



## ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel  
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of  
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

many ingredients necessary for peace to actually come about. The relegation of the conflict to a matter of land alone is the reason why all peace proposals over the past century have been rejected by the Palestinians. The essence of the two-state placebo is the

## Commentary...

### Don't Confuse Me With Facts. It's Always About the "Occupation" By Asaf Romirowsky

Like clockwork, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's recent observation that "the establishment of Israeli civilian settlements in the West Bank is not, per se, inconsistent with international law" was immediately denounced by the Jewish Left.

The head of the Reform movement in North America, Rabbi Rick Jacobs, said the US government's new position on Israeli settlements will undercut the fight against BDS and the delegitimization of Israel in the US, specifically on college campuses.

It is not clear when Rabbi Jacobs was last on a campus, but the debate on North American college campuses is not about the so-called "occupation" but about whether Israel has a right to exist, period. Pro-BDS groups, including "Jewish" ones, are talking about the illegitimacy of the 1949 armistice lines, not those of 1967.

Moreover, a recent survey conducted by Ron Hassner at the University of California, Berkeley shows that most students who care strongly about the "Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories" do not have knowledge of even basic facts on the subject.

Jacobs's lack of understanding speaks to the divergent lexicon of the conflict, and more pointedly to the growing split between American Jews and Israelis. In many "progressive" circles there is little to no understanding of what areas are even in dispute; witness the continued claims that Gaza is "occupied" by Israel. For the BDS movement, everything Israeli, including Haifa and Tel Aviv, is a "settlement" and hence "illegal."

Far more than American policy, it is the language of "occupation" that plays a key role in what has become the religion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The main feature of that religion is the Palestinian claim that their (alleged) territories are "occupied" by Israel, regardless of where they are located on the map, much less in any legal sense under international law. The mantra of "occupation," and the demand that Israel be shunned until the "occupation" is ended—meaning the time when Israel is dissolved by the implementation of the Palestinian "right of return"—is the key demand of the Palestinians and the BDS movement.

Part of the problem is deliberate confusion over semantics. Historically, the word *yishuv* is usually defined as "the Jewish community in pre-State Palestine." It relates to those Jews who aspired to the national revival of the Jewish People in Palestine under the Ottoman Empire and the British Mandate or, as they called it, the Land of Israel. *Moshav*, which stems from the same root, connotes a place of residence. Over the years, Israelis have used the word *hityashvut* (residing) and *hitnahlut* (settlement) interchangeably, all referring to building the land of Israel in terms of the nation state. Biblically, the term *nahala*, which comes from the same root as *hitnahlut*, referred to the geographic location of each of the 12 tribes of Israel.

The weaponization of the term *hitnahlut* (settlement) began after 1967 by the PLO and the Arab world. For the government of Israel under Levi Eshkol, newly established communities were an outgrowth of military outposts that had been created with the clear understanding that they were the first line of defense between Israel and its enemies. But 52 years later, no one remembers that Eshkol headed the Labor government or that Israel made overtures toward reconciliation in the immediate aftermath of the Six-Day War. The only legacy preached by rabbis like Rabbi Jacobs are condemnations of the "occupation."

Naturally, Rabbi Jacobs continues to echo the left wing mantra that "The US is giving a green light to settlements and settlement expansion. This could also be interpreted as a first step toward supporting any Israeli annexation efforts."

Jacobs's interpretation characterizes the entire Arab-Israeli conflict as a territorial one, ignoring its religious foundations and thus all the

belief that peace will come when there are two states living side by side. But the reality is that the resilience of Jewish-Israeli survival has been overshadowed by the false Arab-Palestinian notion of being "occupied" and "robbed" of their true destiny by religiously ordained supremacy.

