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Commentary...

Hypocrisy and Double Standards over the Massacre of the Druze

By Melanie Phillips

The hypocrisy, double standards and malevolence are off the scale. Syrian government forces carried out a four-day massacre this week of the Druze minority in Suweida, a Druze town in southern Syria. An estimated 300 Druze were slaughtered in a series of barbaric atrocities perpetrated by troops loyal to the new Syrian president, Abu Mohammed al-Julani.

About 150,000 Druze live in northern Israel. These are loyal and brave Israeli citizens. Many have served in the Israel Defense Forces, and several have lost their lives in the service of the Jewish state. Druze communities also serve as a strategic buffer zone for Israel on the Golan Heights and in Syria.

As a result, Israel went into Syria to defend them. The IDF conducted dozens of airstrikes targeting Syrian government troop convoys, and also struck the Syrian defense ministry headquarters in Damascus and sites near the presidential palace. Under this pressure, a ceasefire was agreed, and Syrian forces withdrew from Suweida.

The attacks on the Druze were barbaric. There were reportedly beheadings and rapes; children were murdered in front of their parents.

The troops publicly humiliated their male victims by shaving off their beards, which are religiously significant to them, in a chilling echo of what the Nazis did to the Jews of Germany.

Yet this slaughter elicited no condemnation from those who, day in and day out, signal their own supposed virtue by falsely accusing Israel of war crimes. Faced with the evidence of a horrific attempt to exterminate the Druze, demonstrators who have been screaming about Israel's "genocide" for the past 21 months were conspicuously absent from the streets and campuses.

The likes of Amnesty and Human Rights Watch were silent. Al-Julani's troops reportedly slaughtered the entire staff at Suweida's hospital along with their patients. Yet from those who falsely accuse Israel of targeting hospitals in Gaza in order to kill patients and staff—and who wickedly ignore the fact that Hamas has turned them into terrorist hubs and thus made them into legitimate military targets—there was only silence.

Astoundingly, these people instead blamed Israel—the only country that went to the aid of the Druze—for attacking Syria. António Guterres, the U.N. secretary-general, posted on X that he condemned the killing of any civilians, omitted to place responsibility on al-Julani's forces and instead blamed Israel for defending the Druze.

Various media outlets reported these atrocities as "tit for tat" skirmishes between the Druze and Bedouin tribes. Even the Trump administration bafflingly described what happened as a "misunderstanding" between Israel and Syria that had somehow gotten out of hand.

The perversity of all this reaction was hardly surprising. Much of it was wrapped up in a deep animus against Israel and the Jewish people, which is its own dark and terrifying story.

Something else, however, was at work here—and that was the rush that took place to embrace al-Julani, a former member of Al-Qaeda and ISIS who had been imprisoned by the Americans from 2006 to 2011, as a force for good.

Despite al-Julani's blood-soaked jihadi past, world leaders queued up for a picture of them shaking his hand. U.S. President Donald Trump declared him a "handsome guy," delisting his militia, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, as a terrorist entity and lifting sanctions on it.

All the new president had needed to do was trim his beard, don sharply-cut Western clothes, replace his nom de guerre of al-Julani by Ahmad al-Sharaa and declare that he wanted to join the Abraham Accords—and he was miraculously transformed from a depraved fanatic into an invaluable regional player.

This required his new fans to believe that one day, al-Julani thought that he had a mission from God to slaughter infidels, but the next day, that belief had conveniently vanished. Much more likely was that he had expeditiously parked his

Islamism, following the Islamic doctrine of taqiyya or mandated lying for Islam.

Western leaders don't know about or understand such things because they choose to shut their minds completely to the realities of the Islamic world and the fanatical Islamist mindset. They view the world through a Western prism that depicts everyone from other cultures as being governed, as they themselves are, by reason and self-interest.

Secularists are unable to understand any religious mindset, which seems to them too ridiculous to take seriously. They believe accordingly that Islamists are driven to commit their terrible atrocities from oppression, dire poverty or despair. They can't grasp that, on the contrary, the jihadi ecstatically believes himself to be fulfilling a sacred duty in murdering unbelievers because this is the work of God.

