

Truth and Consequences in the Gaza Invasion

"This Time We Went Too Far"

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This article is excerpted from Norman Finkelstein's important new book about the Gaza conflict, "This Time We Went Too Far" published this month by OR Books. To purchase a copy of the complete book please visit [OR Books](#). This book is not available from bookstores or other online retailers.

Public outrage at the Gaza invasion did not come out of the blue but rather marked the nadir of a curve plotting a steady decline in support for Israel. As polling data of Americans and Europeans, both Gentiles and Jews, suggest, the public has become increasingly critical of Israeli policy over the past decade. The horrific images of death and destruction broadcast around the world during and after the invasion accelerated this development. "The increased and brutal frequency of war in this volatile region has shifted international opinion," the British Financial Times editorialized one year later, "reminding Israel it is not above the law. Israel can no longer dictate the terms of debate."

One poll registering the fallout from the Gaza attack in the United States found that American voters calling themselves supporters of Israel plummeted from 69 per cent before the attack to 49 per cent in June 2009, while voters believing that the U.S. should support Israel dropped from 69 per cent to 44 per cent. Consumed by hate, emboldened by self-righteousness, and confident that it could control or intimidate public opinion, Israel carried on in Gaza as if it could get away with mass murder in broad daylight. But while official Western support for Israel held firm, the carnage set off an unprecedented wave of popular outrage throughout the world. Whether it was because the assault came on the heels of the devastation Israel wrought in Lebanon, or because of Israel's relentless persecution of the people of Gaza, or because of the sheer cowardice of the assault, the Gaza invasion appeared to mark a turning point in public opinion reminiscent of the international reaction to the 1960 Sharpeville massacre in apartheid South Africa.

In the Jewish diaspora official communal organizations with longstanding ties to Israel predictably lent blind support. But, at the same time, newly minted progressive Jewish organizations distanced themselves to a lesser or greater degree. Whereas in the past mainstream Jews actively supported Israeli wars, most registered ambivalence during the invasion, apart from a contracting older minority that came out swinging in Israel's defense, and an expanding younger minority that scathingly denounced it. Between the increasing estrangement of younger Jews from Israeli bellicosity and the increasing qualms of Jews generally about supporting it, the Gaza massacre signaled the break-up of hitherto blanket Jewish support for Israeli wars. In addition, whereas the antiwar demonstrations in most Western countries were ethnically heterogeneous (including significant numbers of Jews), the "pro"-Israeli demonstrations were composed almost exclusively of Jews.

The fact that active opposition to Israeli policy, say, on college campuses, has spread beyond the Arab-Muslim core towards the mainstream, whereas active support for Israel has shrunk to a fraction of the ethnic Jewish core, is a telling indicator of where things are headed. The era of the “beautiful” Israel has passed, it seems irrevocably, and the disfigured Israel that in recent years has replaced it in the public consciousness is a growing embarrassment. It is not so much that Israel’s behavior is worse than it was before, but rather that the record of that behavior has, finally, caught up with it.

The truth can no longer be denied or dismissed. The documentation of the Arab-Israeli conflict set out by respected historians fundamentally conflicts with the version popularized in the likes of Leon Uris’s *Exodus*. The evidence of Israeli human rights violations compiled by respected mainstream organizations cannot be reconciled with its vaunted commitment to “purity of arms.” The deliberations of respected judicial and political bodies cast severe doubt on Israel’s avowed commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. For a long while Israel’s “supporters” deflected the impact of this accumulating documentary record by wielding the twin swords of The Holocaust and the “new anti-Semitism.”

It was proposed that Jews could not be held to conventional moral/legal standards after the unique suffering they endured during World War II, and that criticism of Israeli policy was motivated by an ever-resurgent hatred of Jews. However, apart from the inevitable dulling that comes of overuse, these weapons proved much less efficacious once criticism of Israel broke into the mainstream of public opinion. Unable to deflect criticism of Israel, apologists now conjure bizarre theories to account for its ostracism. Reaganomics guru George Gilder posits that a free-market system singularly unleashes human potential, and that under such a system Jews are and must be “represented disproportionately in the highest ranks” because they are the most gifted.

Inversely, if Jews do not rule the roost, it must be because a less-than-ideal economic system holds sway. Anti-Semitism springs from resentment of “Jewish superiority and excellence” and “the manifest supremacy of Jews over all other ethnic groups,” while the hatred of Israel springs from the fact that it has evolved (under the inspired tutelage of Benjamin Netanyahu) into the perfect free-market system that “concentrates the genius of the Jews,” making it “one of the world’s leading capitalist powers” and the envy of the world: “Israel is hated above all for its virtues.”

