

Jewish Groups that Aid Israel's War Crimes Can't Deny All Responsibility for Those Crimes

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Here is something that can be said with great confidence. It is racist - antisemitic, if you prefer - to hold Jews, individually or collectively, accountable for Israel's crimes. Jews are not responsible for Israel's war crimes, even if the Israeli state presumes to implicate Jews in its crimes by falsely declaring it represents all Jews in the world.

Very obviously, it is not the fault of Jews that Israel commits war crimes, or that Israel uses Jews collectively as a political shield, exploiting sensitivities about the historical suffering of Jews at the hands of non-Jews to immunise itself from international opprobrium.

But here is something that can be said with equal certainty. Israel's apologists - whether Jews or non-Jews - cannot deny all responsibility for Israel's war crimes when they actively aid and abet Israel in committing those crimes, or when they seek to demonise and silence Israel's critics so that those war crimes can be pursued in a more favourable political climate.

Such apologists - which sadly seems to include many of the community organisations in Britain claiming to represent Jews - want to have their cake and eat it.

They cannot defend Israel uncritically as it commits war crimes or seek legislative changes to assist Israel in committing those war crimes - whether it be Israel's latest pummelling of civilians in Gaza, or its executions of unarmed Palestinians protesting 15 years of Israel's blockade of the coastal enclave - and accuse anyone who criticises them for doing so of being an antisemite.

But this is exactly what has been going on. And it is only getting worse.

Upsurge in antisemitism?

As a ceasefire was implemented late last week, bringing a temporary let-up in the bombing of Gaza by Israel, pro-Israel Jewish groups in the UK were once again warning of an upsurge of antisemitism they attributed to a rapid growth in the number of protests against Israel.

Hmm. Pro-Israel groups say there's been a surge of antisemitism in the UK because of the large numbers attending protests against Israel killing Palestinians in Gaza: 'Demos are being held all over the country every day about this issue' <https://t.co/oPxFs7GcOF>

— Jonathan Cook (@Jonathan_K_Cook) [May 20, 2021](#)

These groups have the usual powerful allies echoing their claims. British prime minister Boris Johnson met community leaders in Downing Street on Thursday pledging, as Jewish News [reported](#), “to continue to support the community in the face of rising antisemitism attacks”.

Those Jewish leaders included Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, a supporter of Johnson who played a part in [helping him](#) win the 2019 election by renewing the evidence-free antisemitism smears against the Labour party days before voting. It also included the Campaign Against Antisemitism, which was founded specifically to [whitewash](#) Israel’s crimes during its 2014 bombardment of Gaza and has ever since been vilifying all Palestinian solidarity activism as antisemitism.

My latest: Anti-Palestinian bigotry from a self-styled antisemitism watchdog is the latest move to dress up bullying and threats as victimhood <https://t.co/KRaPEuA1jy>

— Jonathan Cook (@Jonathan_K_Cook) [May 12, 2020](#)

In attendance too was the Jewish Leadership Council, an umbrella organisation for Britain’s main Jewish community groups. In an [article](#) in Israel’s Haaretz newspaper on this supposed rise in antisemitism in the UK, the JLC’s vice-president, Daniel Korski, set out the ridiculous, self-serving narrative these community groups are trying to peddle, with seemingly ever greater success among the political and media elite.

Popular outrage over Gaza

Korski expressed grave concern about the proliferation of demonstrations in the UK designed to halt Israel’s bombardment of Gaza. During 11 days of attacks, more than 260 Palestinians were killed, including at least 66 children. Israel’s precision air strikes targeted more than a dozen hospitals, including the only Covid clinic in Gaza, dozens of schools, several media centres, and left tens of thousands of Palestinians homeless.

The sense of popular outrage at the Israeli onslaught was only heightened by the fact that Israel’s prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, had clearly engineered a confrontation with Hamas at the outset to serve his immediate personal interests: preventing Israeli opposition parties from uniting to oust him from power.

In his naked personal calculations, Palestinian civilians were sacrificed to help Netanyahu hold on to power and improve his chances of evading jail as he stands trial on corruption charges.

Of the ceasefire, Israel says it has met its 'goals': over 230 killed in Gaza,

including 65 children; hospitals wrecked; tens of thousands homeless; electricity and water in even shorter supply – and most importantly, Netanyahu has scuppered Israeli opposition efforts to oust him

— Jonathan Cook (@Jonathan_K_Cook) [May 21, 2021](#)

But for Korski and the other community leaders attending the meeting with Johnson, the passionate demonstrations in solidarity with Palestinians are their main evidence for a rise in antisemitism.

