



PERSPECTIVES

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The Struggle for Israel's Jewish Soul

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The possibility of an Israeli minority government that relies on the Joint Arab List underscores the clear and present danger of accommodating political parties and movements that reject the existence of the Jewish state and propagate Israel's transformation into a Palestinian Arab (Muslim) state.

From its outset, the Zionist movement was committed to full civil and religious equality of the non-Jewish minority in the future Jewish state (as stipulated in the 1917 Balfour Declaration and the League of Nations mandate). According to a draft constitution of the prospective Jewish state, prepared by Ze'ev Jabotinsky in 1934, Arabs and Jews were to share all rights and duties including military and civil service; Hebrew and Arabic were to enjoy the same legal standing; and "in every cabinet where the prime minister is a Jew, the vice-premiership shall be offered to an Arab and vice versa." Echoing this vision, about a decade later David Ben-Gurion avowed that "one should not even contemplate a Jewish state that lacks full and absolute equality, political, civil, and national, for all of its residents and citizens.... In a Jewish state, an Arab could be elected prime minister or president, if suitable for the post."

Manifested *inter alia* by [Israel's Proclamation of Independence](#) (May 14, 1948), which granted "complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex" and urged the nascent state's Arab citizens "to participate in the upbuilding of the state on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its provisional and permanent institutions," this ultraliberal and inclusive outlook was predicated on the assumption—underpinning the essence of all nation-states—of its citizens' acceptance of its legitimacy and their abidance by its laws, rules, and regulations. In the case of the Arab-Jewish conflict this meant

acquiescence of Israel's Arab citizens to their minority status in Israel; that is, in the national home of the Jewish people as postulated by the 1922 mandate of the League of Nations—the UN's predecessor as representative of the will of the international community—which tasked Britain with facilitating the establishment of this national home. In Ben-Gurion's words: "A Jewish state does not only mean Jewish majority in that state—it also concerns the state's purpose: it will be a state not only of and for its citizens, but a state whose mission is to ingather the exiles and to concentrate and ensconce them in the homeland."

By way of attaining this goal, Israel passed the Law of Return, which grants Jews, wherever they are, the right to citizenship should they choose to make Israel their home, as well as specific legislation aimed at safeguarding Israel's Jewish character, notably [Basic Law: The Knesset](#) (Article 7A). It stipulated that:

A candidates' list shall not participate in elections to the Knesset, and a person shall not be a candidate for election to the Knesset, if the objects or actions of the list or the actions of the person, expressly or by implication, include one of the following:

1. negation of the existence of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state;
2. incitement to racism;
3. support of armed struggle, by a hostile state or a terrorist organization, against the State of Israel.

Indeed, when in 1965 the Central Elections Committee disqualified the Arab Socialist List organized by the irredentist *al-Ard* movement, which rejected Israel's very existence, from running for the Knesset, the Supreme Court ratified that measure under the doctrine of "defensive democracy." As the court stated in a majority opinion: "There can be no doubt that the state of Israel is not only a sovereign, independent state, which cherishes freedom and is characterized by the rule of the people—but also that it was established 'as a Jewish state in the Land of Israel'."

Since then, and especially after the launch of the Oslo "peace process" in 1993, Israel's Arab parties have undergone massive radicalization. Ignoring legislation forbidding unauthorized visits by Israelis to enemy states, Azmi Bishara, founding leader of the ultranationalist Balad Party (with seats in the Israeli parliament since 1999), travelled to Damascus to commemorate the death of Hafez Assad, one of Israel's most implacable enemies, from where he implored the Arab states to enable anti-Israel "resistance activities," expressed

admiration for Hezbollah, and urged Israeli Arabs to celebrate the terrorist organization's achievements and internalize its operational lessons.

His Knesset peer Ahmad Tibi was beside himself with joy on meeting the deceased tyrant's son, Bashar Assad (in January 2009), who would soon go on to slaughter hundreds of thousands of his own citizens. "Heads of state are begging to shake Assad's hand, crawling to shake his hand," he gloated at an Israeli Arab election gathering. "Yet what they fail to obtain despite their crawling, others get."