Consequently, Israel is the "oppressor." The Palestinian concept demands that the "occupation" remain the root cause of all that society's problems, self-imposed and otherwise, from social and economic woes to terrorism. The fact that the Trump administration decided to acknowledge historical fact—that the 1949 boundaries were neither sacred nor a permanent border and were always subject to adjustment—has been known for over five decades. This reality will not change no matter how falsely the facts are described on campus or by the Reform movement. (BESA Jan 5)

### America's Willing Executioners By Ron Jager

In recent days as we witness one murderous anti-Semitic attack after another in the tri-state area, we all seem to be asking the same questions. Why now? Why has the savagery of recent attacks against Jews become suddenly so barbaric and undeniably brazen? Even though these questions are a natural response to a situation seemingly beyond our control, they are based on incorrect assumptions and ignore the writing on the wall that many observers including myself have been warning about over the past few years.

In the decades following the end of World War II, American Jews have prospered as never before, experiencing unlimited levels of inclusion and equality. In a complete rejection of the days of "Gentleman's Agreement", American Jews can be found in every sphere of American society. Jews have never felt more secure and freer of persecution than they have felt in America since the period of the Holocaust. So in the words of Joseph Heller, "Something Happened".

The steep increase in anti-Semitic attacks throughout the United States is being portrayed by the majority of the mainstream media outlets as well as social media, as coinciding with the election of President Trump, leading the public to believe that the alt-right anti-Semitic forces are on the march with impunity. Little if any media attention has been given to the fact that for the past 18 years, since the Durban Conference in 2001, when the BDS and the delegitimization movements against Israel were established, ultra-liberal sanctimonious Jews and leftist progressive Jewish organizations have been at the forefront of political activity demonizing Israel, working to portray it as an apartheid state committing genocide against the Palestinian Arabs.

When Jews falsely attack Jews, and when Jews deny the State of Israel the basic right of self-defense afforded to all nations of the world, thereby making it acceptable to express hatred of Israel, they are inciting hatred toward themselves and hatred towards the Jews of America and not only Israel. When we hear Jews vigorously condemning Israel and then condemning President Trump, dismissing the legitimacy of the election results while at the same time inflaming the public discourse with vulgar language, it shouldn't be a surprise that the anti-Semites feel empowered. In such an environment, with the social media platforms filled with unlimited and round the clock expressions of Jew hatred, the consequence of taking the short leap to single out Jews as responsible for the uncertainty and confusion felt by the American public is inevitable. What began as a Jewish anti-Israel, anti-settler campaign has mushroomed into widespread anti-Semitism that does not differentiate between Orthodox and Reform, between Israel or the "settlers," between the "start-up nation" and "a light unto nations", and between American Jews and Israeli Jews. American Jews have become sitting ducks wondering when the next

murderous attack will occur.

The Afro-American man who hacked 5 Jews with a machete the size of a broomstick during a Hanukkah celebration in Monsey New York this past week, Grafton Thomas, didn't care much about "white supremacists" He is an Afro-American man from Greenwood Lake, a town about 20 miles away from Monsey. When he fled from the scene, he drove to Harlem -- hardly a bastion of white supremacy. This doesn't mean that he represents the black community and it certainly doesn't diminish the threat of white supremacists for American Jews. It does mean that he has been radicalized either on his own initiative or by others to act and murder Jews.

Let me be clear, the political and racial rhetoric of Jew hatred that has radicalized and emanated from all platforms of the media, either printed, broadcasted or thru the internet has created an environment that empowers those that chose to turn to acts of violence. The political discourse in America has also contributed to the current level of violence against Jews but let's be clear, it is not coming from both sides of the political spectrum. The Republican Party does not express or support statements by elected representatives that are anti-Semitic or encourage Jew hatred.