If Jews figure prominently among critics of Israel, it is because they “excel so readily in all intellectual fields that they outperform all rivals in the arena of anti-Semitism.” The West in turn must preserve and protect Israelis from the “world of zero-sum chimeras and fantasies of jihadist revenge and death” and the “barbarian masses” because Jewish endowments have enabled humanity to “thrive and prosper”: Jews are “crucial to the human race.”

Indeed, “if Israel is destroyed, capitalist Europe will likely die as well, and America, as the epitome of productive and creative capitalism spurred by Jews, will be in jeopardy”; “Israel is at the forefront of the next generation of technology and on the front lines of a new racial war against capitalism and Jewish individuality and genius”; “Just as free economies are necessary for the survival of the human population of the planet, the survival of the Jews is vital to the triumph of free economies. If Israel is quelled or destroyed, we will be succumbing to forces targeting capitalism and freedom everywhere.”

Across the Atlantic, Robin Shepherd, director of international affairs at the London-based Henry Jackson Society, asserts that Israel has come under strong criticism in the West not

because of its human rights record but because it is a democratic, capitalist state fighting on the front lines alongside the U.S. against the “civilizational” threat posed by radical Islam: “Israel had become an enemy not because of anything it had done” but “because it was on the wrong side of the barricades.” The “primary energizing platform in the West” for this “tidal wave of hysteria, deception and distortion against the Jewish state” consists of totalitarian Marxists and left-liberal fellow travelers who, disappointed by the Western proletariat and Third World liberation struggles, have made common cause with “militant Islam” to destroy the liberal-capitalist world order. Although these critics of Israel are not anti-Semitic in the traditional “subjective” sense of despising Jews per se, they are guilty of “objective” anti-Semitism because Israel is so central to Jewish identity in the contemporary world.

But opposition to Israel supposedly also emanates from ancien régime bluebloods who want to restore the old-world hierarchies before arriviste Jews disrupted them. This far-flung “neo-anti-Semitic” conspiracy embraces “most” of those who accuse Israel of committing war crimes and otherwise violating international law. Thus, it is to be understood that behind the condemnation of Israel by Amnesty International and the International Court of Justice, Nobel peace laureates Jimmy Carter and Mairead Corrigan Maguire, the Financial Times and the BBC, lurks the evil hand of the radical leftist-fanatic Islamic-landed aristocratic nexus. For those who want to learn more, Shepherd “highly” recommends Alan M. Dershowitz’s *The Case for Israel*.

Although such explanations for Israel’s isolation lack credibility, it cannot be doubted that Israel’s stock has fallen precipitously. Whereas Israel won many adherents in the West after its lightning victory in June 1967, in recent years it has been reduced almost to the status of a pariah state, especially in Europe. A 2003 poll of the European Union named Israel the biggest threat to world peace. A 2008 survey of global opinion named Israel the biggest obstacle to achieving peace in the Israel-Palestine conflict. In a BBC World Service poll taken on the eve of the Gaza invasion, fully 19 of the 21 countries surveyed held a predominantly negative view of Israel.

Meanwhile, under the title “Second Thoughts about the Promised Land,” the Economist reported in 2007 that although “most diaspora Jews still support Israel strongly. . . their ambivalence has grown.” Dissenting Jewish voices have begun to coalesce in Great Britain, Germany, and elsewhere, challenging the hegemony of official Jewish organizations that parrot Israeli propaganda. In the United States the overall picture and trends are perhaps not as pronounced but are no less noteworthy. Judging by poll data it can broadly be said that Americans have consistently viewed Israel favorably and have sympathized much more with Israel than with the Palestinians. But Americans also overwhelmingly support an evenhanded U.S. approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict, and most recently have expressed “equal levels of sympathy” for both sides, while a substantial minority believe that U.S. policy tilts (or tilts too much) in favor of Israel; a robust majority of Americans “think Israel is not doing its part well in making efforts to resolve the conflict”; and Americans have occasionally supported the use of sanctions to rein in Israel.