Such Westerners accordingly seize upon any apparent confirmation that religious fanatics are deep down just like themselves. That's why they all swooned over al-Julani.

A reformed jihadist confirms their belief that Islamist mass murderers are, in fact, charming and delightful individuals who are simply thrilled to give up the beheading and raping and burning alive in order to hobnob with world leaders, swan around in official cars and leave all their youthful excesses behind.

So, goes this thinking, there's no need to be frightened by people like that at all. They're basically fine. All they need is to be given a chance.

This same fantasy generated the disastrous Western attitude towards the Arab war of extermination against the Jewish homeland in Israel. The West's insistence on dividing the land in a "two-state solution" derives from its fixed belief that the conflict is over the division of the land.

It refuses to believe that this is a war of extermination because that seems so utterly pointless; it makes no sense to the Western mind that can only think in terms of cause and effect.

That's also one reason why the West finds it so difficult to understand antisemitism. Such persistent hatred of the Jews, goes this thinking, can only mean that they have done something really terrible to deserve it. The idea that people want to wipe out the Jews simply because such antisemites subscribe to a deranged belief that the Jews shouldn't exist at all runs smack up against the West's deficient grasp of human nature. Which means it doesn't understand antisemitism at all.

This failure in understanding led to the catastrophe of the Oslo Accords, the shattering impact of which has come into the sharpest possible relief as a result of the Hamas-led atrocities in Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, and the war that has followed.

This is because, under the thinking behind Oslo, the West told itself that first the Palestinian Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat and then his successor, Mahmoud Abbas, were no longer terrorists but had become statesmen.

Accordingly, the Oslo Accords gave the Palestinian Arabs the infrastructure of autonomous self-government. The result has been three decades of a Palestinian Authority that became a global engine for the destruction of Israel and incitement against Jews.

In a fascinating podcast interview with Dan Senor, Israel's minister of Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer, who has been at the forefront of Israel's engagement with the United States during the current war and who was involved in trying to resolve the Middle East conflict for decades before, noted that since Oslo, the P.A. has systematically poisoned a generation of Palestinian Arabs against Israel. A few days after Oct. 7, Dermer was sent a shocking video in which young Palestinian Arab children were talking about wanting to kill the Jews. The point was that these weren't children from Hamas-run Gaza but from the Palestinian area of Jerusalem.

“People don’t want to believe it,” said Dermer, “because they don’t want to stare this evil in the face and say it has to be dealt with.”

Dermer remains remarkably optimistic that the current war, which he says Israel will win, will offer, once it ends, a chance to “reset Oslo” by linking the reconstruction of Gaza with deradicalization so that Palestinian Arabs no longer want to murder Jews.

Whether or not his optimism about this is well-founded, teaching the blinkered West to stare evil in the face is scarcely less of an urgent challenge. (JNS Jul 17)

Hamas Leaders Rattled by Emergence of Clans Against Them in Gaza By Yaakov Lappin

Israel is reportedly actively arming and supporting multiple local, anti-Hamas clans and militias in the Gaza Strip as part of a broader effort to cultivate a new source of local power for the “day after” the war. According to assessments in Israel, Hamas has been significantly shaken by these efforts.

Recent reports indicate this policy, which includes Israeli support for a militia led by Yasser Abu Shabab in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, is expanding. According to a July 3 report by Ynet news, Israel is arming and coordinating with two additional clans: the Khalas clan, operating in Gaza City’s Shejaiya neighborhood, and a faction led by Yasser Khanidak in Khan Yunis.

This effort represents a significant attempt to reshape the political-security landscape of a post-war landscape. Brig. Gen. (ret.) Hanan Geffen, a former commander of the Israel Defense Forces elite Unit 8200 intelligence unit, told JNS in recent days that Israel is trying to learn and apply lessons from past, negative experiences with setting up groups.

“We have had a bad experience over the years with groups we tried to establish under Israeli auspices,” Geffen told JNS. “The very fact of Israeli sponsorship causes the Palestinian public to be wary and not accept them, to present them as traitors, and therefore, these groups have been condemned in various ways over the years. So history is not encouraging.”