The Democratic Party however, has condoned either through indifference or out of fear of losing the support of their base, expressions of anti-Semitism and Jew hatred by their own political Congressional representatives. When liberal Jewish leaders in America, and major Jewish organizations that support the Democratic Party ignore this undeniable fact, then they are empowering those on the threshold of Jew hatred to act and attempt to violently attack Jews. When Jew hatred and anti-Semitic expressions by Congressional Women Ilhan Abdullahi Omar and Rashida Harbi Tlaib, both Democratic Congresswomen and of Muslim faith, are condoned with zero political accountability, then the Democratic Party is contributing to the discourse of Jew hatred. When former Democratic President Bill Clinton shares the stage with the head of the "Nation of Islam" Louis Farrakhan, a known anti-Semite and states publicly and with immunity that Jews are like "termites" , then the Democratic Party is contributing the culture of Jew hatred that is sweeping America

"I'm not an anti-Semite. I'm anti-Termite." – Oct. 16, 2018, tweet from Louis Farrakhan (@LouisFarrakhan).

"Pedophilia and sexual perversion institutionalized in Hollywood and the entertainment industries can be traced to Talmudic principles and Jewish influence. Not Jewish influence, Satanic influence under the name of Jew." –Louis Farrakhan, Saviours' Day speech, Chicago, Feb. 17, 2019

Sadly, the response of liberal progressive Jews to the political immunity the Democratic Party has given their own politicians espousing Jew hatred, has been to maintain the "big lie" and repeat their mantra; that the fountainhead of all this "hate" is the one and only target of their real rage; President Donald Trump. As if taking his cue from his like-minded Jewish supporters Mayor De Blasio stated "A lot of folks were told it was unacceptable to be anti-Semitic," he continues: "It was -unacceptable to be racist, and now they're getting more permission." The message was in line with his Jewish supporters: De Blasio was trying to explain who is responsible for epidemic of Jew hatred in New York, President Trump. The inability of the Democratic Mayor and his Jewish supporters to truly understand how their misguided attempt to place the blame on the other side of the political isle has encouraged the street-level violent anti-Semitism to spread like wildfire.

Will more Jews have to die before our liberal and Democratic Jewish leaders reexamine many of their false assumptions of why anti-Semitism and Jew hatred has become rampant on the streets of New York and the tri-state area? Will the Jewish community begin to demand without being reticent of the Democratic Party to purge their ranks of anti-Semites and Jew haters? Will they demand of their Democratic Mayor to take real action and not just pay lip service to his gullible and misguided supporters within the Jewish Community? Passing the burden on to others, is no way to make the streets safe. Failure to act will cause anti-Semitism to spread on a scale yet seen in New York or anywhere else, empowering America's willing executioners.

## Oppose Iran sanctions, but support BDS against Israel?

By Jonathan S. Tobin

The rising tide of Jew-hatred that is sweeping around the globe is no laughing matter. So the idea of having a vote to determine who is the "Antisemite of the Year" may strike some as more of a publicity stunt than a sober attempt to deal with the problem. But whatever one may think of such a dubious label or whether it treats the subject with the requisite seriousness, the point of the Internet vote in which thousands took part was to call attention to the plague of anti-Semitism and how it is being legitimized. More to the point, it turned out that within days of the announcement, the "winner" of the title justified the choice with a statement that helped illustrate the way anti-Zionism is just another form of anti-Semitism.

The effort was sponsored by StopAntisemitism.org, which also recently published "The New Anti-Semites," an authoritative report on the way the BDS movement is steeped in hatred of Jews, as well as the way its left-wing supporters receive vocal support from the far-right. And the result of the poll was in keeping with that theme. Though she had steep competition from the Nation of Islam's Louis Farrakhan, Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke and white-supremacist Richard Spencer, the person who received the most votes was Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.).

In a year in which armed white supremacists have attacked synagogues killing and wounding Jews at prayer, and in which thugs have turned violent attacks on ultra-Orthodox Jews in the Greater New York area a near daily occurrence, does Omar deserve the title?

