizing within the US-Israel political framework. Tlaib and Omar displayed remarkable audacity in openly lying about their trip, both in advance and then again after it was canceled. They falsely claimed they were planning to meet Israeli officials when their itinerary included only 'Palestine', Palestinians, and supporters of Palestinians.

Tlaib's actions proved that her visit was never meant to be an impartial trip to the scene of the conflict. Nor was it about seeing her grandmother. The point was to showcase the so-called "occupation." Such manipulations, compounded by the soft power enjoyed by pro-Palestinian groups, magnify a fictitious reality. They allow those groups to hijack the narrative of peace, justice, and human rights while yearning for Israel's destruction.

US-Israel relations do not exist in vacuum, and US opinion is neither monolithic nor frozen in time. It has undergone significant shifts since 1948, with some groups becoming more favorable toward Israel and others less so. Nevertheless, as polls illustrate, support for Israel has become an American value, even if some elected officials feel otherwise. Sustaining this requires work and perseverance.

It is a serious challenge to get past the self-delusion and zero-sum exclusion of the BDS worldview, which polarizes American politics regarding Israel, and convey the actual reality of the Middle East. The normalization of antisemitism in American politics and culture – together with our growing collective dependency on technology and the general tone of politics – reduces complex issues to sound bites and drives polarization and ignorance.

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