Despite this, Geffen believes that the current situation in the coastal enclave is unprecedented and may offer a new opportunity, rooted in the specific demographics of Gaza. He explained that the Strip is composed of three main populations: the original residents; Bedouin tribes who arrived from Sinai; and a very large population of refugees from 1948 who came to dominate Gaza.

“The descendants of refugees from the camps took over the Strip. In the end, Hamas took power,” Geffen said.

“If we reach a situation where Hamas—that is, the refugees in the Gazan translation—to a point where they understand that they caused a terrible disaster for Gaza, for 2 million people who do not see reconstruction on the horizon, if they see this and it penetrates their consciousness, then groups like Abu Shabab and others who say, ‘We are coming to save you from the catastrophe,’ may establish a base to exist and may survive,” he assessed.

“From Israel’s perspective, this is currently the preferred solution, because nobody wants Hamas, and nobody wants the [Palestinian] Authority because the Authority itself is a completely irrelevant body that will not contribute anything,” Geffen added.

A key tool for empowering these new groups, he suggested, will be the massive reconstruction effort Gaza will require. By giving these new clan leaders control over local construction companies, labor recruitment, and security for building sites, Israel and its international partners could help create a new, organic power base that provides tangible benefits to the population, directly challenging Hamas’s political control, he argued. This effort to cultivate local alternatives to Hamas could be backed and financed by moderate Gulf states.

In a July 6 interview with Kan News, Yasser Abu Shabab stated that his Gaza militia had received weapons from Israel to stand up to Hamas, adding, “We tasted the bitterness and injustice that was caused to us by Hamas, and we took it upon ourselves to deal with this aggression. He added that his organization moves with ease in Rafah and is located in a zone under full IDF control. Abu Shabab described Hamas as “an inflated balloon. Hamas is fighting for its life. It’s going to a deal that is its last path towards the end of its existence, the end of the organization from a moral and physical perspective. Physically, I will pursue them.”

Geffen interpreted this interview as a message by Abu Shabab to both Hamas and to Gazans that he is receiving IDF protection. “This means that if there is a threat to me, the IDF, fighter jets, then someone will come to protect me. This seems to be what he is saying, because he is speaking in a very explicit and open manner.”

Geffen also added that there may be several other groups being supported by Israel in a hidden manner, potentially through the Shin Bet or the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories.

“These are processes. We see the beginning of them. We saw a report about the IDF reducing a cell of Gazans from a home, including one taken to the hospital. These appear to be people activated by the IDF or the Shin Bet. In other words, we can assess that there are various ways to integrate or cooperate with such activities, both through combat and through reconstructions.”

While Israel sees this as a path forward, the Palestinian Authority views it as a scenario in which it is excluded from the future of the Gaza Strip. Jibril Rajoub, the secretary-general of Fatah’s Central Committee, stated in a July 13 interview with an Egyptian television channel that any ceasefire that does not include a unified Palestinian leadership would be a “recipe for civil war.”

He accused Israel of “establishing and arming militias for the day after the war,” and claimed that a future Palestinian state must be based on “one authority, one gun, one law, one police officer” under the Palestinian Authority. Yet the gap between Rajoub’s comments and the reality in Gaza could not be greater.

Hamas, for its part, is treating the rival clans and militias as a direct threat. On July 3, Hamas issued a 10-day ultimatum, ordering Yasser Abu Shabab to surrender and face trial for treason.

Joe Truzman, a senior research analyst at the Washington D.C.-based Foundation for Defense of Democracies’ Long War Journal, stated, “Israel arming clans has not created enough pressure on Hamas to create a crisis for the group. While significantly degraded, Hamas continues to be the dominant organization in Gaza. ... The most pressing concern for Hamas is that several armed opposition groups will grow and become a considerable fighting force.”

Ahmad Sharawi, a research analyst at FDD, added that Hamas will leverage the “collaborator” label to justify its actions.