You can make a good argument that, like the other publicity hounds that make "the Squad" of left-wing members of Congress, especially Reps. Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.) and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.), Omar has been given far too much attention by the national press. Yet it's hard to ignore a member of Congress with 1.8 million Twitter followers that spews anti-Semitic invective about Jews having dual loyalty and buying Congress to support Israel. Even harder to ignore is that fact that Omar and her allies were, despite their humble status on Capitol Hill as insignificant congressional freshmen, powerful enough to force House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to back off from efforts to censor Omar for her public anti-Semitism. And it can also be asserted that she and her colleagues have helped set the agenda for their party on issues like the Green New Deal, even if most House Democrats remain supportive of Israel rather than backers of BDS, as is the case with Omar and Tlaib.

Still, Omar deserves credit this week for illustrating not merely the hypocrisy of BDS, but how it treats Israel differently from other countries.

Omar was not alone in deploring President Donald Trump's order to have the U.S. military kill Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The IRGC runs Tehran's activities as the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism, and was responsible not only for torturing and killing Iranians who protested the regime, but also many thousands more in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. And, of course, they commanded attacks on Jews and Israelis. Omar also decried the president's announcement that the United States would step up economic sanctions against Iran, which aim to force the rogue regime to give up its nuclear program, and cease its terrorism and illegal missile production.

She tweeted: "This makes no sense. Sanctions are economic warfare."

That's actually true. Restrictions on commerce with Iran are a way, short of an actual shooting war, for the United States to hold the theocratic regime accountable for its behavior. And if you think such tactics are unfair and can, as Omar also asserted, cause hardships for those being sanctioned, then it is possible to argue that the United States should never employ the strategy for fear of causing hardship to the Iranian people.

Omar, however, doesn't oppose all sanctions. She has repeatedly endorsed the BDS movement against Israel. She thinks the one Jewish state on the planet, which happens to be the only democracy in the Middle East, as well as the only nation in the region where all faiths may freely be observed and respected, should be subjected to the same kind of economic warfare.

Contrary to the claims of some of its apologists, the purpose of BDS is not to pressure Israel's government to change its policies. As

the founders of the movement and its leading advocates in the United States have repeatedly made clear, its goal is to eliminate Israel.

So if you support BDS against Israel but oppose sanctions against Iran—a brutal theocracy that oppresses its own people, seeks to impose its brand of Islamist tyranny on others via terrorism, and is dedicated to the goal of destroying Israel—then you are not merely being hypocritical. Singling out Jews for treatment that you think not even one of the worst governments on earth deserves is a form of bias that is indistinguishable from anti-Semitism.

While the designation of Omar as “Antisemite of the Year” was ignored by most people, her willingness to oppose sanctions on Iran while advocating them against Israel is something that should cause other House members to shun both the congresswoman and fellow BDS supporter Tlaib as purveyors of hate. Instead, they continue to be treated as not merely respectable members of Congress, but also lauded by much of the media and pop-culture outlets as minority role models and opinion leaders.

Ilhan Omar may not have committed murder, but by helping to legitimize the kind of double standards and biases that define anti-Semitism, she is deserving of the same sort of opprobrium dished out to other extremists. The failure of the media to do so is an illustration of how Jew-hatred has sadly become mainstreamed. (JNS Jan 9)

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### **Why do Likud Voters Support Netanyahu? Thank the Supreme Court** By Evelyn Gordon

Although Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was favored to win his Likud party’s leadership contest on Dec. 26, the magnitude of his victory surprised many observers. Despite his three indictments for corruption and his failure to form a government following two elections last year, 72 percent of primary voters chose him over a popular and respected challenger. To understand why, it’s worth examining a High Court of Justice ruling handed down the following week.

The court was asked by 67 academics, former defense officials and cultural figures to rule that due to the indictments, Netanyahu should be barred from forming the next government, even if Likud and its allies win the most Knesset seats in March’s election. The justices dismissed the petition as premature since the election results may render the question moot.

What they emphatically didn’t say, however, is that who the voters elect is none of their business, given that no existing law bars someone under indictment from forming a government, and the only relevant legislation implies the opposite: It requires serving prime ministers to resign if convicted.

