

Israel Moves Quickly to Exploit Paris Attacks

By [Ali Abunimah](#)

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After hesitations reportedly over cost and security, Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) finally decided to attend the “solidarity” march in Paris on Sunday, ostensibly in support of “free expression” and other “Western values.”

The march had been called in the wake of the attacks in Paris last week in which two gunmen murdered twelve people at the offices of the magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, and a third murdered four people at a Jewish grocery store.

Netanyahu evidently could not resist the publicity given that it is election season in Israel, and he would not want to risk being upstaged by political rivals who had announced their attendance, including such violent racists as foreign minister [Avigdor Lieberman](#) and economy minister [Naftali Bennett](#).

Netanyahu on the right in the [#ParisMarch](#) , yet sanctions wholesale murder of civilians in Gaza. pic.twitter.com/qr4wY7uejF

— Ahmed Kadry (@AhmedKadry) [January 11, 2015](#)

(Update: Israeli media are reporting that Netanyahu gatecrashed the march, defying a request from French President François Hollande that he stay away -- more below.)

Many people circulated images like the one above of world leaders linking arms with Netanyahu, noting the perverse irony of a march for such things as “freedom” and against “terrorism” being led by such figures, including the man who ordered the bloodbath in Gaza last summer.

As people in the Gaza ghetto continue to [die of cold](#) as a direct consequence of the destruction and ongoing siege, one observer in Gaza, Dima Eleiwa, had a wry explanation for why the leaders embracing Netanyahu have kept silent about their ordeal:

We’re not French enough.

— Dima Eleiwa (@DimaEleiwa) [January 11, 2015](#)

Gaza writer [Ayah Bashir](#) asked poignantly:

We are dying literally in this prison! We are freezing! I haven’t seen electricity all day! Why do we have to endure all this suffering? [#Gaza](#)

— Ayah Bashir (@Ayah_Gaza) [January 10, 2015](#)

While Netanyahu was certainly playing to a domestic audience, his presence in Paris is also part of Israel's swift move to capitalize on the horror in France on a number of fronts: to attack the Palestinians, to sharpen the dangerous discourse of a "war of civilizations" and to speed up the population transfer of Jews from Europe.

Jews out of Europe?

As [I've written previously](#), Israel has a long-term goal of transferring France's half-million-strong Jewish population to Israel as part of its effort to counter the so-called "demographic threat" from Palestinians.

In this context, the horrifying anti-Semitic murders in the Jewish supermarket, like previous attacks on Jews, are a boon for Israeli officials "[excited](#)" by the resulting exodus of some Jews who fear remaining in France.

Netanyahu immediately seized on the attacks to press the message home, tweeting: "To all the Jews of France, all the Jews of Europe, Israel is not just the place in whose direction you pray, the state of Israel is your home."

To all the Jews of France, all the Jews of Europe, Israel is not just the place in whose direction you pray, the state of Israel is your home

— בנימין נתניהו (@netanyahu) [January 10, 2015](#)

Israeli politician [Yair Lapid](#) upped the ante, [declaring](#), "I don't want to speak in terms of Holocaust, but ... European Jewry must understand that there is just one place for Jews, and that is the State of Israel."

Netanyahu, Israeli daily *Haaretz* [reported](#), is setting up a "special ministerial committee" that "will convene next week to discuss steps to encourage immigration from France and from Europe in general."

Understandable fear

The horror and fear that attacks like the ones in Paris and the 2012 murders at a Jewish school in Toulouse generate are real. Jewish communities in France understandably want to put their safety first.

But to leap from these - thankfully rare - attacks to the conclusion that all Jews must leave France and even Europe is not an obvious step. And it is a dangerous and drastic one.

When is it anti-Semitism?

Recall that immigrants and their European-born descendants from Muslim-majority countries are routinely accused by those who hate and fear them of "refusing to integrate" in Europe - this was an [accusation](#) leveled by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, among many others.

Does Hollande endorse or oppose Netanyahu's call for Jewish population transfer from France?

— Ali Abunimah (@AliAbunimah) [January 11, 2015](#)

By the same token, those who say that Jews must leave Europe for their own safety are saying in effect that it is impossible for Jews to integrate and ever be safe in their home countries.

The idea that Jews are always alien and that hatred against them is eternal and immutable – as opposed to being created and conditioned by contemporary politics and racist discourses in which Israel, among others, participates – is a fundamentally anti-Semitic one.

If French President François Hollande said that France is not the home of the Jews and they should leave to their “real” home, people would correctly understand that as anti-Semitic.

But when Netanyahu makes the same declaration, it is called Zionism.

It is not just critics of Israel who understand – at least implicitly – the [tacit alliance between anti-Semitism and Zionism](#) – but many European Jews themselves.