“Palestinian media has already turned against these individuals, labeling them as traitors and collaborators. Hamas, in turn, often justifies its crackdown on local dissidents by framing them as part of this alleged betrayal,” he said. (JNS Jul 17)

Reckoning Needed Between Terror-Sponsoring Qatar and United States By Natalie Ecanow

The emirate of Qatar continues to play an outsized role in the diplomatic efforts to end the war in Gaza. Over the weekend, these efforts once again failed to end the crisis and release the remaining 50 Israeli hostages taken by Hamas on October 7, 2023. This failure should not come as a surprise. Qatar has been a loyal patron to the terrorist group since 1999. The energy rich regime is more committed to the survival of its terror proxy in Gaza than it is to regional peace.

Qatar’s support for Hamas predates the terrorist organization’s takeover of Gaza in 2007. When Jordan expelled Hamas in 1999, Qatar offered sanctuary to the group, which had already become notorious for using suicide bombing attacks over the previous decade. Qatar’s foreign minister said that Hamas officials were “welcome as guests in Qatar” but that Doha would “not allow any political activity from the country [sic].”

Hamas chose to relocate to Syria. However, that arrangement lasted for only a decade. With the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, the terror group found its way back to Qatar.

This did not mean that Qatar pared back its support for the group. In 2003, Hamas leaders reportedly convened in Qatar after the IDF attempted to eliminate Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmed Yassin following a Hamas suicide bombing in Jerusalem that killed seven people, including two American citizens.

This episode led to one of the first efforts by Qatar to advocate for its terror proxy. The regime in Doha stepped in and tried to negotiate an end to the second intifada (a campaign of terrorist attacks led by Hamas in Israel from 2000 to 2005) by asking Israel to refrain from targeting the terrorist group’s leaders. At the time, Israeli media reported that “Qatar has some influence on Hamas’ decision-

making process, largely because a significant portion of the Islamic organization's funds come from Qatari sources."

In 2006, Hamas swept the Palestinian elections that followed Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza the previous year. After a political standoff with the rival Palestinian faction Fatah, Hamas waged a bloody civil war and seized control of Gaza in 2007. Qatar sided with Hamas and endorsed the terrorist group's power grab. In 2012, former Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani was the first world leader to visit Gaza under Hamas rule. The terrorist group welcomed Sheikh Hamad to the strip with fanfare. The government of Qatar pledged \$400 million in assistance to the terrorist-controlled government now overseeing Gaza. A spokesman for Israel's Foreign Ministry said the emir had "thrown peace under the bus" and that "most of the money that he's pouring in Gaza will go to Hamas pockets, directly or indirectly."

Thirteen years and five wars between Hamas and Israel later, Qatar's support for Hamas has not waned. Qatar has pumped an estimated \$1.8 billion into Hamas-run Gaza since 2012. In 2018, Doha began transferring an estimated \$30 million per month to Gaza to purportedly help the Hamas government subsidize civil servant salaries. The Israeli government approved the transfers in a failed bid to prevent future wars. This would come back to haunt the Israelis in the wake of the October 7, 2023, Hamas-led atrocities.

Israel paused the suitcase deliveries after Hamas dragged Israel into an eleven-day war in May 2021. But Qatar found a workaround: in cooperation with Egypt, Qatar began providing fuel to Gaza that Hamas authorities could sell for cash. Within months, however, normal Qatari cash deliveries resumed.

Since October 7, 2023, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has recovered documents in Gaza that refute Qatar's longstanding claim that no "aid has ever been delivered to Hamas's political or military wing." In 2019, Hamas political chief Ismail Haniyeh reportedly told Qatar's foreign minister that Doha was "Hamas's main artery" for fundraising. Haniyeh wrote to then-Hamas Gaza chief, Yahya Sinwar, in 2021 to tell him that Qatar's emir had "agreed in principle to supply the resistance discreetly," and that \$11 million had already "been raised from the emir for the leadership of the movement."

The documents support the Israeli Shin Bet internal security agency's finding that "the flow of money from Qatar to Gaza and its delivery to Hamas's military wing" enabled Hamas to amass offensive power and launch its October 7, 2023, attack. A group of veteran American and Israeli intelligence officials likewise concluded in April 2024 that "the vast majority of funds Qatar was sending to Gaza were going to assist Hamas's terror infrastructure, weapons, and training."