Instead, by deeming the petition “premature” rather than non-justiciable, they made it clear that they would consider overturning the voters’ decision should the election results make the question relevant. Indeed, the ruling said so explicitly: The petition raises “an important issue of principle” that “touches on the principle of the rule of law, the integrity of elected officials and the public’s trust in government institutions ... and therefore, there’s nothing to the respondents’ argument that the issue isn’t justiciable.”

Though I backed Netanyahu’s challenger in the primary, you shouldn’t have to be a Netanyahu fan to find this ruling shocking. The right to choose the country’s leadership in free and fair elections is the most fundamental democratic right of all. Thus the fact that the court considers itself entitled to overturn the voters’ choice without any authorization in law, merely because it disapproves of it, shows just how far Israel has slid down the slope from a democracy with a strong and independent court system to a judicial dictatorship. And while the primary predated this ruling, thousands of others over the past three decades have sent the same message.

Time after time, the legal system has vetoed elected governments’ policies not because they violated any law, but because the attorney general or the justices deemed them “unreasonable”—a decision actual democracies leave to the voters. Or contrary to some “right” that not only doesn’t exist in Israel’s Basic Laws, which the court (wrongly) treats as a constitution, but was explicitly omitted from them. Or contrary to “the fundamental values on which our system is based,” even when said values, like judicial supremacy, are diametrically opposed to the actual principles of Israel’s system of government

(which, like its British model, is based on parliamentary supremacy).

Moreover, the legal establishment has a long and sordid record of submitting unwarranted indictments to oust ministers it dislikes. One particularly egregious example was Yaakov Neeman, who was forced to resign as justice minister in 1996 after being charged with perjury over minor mistakes in affidavits—like a date being given as 1992, rather than 1991—that he himself discovered, disclosed and corrected. As the trial court said in dismissing the case, indicting people for perjury over errors they voluntarily corrected would simply discourage others from admitting mistakes, thereby impeding the courts’ ability to discover the truth.

Thus it’s no surprise that only 55 percent of all Israeli Jews trust the Supreme Court, with a whopping 78 percent of rightists deeming it politically biased, while fewer than half of all Israeli Jews trust the attorney general. And this, judging by discussions with fellow Likud members before the vote, was a key issue in the primary.

Netanyahu didn’t win in a landslide because he has been an excellent prime minister, though most Likud voters (myself included) think he has. And he certainly didn’t win because Likud voters approve the behavior that led to his indictment; they find it repulsive, even if many doubt that it’s criminal (I’m in the minority in considering one of the indictments serious).

Rather, the most common argument I heard was simply this: “Ousting Netanyahu would mean letting them win.” In other words, Netanyahu the man no longer matters; he has simply become a symbol of the much larger struggle to regain the fundamental democratic rights that the legal establishment—the courts, the attorney general and the prosecution—has steadily usurped over the past three decades.

It may seem strange that voters should make their stand over a man facing serious indictments for corruption. But he has become the focal point of this battle precisely because the issue his case poses is so clear and simple: Do voters still have the right to elect whomever they please, even if their choice appalls other Israelis? Or can the legal establishment use indictments to overturn their choice of prime minister, even though that the law gives it no such right?

In fact, ironically enough, the charges against him actually increase Netanyahu’s value as a champion in this battle because they make legal reform vital to his own self-interest. Previously, many politicians, including Netanyahu himself, feared to enact legal reforms because the aforementioned false indictments frequently targeted those who, like Neeman, sought to do so. But now, curbing the court’s power is Netanyahu’s only chance of escaping jail; otherwise, even if the Knesset grants him immunity from prosecution, the court will certainly overturn its decision.

Anyone who claims to care about “the rule of law” and views Netanyahu’s potential election as a devastating blow to it ought to think long and hard about this: Millions of Israelis are willing to vote for a possible criminal because they see it as their only chance of curbing the legal establishment’s takeover of Israel’s democracy.