The following year, Tibi travelled to Libya with a delegation of Israeli Arab parliamentarians to meet the long-reigning (and soon-to-be-deposed) dictator Muammar Qaddafi, whom he lauded as "King of the Arabs" and who was praised by one of Tibi's peers as "a man of peace who treats his people in the best possible way." Confronted with scathing Knesset criticism upon their return, Knesset member Taleb Sana was unrepentant. "Israel's enemy is Israel itself," he said. "As Qaddafi said during the visit, they have no problem with Jews but only with Zionism. Perhaps you'll learn and understand some time—that is: abolish the Jewish state of Israel."

By this time, open calls for Israel's destruction had substituted for the 1990s' euphemistic advocacy of this goal. Bishara, whose Balad party was predicated on making Israel "a state of all its citizens" (the standard euphemism for its transformation into an Arab state in which Jews would be reduced to a permanent minority), became increasingly outspoken after his 2006 flight from the country to avoid arrest and prosecution for treason, having allegedly assisted Hezbollah during its war with Israel in the summer of that year, predicting the Jewish state's fate to be identical to that of the crusading states. (Ten years later, Balad and the communist party Hadash would [condemn the Arab League's designation of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization](#) as serving Israel's interests.)

His successor, Jamal Zahalka, preferred a more contemporary metaphor, claiming that just as South Africa's apartheid had been emasculated, so its Zionist counterpart had to be destroyed, while the "national committee of the heads of local Arab municipalities in Israel," the effective leadership of the Israeli Arabs, issued a lengthy document outlining its "Future Vision for the Palestinian Arabs in Israel." The document derided Israel as "a product of colonialist action initiated by the Jewish-Zionist elites in Europe and the West," which, it charged, had pursued "domestic colonialist policy against its Palestinian Arab citizens." The document then rejected Israel's continued existence as a Jewish state and demanded its replacement by a system that

would ensure Arab “national, historic and civil rights at both the individual and collective levels.”

As this steady ultranationalist surge was met by corresponding reluctance by the legal system to enforce the legislation designed to ensure Israel’s Jewish character (before the February 2009 and April 2019 elections, for instance, the Supreme Court overturned the Central Elections Committee’s disqualification of Balad and vetoed the disqualification of Arab Members of Knesset who have expressed “support of armed struggle, by a hostile state or a terrorist organization, against the State of Israel”), Israeli Arab politicians’ rejection of Israel’s Jewish nature has become ever more pronounced.

Thus we have Tibi telling President Reuven Rivlin during the September 2019 parliamentary consultations that “[we are the owners of this land](#)... we did not immigrate here, we were born here, we are a native population.” Six months later, after another round of national elections brought the Joint List’s Knesset representation to an unprecedented tally of 15 MKs, Tibi was far more brazen. “[The Land of Israel is a colonialist phrase](#),” he stated in a radio interview. “I contemptuously reject the term ‘Judea and Samaria’. This is the Palestinian bank, the occupied Palestinian territories.”

Of course the Land of Israel was known as such millennia before the advent of European colonialism, or even before the Roman colonialists renamed it Syria Palaestina precisely to obliterate the millenarian Jewish entitlement to this land. The biblical areas of Judea and Samaria were known by this name since biblical times, thousands of years before they were renamed the West Bank (of the Hashemite Kingdom) in 1950 by King Abdullah ibn Hussein. The League of Nations’ mandate for Palestine delineated the country’s borders according to its interpretation of the biblical term “from Dan to Beersheba,” while Mandatory Palestine included a substantial Samaritan district comprising much of the would-be “West Bank.”

It is hardly surprising that Tibi and his fellow members of the Joint List would remain impervious to the historical truth. Theirs is the agenda of rewriting the story of the “Nakba” —the Palestinian misnomer for their wholly unnecessary self-inflicted 1947-48 disaster when, rather than accept the UN’s partition resolution, they tried to destroy the state of Israel at birth—and nothing would be allowed to stand in the way of this (self-destructive) agenda. As the Joint Arab List’s leader Ayman Oudeh told President Rivlin on March 15: “We are not solely interested in full civil equality. We are a national group that deserves full national equality.” In other words: ending Israel’s existence as a Jewish state.

But what about the three former IDF chiefs of staff heading the Blue and White party? Don't they realize that they are but "useful idiots" for the Joint List's ultimate goal (as candidly revealed by Oudeh, who described collaboration with this party as a steppingstone to "toppling the Netanyahu-led right-wing rule" en route to [ending "the Zionist hegemony"](#))? Has their hatred of Benjamin Netanyahu blinded them to the point of forgetting the values and ideals for which they fought for decades and putting Israel's future at risk?

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