In 2012, as the terrorist group moved its headquarters from Syria to Qatar, Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh gushed that "all of Doha is an office" for Hamas, "thanks to the love and cordiality that the Qatari leaders have provided for the Palestinians."

To this day, Qatari officials maintain that the office came at the "request from Washington to establish indirect lines of communication with Hamas." However, an Obama White House official asserted that there was never any request from Washington. Even after the October 7, 2023, Hamas slaughter of 1,200 Israelis and the kidnapping of 251, Qatar has continued to allow Hamas to operate on its soil.

Inexplicably, the United States government continues to rely on Qatar to negotiate for the release of the hostages held by Hamas, even as the regime hosts the terror group's political elite — including Khaled Meshaal, whom the U.S. Department of Justice charged in September 2024 with terrorism, murder conspiracy, and sanctions evasion. Qatar, which was awarded the status of "major non-NATO ally" by Washington, has not offered to turn Meshaal over to U.S. authorities. This alone is a compelling reason for Congress to review Qatar's status.

Qatar has long been identified as a jurisdiction of illicit finance benefitting a wide range of terrorist groups beyond Hamas, including the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, Islamic State, and others. The Persian Gulf emirate has somehow also found a way to fund American institutions of higher education, as well as K-12 schools across the country. A reckoning is needed between our two countries. Congressional hearings, legislation, executive orders, and other measures to regulate relations between our countries are long overdue.

(Foundation for the Defense of Democracies Jul 13)

Tucker Carlson's Jeffrey Epstein Obsession is an Anti-Semitic Conspiracy Theory By Jonathan S. Tobin

Conspiracy theories aren't generally concocted out of whole cloth. They are almost always rooted in quite real and terrible events for which there are no conclusive and satisfactory answers.

That is why last week's announcement that the U.S. Department of Justice's attempt to take a deep dive into the records of the case of disgraced financier and sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein produced no great revelations. Neither did it reveal a much-sought-after list of celebrity "clients" for whom he procured underage victims. The lack of any definitive results was bound to be met with anger from an Internet audience already prone to disbelieve any official response. Predictably, it strengthened the conviction among those who had immersed themselves in this sordid story that this, too, was just more evidence of a grand plot to fool the public and cover up unspeakable crimes.

But just as predictable was the next step down the rabbit hole of Epstein conspiracy theories. Within days of Attorney General Pam Bondi admitting that no evidence in the FBI's files would allow the Justice Department to continue the investigation, former Fox News host Tucker Carlson doubled down on the idea of a government cover-up while speaking at the Turning Point USA conference in Tampa, Fla.

Not only was he willing to hurl such an accusation at an administration made up of his presumable political allies. He went further by claiming to an audience cheering his supposed courage in making such charges that Epstein was an agent of the government of Israel, whose vile actions were somehow part of an effort to blackmail politicians and celebrities. Unsatisfied with such slander, he also invoked the notion that the entire financial industry is some sort of scam—and attacked pro-Israel billionaire Bill Ackman for good measure.

Nor was Carlson alone in trying to make this about Israel and the Jews. Podcaster and former Fox News and NBC journalist Megyn Kelly, who is generally far more responsible than Carlson when it comes to flinging around conspiracy theories, echoed the allegation, also voicing the belief that Epstein was probably a Mossad agent.

Why are they—and their legions of imitators and followers—latching onto the idea that the Israeli government is at the heart of one of the most notorious sex crimes in recent history? The answer is obvious. For podcasters and social-media "influencers" who thrive only to the extent that they can feed their audiences' hunger not just for simple answers to complex problems but the kind of conspiratorial thinking that confirms their desire to view every bad thing as a diabolical plot, the Epstein case is a gift that never stops giving. To attach Israel to this sort of topic is a guarantee not only of millions of clicks on videos and podcasts, but also gives those saying such things an instant mass audience that is always willing to believe anything awful that can be said about the Jewish state or the Jews.

Two main points need to be acknowledged in discussing this topic.