‘Free Palestine’ chants

These community organisations cite a few incidents that undoubtedly qualify as antisemitism – some serious, some less so. They include shouting “Free Palestine” at individuals because they are identifiable as Jews, something presumably happening mostly to the religious ultra-Orthodox.

But these Jewish leaders’ chief concern, they make clear, is the growing public support for Palestinians in the face of intensifying Israeli aggression.

Quoting David Rich, of the Community Security Trust, another Jewish organisation hosted by Johnson, the Haaretz newspaper reports that “what has really shaken the Jewish community ... ‘is that demos are being held all over the country every day about this issue’ [Israel’s bombardment of Gaza].”

Revealingly, it seems that when Jewish community leaders watch TV screens showing demonstrators chant “Free Palestine”, they feel it as a personal attack – as though they themselves are being accosted in the street.

One doesn’t need to be a Freudian analyst to wonder whether this reveals something troubling about their inner emotional life: they identify so completely with Israel that even when someone calls for Palestinians to have equal rights with Israelis they perceive it as a collective attack on Jews, as antisemitism.

Exception for Israel

Then Korski gets to the crux of the argument: “As Jews we are proud of our heritage and at the same time in no way responsible for the actions of a government thousands of miles away, no matter our feelings or connection to it.”

But the logic of that position is simply untenable. You cannot tie your identity intimately to a state that systematically commits war crimes, you cannot vilify demonstrations against those war crimes as antisemitism, you cannot use your position as a “Jewish community leader” to make such allegations more credible, and you cannot exploit your influence with world leaders to try to silence protests against Israel *and then* say you are “in no way responsible” for the actions of that government.

If you use your position to prevent Israel from being subjected to scrutiny over allegations of war crimes, if you seek to manipulate the public discourse with claims of antisemitism to create a more favourable environment in which those war crimes can be committed, then some of the blame for those war crimes rubs off on you.

That is how responsibility works in every other sphere of life. What Israel's apologists are demanding is an exception for Israel and for themselves.

Lobby with the UK's ear

In another revealing observation seeking to justify claims of an upsurge in antisemitism, Korski adds: "We don't see the same kind of outpouring of emotion when it comes to the Rohingya or the Uighurs or Syria, and it makes a lot of Jews feel this is about them [as Jews]."

But there are many reasons why there aren't equally large demonstrations in the UK against the suffering of the Rohingya and the Uighurs - reasons that have absolutely nothing to do with antisemitism.

The oppressors of the Rohingya and the Uighurs, unlike Israel, are not being generously armed by the British government or given diplomatic cover by Britain or being given preferential trade agreements by Britain.

How can British "enhanced military collaboration" with the IDF now be deemed legal? They just bombed Al Jazeera and AP's offices using the £500bn worth of arms Britain has sold them - with no conditions on use! [#FreePalestine](#)

— Paul Mason (@paulmasonnews) [May 15, 2021](#)

But equally importantly, the states oppressing the Rohingya and Uighurs - unlike Israel - don't have active, well-funded lobbies in the UK, with the ear of the prime minister. China and Myanmar - unlike Israel - don't have UK lobbies successfully labelling criticism of them as racism. Unlike Israel, they don't have lobbies that openly seek to influence elections to protect them from criticism. Unlike Israel, they don't have lobbies that work with Britain to introduce measures to assist them in carrying out their oppression.

The president of the Board of Deputies, Marie van der Zyl, for example, [pressed](#) Johnson at the meeting this week to classify all branches of Hamas, not just its military wing, as a terrorist organisation. That is Israel's wet dream. Such a decision would make it even less likely that Britain would be in a position to officially distance itself from Israel's war crimes in Gaza, where Hamas runs the government, and even more likely it would join Israel in declaring Gaza's schools, hospitals and government departments all legitimate targets for Israeli air strikes.

Pure projection

If you are lobbying to get special favours for Israel, particularly favours to help it commit war crimes, you don't also get to wash your hands of those war crimes. You are directly implicated in them.

David Hirsch, an academic at the University of London who has been closely connected to efforts to weaponise antisemitism against critics of Israel, especially in the Labour party under its previous leader Jeremy Corbyn, also tries to play this trick.

He tells Haaretz that antisemitism is supposedly "getting worse" because Palestinian

solidarity activists have been giving up on a two-state solution. “There used to be a struggle in Palestine solidarity between a politics of peace – two states living side by side – and a politics of denouncing one side as essentially evil and hoping for its total defeat.”