Had the courts not so consistently substituted their own will for that of the voters, Israel would never have reached this pass. And unless its excesses are curbed, the situation will only get worse, regardless of who wins the next election. (JNS Jan 8)

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### **Soleimani, the Blob and the Echo Chamber** By Alex Joffe

A review of initial comments from well-known former officials and journalists shows that their sense of their own wisdom and indispensability is undiminished. Given their links with the Democratic presidential candidates, their comments offer not only a critique of the Trump administration but a foreshadowing of a potential Democratic administration.

The killing of Qassem Soleimani in Iraq on Friday by the United States will reverberate across the Middle East and the world for decades to come. The architect of Iran’s imperial expansion and its worldwide terror networks, including hundreds if not thousands of fatal attacks against American soldiers in Iraq, Soleimani was a unique and deadly figure. Iranian revenge attacks for his killing are inevitable. In the meantime, however, it is useful to examine reactions to his death from the interlocked American foreign policy and media apparatus.

Former Obama White House staffer Ben Rhodes introduced the term “the Blob” to refer to the shapeless and permanent bipartisan foreign policy establishment as a means of highlighting the Obama administration’s purportedly novel thinking. Like a shapeless iceberg, the Blob is mostly underwater (that is, unseen). It is comprised of hundreds of individuals inside and outside government, with the latter to be found mostly at policy organizations, think tanks, the media and academia before they cycle back into official positions.

Rhodes, a former speechwriter turned policy guru, also noted regarding journalists that “the average reporter we talk to is 27 years old, and their only reporting experience consists of being around political campaigns. That’s a sea change. They literally know nothing.” Together, these journalists formed what Rhodes labeled the “Echo Chamber,” which could be relied upon to “[say] things that validated what we had given them to say.”

This handy description is Rhodes’s only useful and lasting contribution to American foreign policy. Indeed, as if to illustrate both the permanence of the Blob/Echo Chamber revolving door and its vacuity, Rhodes currently runs an anti-Trump policy organization and appears frequently as a television commentator.

What then do the Blob and the Echo Chamber have to say about Soleimani’s death? The medium known as Twitter, with its short, impulsive and poorly thought out messages, provides a unique window into what people are really thinking. Rhodes himself, who was fundamentally invested in the Obama administration’s Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear deal, was quick to respond on Twitter to the news of Soleimani’s death.

Among his comments: “Trump may have just started a war with no congressional debate. I really hope the worst case scenario doesn’t happen but everything about this situation suggests serious escalation to come,” and “Iraq and Lebanon are just two of the places where we have to be very concerned about the potential Iranian response which could play out over time — not to mention Iran’s nuclear program. Again, QS was as bad a guy as there was, but what is the strategy here?”

Former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power also condemned the action by pointing to the uncertainty of the outcome, and specifically the allegedly precipitous manner in which the decision was made: “Trump is surrounded by sycophants (having fired those who’ve dissented). He has purged Iran specialists. He has abolished NSC processes to review contingencies. He is seen as a liar around the world.”

Lesser-known Blob members also weighed in. Kelly Magsamen, currently of the Center for American Progress and formerly principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for Asian and Pacific security affairs, similarly lamented, “I worked the Iran account for years at the NSC under two Presidents. I’m honestly terrified right now that we don’t have a functioning national security process to evaluate options and prepare for contingencies. God help us.”

Finally, Brett McGurk, former deputy assistant secretary of state for Iraq and Iran, now of Stanford University, said, “We need to presume we are now in a state of war with Iran... and that is not something that the Trump administration appears to have been prepared for.”

The Echo Chamber expressed similar concerns. Charter member Ezra Klein of Vox fretted, “The question isn’t whether Soleimani was a bad guy. The questions are: 1. What are the likely consequences of his assassination? 2. Do you trust the Trump administration to have planned for those consequences and to manage what comes next?”