Significantly, a majority of Americans have also supported a two-state settlement on the June 1967 borders, meaning full Israeli withdrawal from the territories it occupied in the June war. “Yes, the polls show strong support for Israel,” M. J. Rosenberg, director of policy analysis for the Israel Policy Forum observed in 2007 apropos of recent trends; however, “that support for Israel, such as there is, is broad but it is not very deep.” This phenomenon can be seen almost every day in “Letters to the Editors” columns. Every time an op-ed

about Israel appears, especially if it is critical, there are a slew of letters to the editor. Most support the Israeli position. And almost without exception, they are written by Jews. That vast majority [of non-Jewish Americans] out there which supposedly is so supportive of Israel virtually never chimes in. According to a 2007 poll by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) the favorable opinion of Americans towards Israel is markedly less than their favorable opinion toward Great Britain and Japan, while roughly equal to their favorable opinion of India and Mexico. Nearly half of the respondents believe that the U.S. should work with “moderate” Arab states “even at the expense of Israel.”

Half or more of Americans polled held Israel and Hezbollah equally to blame for the summer 2006 Lebanon War and supported a (more) neutral U.S. stance. In addition, in recent years, influential religious constituencies such as the Presbyterian Church USA, the World Council of Churches, the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church have all supported initiatives, including corporate divestment, to force an end to Israel’s occupation. A 2005 survey by Jewish pollster Steven M. Cohen found that “the attachment of American Jews to Israel has weakened measurably in the last two years . . . , continuing a long-term trend.” Respondents were less likely than in comparable earlier surveys to say they care about Israel, talk about Israel with others or engage in a range of pro-Israel activities.

Strikingly, there was no parallel decline in other measures of Jewish identification, including religious observance and communal affiliation. The survey found 26 per cent who said they were “very” emotionally attached to Israel, compared with 31 per cent who said so in a similar survey conducted in 2002. Some two-thirds, 65 per cent, said they follow the news about Israel closely, down from 74 per cent in 2002, while 39 per cent said they talk about Israel frequently with Jewish friends, down from 53 per cent in 2002.

Israel also declined as a component in the respondents’ personal Jewish identity. When offered a selection of factors, including religion, community and social justice, as well as “caring about Israel,” and asked, “For you personally, how much does being Jewish involve each?,” 48 per cent said Israel matters “a lot,” compared with 58 per cent in 2002. Just 57 per cent affirmed that “caring about Israel is a very important part of my being Jewish,” compared with 73 per cent in a similar survey in 1989. A 2007 American Jewish Committee poll found that 30 per cent of Jews felt “fairly distant” or “very distant” from Israel. “In the long run,” Cohen predicts “a polarization in American Jewry: a small group growing more pious and attached to Israel, while a larger one drifts away.”

A 2006 poll found that, among American Jews under 40, fully one-third felt “fairly distant” or “very distant” from Israel, while a 2007 poll found that among Jews under 35 fully 40 per cent registered a “low attachment” to Israel (only 20 per cent registered a “high attachment”). Astonishingly, less than half responded affirmatively that “Israel’s destruction would be a personal tragedy.” The former chairman of the Jewish Agency recently sounded the alarm that “less than 24 per cent of young Jews in North America belong to Jewish organizations. Less than 50 per cent of North American Jews under the age of 35 feel a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people. Less than 25 per cent of North American Jews under age 35 define themselves as Zionists.”

On the nation’s campuses support for Israel is confined not only to Jewish students but also mostly to the Zionist faithful gathered in the Hillels. “Jewish college students are clearly less attached to Israel than in previous generations,” a study commissioned by Jewish advocacy organizations reports. “Israel is losing the battle for the hearts and minds of this cohort.”

Indeed, of the nearly half million Jewish students attending institutions of higher education, “only about five per cent have any connection to the Jewish community.”

Ambivalence towards Israel verging on disaffection can also be discerned among influential sectors of American society, ever the bellwethers of U.S. intellectual life, and the reading public. A recent poll found that a majority of opinion leaders in the U.S. view support for Israel as a “major reason for discontent with the U.S.” around the world.³¹ In a 2003 *New York Review of Books* essay, the Jewish historian Tony Judt asserted that “Israel today is bad for the Jews” and he doubted both the viability and desirability of a Jewish state. John J. Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Stephen M. Walt of the Harvard Kennedy School coauthored an influential paper in 2006 debunking the idealized image of Israel’s history and asserting that Israel has become a “strategic liability” for the United States. A book by former U.S. president Jimmy Carter, provocatively titled *Palestine Peace Not Apartheid*, deplored Israeli policy in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and put the blame for the impasse in the peace process squarely on Israel.