One is that neither Carlson nor Kelly—nor anyone else talking about this publicly—has any tangible, concrete evidence of Israeli government involvement in Epstein's sex crimes. And they freely admit as much. All they have got are circumstantial allegations that they claim that "everyone" believes. That consists of the fact that the criminal was Jewish, involved in Jewish philanthropy and knew prominent Israelis. Add to that the fact that Robert Maxwell, the father of Epstein's one-time girlfriend/accomplice Ghislaine Maxwell, who is currently serving a 20-year prison term for conspiring to abuse minors, is alleged to have had ties with the Mossad some 40 years ago.

That's a lot of smoke. Yet after more than a decade of obsessive global interest in the case, no fire has been discovered.

And no denial from Israelis like former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, no matter how persuasive or authoritative, will ever silence the conspiracy-mongering. It's probably a mistake to even try.

The other is that attaching Israel, the Mossad or the Jews to this sort of a case is a classic trope of antisemitism, straight out of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, in which Jewish plots to suborn society via sexual subversion and shadowy manipulation of world leaders and governments play a prominent role.

That's why throwing out these sorts of charges is not merely run-

of-the-mill clickbait; it would be defamatory and irresponsible at any time. But in doing so now, they are self-consciously throwing fuel on the fire of a global surge in antisemitism that has been taking place since the Hamas-led Palestinian assault on southern Israeli communities on Oct. 7, 2023.

Carlson has been doing his best to stoke the global information war against Israel since then, using his podcast viewed by millions to platform smears of the Jewish state and more traditional antisemitic themes like Holocaust denial. A deep dive into the funding for his online network, where he has peddled pro-Iranian and pro-Qatar propaganda, as well as Russian disinformation, might (as some of his critics allege) reveal funding from nefarious sources like Qatar.

Having conspicuously failed to persuade President Donald Trump not to act to end the Iranian nuclear threat and work with Israel to destroy Tehran's program, as well as all of his predictions of disaster if he did having been proven to be laughably false, has not deterred Carlson from jumping right back onto the Jew-hatred horse after he fell. That's typical of antisemitic conspiracy theorists. The fact that he continues to claim that he is neither antisemitic nor anti-Israel is evidence not only of his shamelessness. It shows the way he is uniting with left-wing Jew-haters to try to move the Overton Window of acceptable discourse about Israel to make it safe to engage in antisemitism.

To note the way that the Epstein case is being used to legitimize Jew-hatred is not to deny the crimes that the perpetrator and his associates engaged in, or that there is a lot about the case that remains inexplicable and troubling.

That Epstein got off with a slap on the wrist when he was first charged with sex crimes has always had the odor of corruption, or at least misconduct on the part of the Florida prosecutors involved. The fact that he engaged in such conduct while hobnobbing with some of the most famous and powerful people in the world is also as outrageous and puzzling as how he got away with it for so long.

Then there is the question of Epstein's suicide in a New York City jail, which occurred under suspicious circumstances, with some calling it murder by those who wished to silence him.

It's also true that Epstein's fortune made on Wall Street gave him access to some of the most influential and famous people in the world, including former President Bill Clinton, Britain's Prince Andrew, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and a host of others. Some of them might have flown on his private planes on trips to his Caribbean island estate and/or participated in his crimes against underage girls.

Has evidence that would connect others to this scandal been destroyed? Maybe. It's also possible that Epstein was smart enough not to have a document with a "client's list" lying around to incriminate him and his pals. Scholar and Harvard Law school professor emeritus Alan Dershowitz, who was on Epstein's legal team when he was first charged with crimes but later left it—and was himself the target of some libelous accusations of participating in his client's wrongdoing that were ultimately walked back—has said that he knows the names of some of the guilty parties but can't speak because of confidentiality pledges imposed by the court.

It's likely that even revealing those names won't stop the conspiracy from continuing to metastasize. What we do know about the Epstein case is enough to fill a library of "true crime" books and documentaries. What we don't know about it—and at this point, likely never will—is equally vast.

Why do so many people care about the man and this case?