Higher up on the Echo Chamber food chain, The New York Times’s Max Fisher’s expressed concerns are not about the decision-making process but about the nature of the Iranian-American relationship: “If reports are true, assassinating Iran’s Soleimani would represent a major, overt act of war. Functionally and legally, it’s not a ‘risk of war’ or ‘tantamount to war.’ It is war outright, and against a country that has invested years of preparation into enduring just that.”

Washington Post columnist and CIA leak conduit David Ignatius warned ominously about “An eerie feeling reading this news, reminiscent of when the US invaded Iraq in 2003 to topple a brutal dictator—and set in motion a chain of consequences for which America was utterly unprepared.”

Finally, offering an academic’s distorted view of both history and

contemporary reality, Harvard political scientist Stephen Walt said, “Just imagine how we’d react if some adversary assassinated a member of the Joint Chiefs, an Undersecretary of State, or the DNI.”

Scores of similar examples are easily found. But what does this exercise in collecting ephemera suggest?

One observation is that the Blob is uniquely and absolutely committed to its own indispensability in the decision-making process. Only they—in this case meaning Obama veterans—have the wisdom and patience to analyze situations and predict outcomes. When they act, as in the killing of Osama bin Laden, the action is wise; when others act, killing a no less dangerous terrorist mastermind, the action is foolish.

Another is that the Blob has a (supposedly) deep, if newly discovered, respect for the American Constitution and the apparent need to consult Congress in order to take action against a designated terrorist and his associates. That this was not a concern with regard to the JCPOA is of little consequence. Similar complaints have been expressed by others regarding the Soleimani killing and the malleable fiction of “international law,” as opposed to the Obama administration’s immense global targeted killing program.

The concern involves who is pulling the trigger, not why. At one level the criticisms are inescapably partisan; Democrats complaining about the Trump administration is the first and only law of American politics today. Parallel complaints regarding process, wisdom and ultimate fitness for office were leveled at Obama by Republicans, though they hardly reached the current level of antipathy directed toward Trump.

The question becomes not whether Trump’s policy decision was correct, but whether the critics adopting tones of ill-disguised hatred are themselves to be trusted. The responses to the Soleimani killing have additional relevance not simply because of their partisanship and self-referential elevation of expertise, which illustrate if nothing else the processes of elite groupthink. They anticipate a possible future, namely the way Democratic presidential candidates uniformly disapproved of the killing.

Current frontrunner and former Obama Vice President Joe Biden likened the act to throwing “a stick of dynamite into a tinderbox.” Elizabeth Warren acknowledged that “Soleimani was a murderer, responsible for the deaths of thousands, including hundreds of Americans,” but said “this reckless move escalates the situation with Iran and increases the likelihood of more deaths and new Middle East conflict.” Finally, Bernie Sanders warned that “Trump’s dangerous escalation brings us closer to another disastrous war in the Middle East that could cost countless lives and trillions more dollars.”

The parallels between the Blob/Echo Chamber and the Democratic candidates illustrate their interlocking nature. Obama veterans would return under Biden or Warren, while Sanders would likely bring in ideologue outsiders, such as his foreign policy adviser, progressive blogger Matt Duss. But they also illustrate common intellectual foundations, the elevation of process and celebration of purported expertise, the search for predictability, and the corresponding avoidance of disruption. Readiness to be gamed by canny adversaries is thus built in.

The candidates’ responses are a foreshadowing of a future Democratic administration. Like most members of the Blob and the Echo Chamber, the candidates have already stated that they would recommit to the JCPOA (which of course may no longer be possible). They would likely return to the Obama policy of indulging Iran’s “legitimate regional aspirations,” “security concerns” and revolutionary Islamic government, even as they offer tepid criticism, as a means of restructuring American relations away from Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Still, every new administration has to deal with the reality bequeathed to it by its predecessors. The killing of Soleimani may or may not upend the chessboard of Iranian imperial expansion, much less unleash World War III. As the new reality unfolds, the question remains whether experts on all sides of the equation are willing to rethink their premises and contend with the world as it is now. First indications are not promising. (JNS / BESA Jan 6)

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