But what Hirsch is doing is pure projection: he is suggesting Palestinian solidarity activists are “antisemites” – his idea of evil – because they have been forced *by Israel* to abandon their long-favoured cause of a two-state solution. That is only because successive Israeli governments have refused to negotiate any kind of peace deal with the most moderate Palestinian leadership imaginable under Mahmoud Abbas – one that has eagerly telegraphed its desire to collaborate with Israel, even [calling](#) “security coordination” with the Israeli army “sacred”.

A two-state solution is dead because Israel made it dead not because Palestinian solidarity activists are more extreme or more antisemitic.

In calling to “Free Palestine”, activists are not demanding Israel’s “total defeat” – unless Hirsch and Jewish community organisations themselves believe that Palestinians cannot be free from Israeli oppression and occupation until Israel suffers such a “total defeat”. Hirsch’s claim tells us nothing about Palestinian solidarity activists, but it does tell us a lot about what is really motivating these Jewish community organisations.

It is these pro-Israel lobbyists, it seems, more than Palestinian solidarity activists, who cannot imagine Palestinians living in dignity under Israeli rule. Is that because they understand only too well what Israel and its political ideology of Zionism truly represent, and that what is required of Palestinians for “peace” is absolute and permanent submission?

Better informed

Similarly, Rich, of the Community Security Trust, says of Palestinian solidarity activists: “Even the moderates have become extremists.” What does this extremism – again presented by Jewish groups as antisemitism – consist of? “Now the movement [in solidarity with Palestinians] is dominated by the view that Israel is an apartheid, genocidal, settler-colonialist state.”

Or in other words, these pro-Israel Jewish groups claim there has been a surge in antisemitism because Palestinian solidarity activists are being influenced and educated by human rights organisations, like Human Rights Watch and Israel’s B’Tselem. Both recently wrote reports classifying Israel as an apartheid state, in the occupied territories and inside Israel’s recognised borders. Activists are not becoming more extreme, they are becoming better informed.

My latest: A new report by human rights group B'Tselem calling Israel an apartheid state will make it harder to smear Israel's critics as antisemites for arguing that the Jewish state is a racist endeavour <https://t.co/ubVRYd3nhj>

— Jonathan Cook (@Jonathan_K_Cook) [January 14, 2021](#)

And in making the case for a supposed surge in antisemitism, Rich offers another inadvertently revealing insight. He says Jewish children are suffering from online “abuse” – antisemitism – because they find it increasingly hard to participate on social media.

“Teenagers are much quicker to join social movements; we’ve just had Black Lives Matter, Extinction Rebellion, #MeToo – now Jewish kids find all their friends are joining this [Palestinian solidarity] movement where they don’t feel welcome or they are singled out because they’re Jewish.”

Fancifully, Rich is arguing that Jewish children raised in Zionist families and communities that have taught them either explicitly or implicitly that Jews in Israel have superior rights to Palestinians are being discriminated against because their unexamined ideas of Jewish supremacy do not fit with a pro-Palestinian movement predicated on equality.

This is as preposterous as it would have been, during the Jim Crow era, for white supremacist Americans to have complained of racism because their children were being made to feel out of place in civil rights forums.

Such assertions would be laughable were they not so dangerous.

Demonised as antisemites

Zionist supporters of Israel are trying to turn logic and the world upside down. They are inverting reality. They are projecting their own racist, zero-sum assumptions about Israel on to Palestinian solidarity activists, those who support equal rights for Jews and Palestinians in the Middle East.

As they did with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s definition, these Jewish groups are twisting the meaning of antisemitism, skewing it from a fear or hatred of Jews to any criticism of Israel that makes pro-Israel Jews feel uncomfortable.

As we watch these arguments being amplified uncritically by leading politicians and journalists, remember too that it was the only major politician to have demurred from this nonsensical narrative, Jeremy Corbyn, who became the main target – and victim – of these antisemitism smears.

Now these pro-Israel Jewish groups want to treat us all like Corbyn, demonising us as antisemites unless we fall silent even as Israel once again brutalises Palestinians.

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This essay first appeared on [Jonathan Cook’s blog](#).

Jonathan Cook won the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His books include “Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East” (Pluto Press) and “Disappearing Palestine: Israel’s Experiments in Human Despair” (Zed Books). His website is www.jonathan-cook.net.

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Featured image: ISRAELI BORDER POLICE OPERATING IN THE CITY OF LYDDA (LOD), MAY 11, 2021.

(PHOTO: TWITTER/@IL_POLICE)

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