As with all true crime tales, it plays into the public's hunger for prurient stories of sexual misconduct. Like reality shows that portray dysfunctional or depraved conduct, the focus on these investigations allows audiences to be both titillated and to feel morally superior to those depicted.

More than that, it also taps into most people's understanding that even the best of political and legal systems are susceptible to corruption or injustice—particularly when, as was likely applicable to Epstein, a two-tier system in which the wealthy and well-connected are treated better than ordinary people. Throw in the belief by some that global elites are not merely wrong-headed and corrupt but devoted to the abuse of children, and you have a formula for an obsession.

That's why it would have been nice if the government files on the case could have ended some of the wild speculation.

A big part of the problem now is the fact that three of the figures who hold positions of authority in the Department of Justice were, seemingly only yesterday, the ones who were engaged in spreading conspiracy theories about Epstein. That was true of Dan Bongino, a podcaster and media personality before his current appointment as deputy director of the FBI. The same could be said of the statements of Bondi and FBI director Kash Patel.

In February, Bondi told Fox News that an Epstein client list was on her desk to be reviewed. She also said that her department had obtained hours of video related to the case. In March, the White House invited 15 far-right influencers to an event where they received white binders labeled "The Epstein Files: Phase 1"; however, the documents provided were already publicly available.

But having encouraged conspiracy theorists when it was the Biden administration that was supposedly covering up evidence, they were left with egg on their faces when it turned out they had nothing to back up their charges.

That's deeply embarrassing for Bondi, Patel and Bongino, who were forced to eat crow. It's also provoked a round of recriminations within the Trump administration and among conservatives on the Internet.

As a result, people like Carlson are now not only hyping long-running assertions that Epstein's crimes were just the tip of an enormous iceberg of egregious conspiratorial wrongdoing but are now aiming their fire at Trump. The president urged his supporters to move on from the story, leading some on the right to lament that he, too, has been co-opted by the global conspiracy. Some on the left are now alleging that he is being protected by the cover-up with the same irresponsible lack of proof that those on the right have used when speaking of the case.

There are two conclusions to be drawn from all this.

One is that, as appalling as the discourse about the Epstein case has been, it is, like the debate about Israel and Iran, further distancing the Trump administration from "woke right" antisemites like Carlson.

Perhaps Bondi will ultimately be dropped by Trump. But like the fact that he is disappointing those on the far right who imagined that "America First" meant an anti-Israel foreign policy, the White House's determination to move on from the obsessions of Carlson and his ilk continues to demonstrate that they have very little influence on the policies and actions of Trump 2.0.

There are strong arguments to be made that, as bad as Epstein's crimes were and as Trump himself has now said, other important threats to America and the West are higher priorities. We might like to know for sure who did what and with whom on Epstein's plane and island. But for the government and the media to be chasing their tails seeking answers to questions that might have no conclusive answers on an old scandal is not a good use of anyone's time.

It's also true that it won't stop the conspiracy theorists or the antisemites from continuing to promote the idea that the Epstein case demonstrates that Israel or the Jews were promoting sexual crimes and then hiding them. Like the assassination of John F. Kennedy and other such fodder for those who dwell in the fever swamps, the Epstein case will live on and continue to feed on itself for the foreseeable future.

There was never a chance that even the Trump administration's admission that the case is closed was going to satisfy those who are up to their necks in wild theories. Telling them that there is no "there" there was, no matter the truth of the matter, never going to silence the doubters or stop scoundrels from seeking to link it to hatred for Israel.

As with his promotion of Holocaust denial, Carlson's stance that he is "just asking questions" about Epstein is disingenuous. While he will claim that he is being silenced even after he shouts his unsubstantiated charges to huge audiences, the time is long past to stop speaking of him and his "woke right" associates as if they aim to seek the truth about Epstein, Israel, Iran or anything else. Like the virus of antisemitism itself, unscrupulous hatemongers may always be with us. While it will never be possible to conclusively discredit those who spread conspiracy theories aimed at harming Israel and the Jews to those willing to swallow their smears, it's incumbent on decent people to stop treating Carlson as a credible source of information or a representative of anything but the most irresponsible elements of society. (JNS Jul 14)