Rabbi Menachem Margolin, the director of the European Jewish Association, [described by Haaretz](#) as “the largest advocate for the Jewish organizations and communities in Europe,” sharply criticized Netanyahu’s latest exhortations on Jews to abandon France.

Margolin said he regretted that “after every anti-Semitic attack in Europe, the Israeli government issues the same statements about the importance of *aliyah* [immigration to Israel], rather than employ every diplomatic and informational means at its disposal to strengthen the safety of Jewish life in Europe.”

(Update: An Israeli official source told Israel’s Channel 2 that the French had wanted Netanyahu to stay away from Paris precisely out of fear that, as [Haaretz put it](#), the Israeli prime minister “would take advantage of the event for campaign purposes and make speeches, especially about the Jews of France. Such statements, the Elysée Palace feared, would hurt the demonstration of solidarity the French government was trying to promote as part of dealing with the terror attacks.” Netanyahu’s defiance, according to [Haaretz](#), has deeply angered Hollande, who “got up from his seat and made an early exit” when Netanyahu rose to speak at a memorial ceremony at the Paris Grand Synagogue.)

Another future

Israel promotes a future in which the possibility of coexistence and transcending current political and politico-religious antagonisms is impossible, and in which Jews have no future in Europe. Instead it invites them to decamp to a region where, Israel insists, they will be surrounded by hostile and bloodthirsty Palestinians, other Arabs and Muslims.

Yet we did not have to peer into a crystal ball to see the alternative to Zionism’s dystopic future. It was tragically embodied in the words of the brother of Ahmed Merabet, the French police officer – a Muslim – slain by the *Charlie Hebdo* attackers.

“I am now telling all racists, Islamophobes and anti-Semites that one must not confuse extremists with Muslims,” an emotional Malek Merabet [told a press conference](#) on Saturday.

“Stop mixing things up, starting wars, burning mosques and synagogues.”

The alternative, then, is solidarity in the face of the racism and bigotry that are generated and perpetuated by the murderous global wars the leaders marching in Paris insist are necessary for our safety.

This solidarity was also embodied in the exemplary actions of Lassana Bathily, the Muslim immigrant worker from Mali, who saved lives at the Jewish supermarket.

Bathily has been [hailed as a hero](#) for leading customers in the Hyper Cacher Jewish supermarket to hide in a cold store where they were safe from the murderer.

Bathily's religion and national origin ought not to have to be remarked upon, but in this moment where once again Muslims are being collectively blamed, his action was an important reminder that human solidarity can and does cross all artificial lines of division.

Smearing Palestinians

Sadly, Israel is unlikely to get the message. Its propaganda apparatus immediately went into action to tar Palestinians with the Paris attacks.

On Saturday, the Israeli Government Press Office sent out an email to journalists in the name of the "Prime Minister's Media Adviser."

It included this screenshot from the Facebook page of the Palestinian publication *Alresalah*.



الرسالة نت
صورة منتشرة عبر صفحات التواصل الإجتماعي عن
منفذي عملية الصحيفة الفرنسية والذين قتلوا مساء
اليوم.
من اليمين امادوا كويبالي ، شريف وسعيد كواشي.

The Israeli government email claimed that the screenshot "is a post from the Facebook page of 'Al-Rasalah,' [sic] a Hamas publication from yesterday evening ... featuring photographs of the three terrorists who were eliminated in Paris. The caption reads: 'The *shahidim* [martyrs] who were dispatched by God, the heroes of the raid in Paris.'"

In fact, Arabic speakers who look at the screenshot will note that across the image in barely

legible red script are indeed words praising the three killers. But there is absolutely no indication that these were the words or opinions of *Alresalah*.

The caption provided by *Alresalah* states only the following, making clear they were not the authors of the montage: "Image disseminated on social media sites of those who carried out the attack on the French publication and who were killed this evening. From right to left, Amadou Coulibaly, Cherif and Said Kouachi."

Alresalah, in its own words, pointedly does not call the men "martyrs" or "heroes." This is not surprising since Hamas itself [strongly condemned](#) the attack in Paris.

But the misleading Israeli propaganda is part of an ongoing effort to justify oppression of Palestinians by demonizing them. This is similar to Israel's infamous "[Hamas is ISIS](#)" propaganda as Israeli warplanes were slaughtering civilians in Gaza.

Alresalah has apparently removed the post from its Facebook page.

Israel's dangerous and exploitative antics recall the words of Netanyahu on 11 September 2001, when asked what the attacks on the United States that day meant for US-Israeli relations.

"[It's very good](#)," he said, hoping that the unfolding horror in New York, Washington, DC and Pennsylvania would "generate immediate sympathy" *for Israel*.

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