Although the Israel lobby launched vitriolic counterattacks to these interventions, its usual smears alleging anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial did not stick. When in 2006 the lobby’s pressures led to cancellation of one of Tony Judt’s speaking engagements, he became an instant cause célèbre in American intellectual circles. His critics, such as Abraham H. Foxman of the ADL, were derided for “slinging the dread charge of anti-Semitism” and for being an “anachronism.” Carter, meanwhile, was said to be a plagiarist, in the pay of Arab sheikhs, an anti-Semite, an apologist for terrorism, a Nazi sympathizer, and a borderline Holocaust denier.

Yet Carter’s book landed on the *New York Times* bestseller list and remained there for months, selling an estimated 300,000 copies in hardback. Although snubbed by Brandeis University’s president, Carter still received standing ovations from the student body when he came to speak at the historically Jewish institution. (Half the audience walked out when Harvard law professor Alan M. Dershowitz rose to answer Carter. Mearsheimer and Walt negotiated a book deal with the publishing house Farrar, Straus and Giroux, and their book, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, also went on to become a *Times* bestseller.

It is further testament to Israel’s waning fortunes that, during Prime Minister Ehud Olmert’s term of office, even Foxman and perennial Israel supporter Elie Wiesel took to publicly rebuking Israel for its failure to pursue peace. The simmering public discontent with Israeli policy in recent years reached a boiling point of indignation during the Gaza invasion. Despite Israel’s carefully orchestrated propaganda blitz; despite the overwhelmingly “pro”-Israel bias of mainstream media coverage, especially during the first few days of the attack; and despite official support in the West for the assault—despite all this, large popular protests throughout Western Europe (Spain, Italy, Germany, France, and Great Britain) dwarfed in size demonstrations supporting Israel.

A wave of student occupations swept across Great Britain including Oxford, Cambridge, Manchester, Birmingham, London School of Economics, School of Oriental and Asian Studies, Warwick, King’s, Sussex, and Cardiff. Even in traditional bastions of support for Israel such as Canada, where the “pro”-Israel bias of the extreme right-wing political establishment and media is unusually intense, a plurality of public opinion disapproved of the assault and the Canadian Union of Public Employees passed a motion calling for an academic boycott of Israel.

Declaring after the ceasefire that “the events in Gaza have shocked us to the core,” a 16-strong group of the world’s most experienced investigators and judges—including Antonio Cassese (First President and Judge of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and Head of the U.N. Inquiry on Darfur) and Richard Goldstone (Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda and Chairman of the U.N. Inquiry on Kosovo)—called for an “international investigation of gross violations of the laws of war, committed by all parties to the Gaza conflict.”

Unsurprisingly, Israel’s apologists attributed the widespread outrage at the Gaza invasion to anti-Semitism. It might be posited as a general rule that the lower the depths to which Israel’s criminal conduct sinks the higher the decibel level of the shrieks of anti-Semitism. Jews are confronting “an epidemic, a pandemic of anti-Semitism,” Abraham H. Foxman declared. “This is the worst, the most intense, the most global it’s been in most of our recent memories.” Such fear-mongering was nothing new from Foxman, who had portended back in 2003 that anti-Semitism was posing “as great a threat to the safety and security of the Jewish people as the one we faced in the 1930s.”

Just as in the past, poll data used to substantiate these exaggerations tallied “indicators” of “the most pernicious notions of anti-Semitism,” such as the finding that “large portions of the European public continue to believe that Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust.” According to Parisian media “philosopher” Bernard-Henri Lévy, anyone doubting that the Nazi holocaust was a “moral watershed in human history” should be reckoned an anti-Semite. Few of the alleged anti-Semitic incidents in Europe went beyond merely unpleasant manifestations, such as emails and graffiti, while European anti-Semitism, notwithstanding the hype, paled beside anti-Muslim bias. (A rise in animus towards Jews and Muslims—in recent years the two curves tend to correlate—appears partly due to a resurgence of ethnocentrism among older, less educated, and politically conservative Europeans.)

Nonetheless it is most probably true that the execution by a self-proclaimed Jewish state of consecutive murderous rampages in Lebanon and Gaza, and the vocal support lent these rampages by official Jewish organizations around the world, caused a regrettable—if entirely predictable— “spillover” whereby Jews generally were in some quarters held culpable. If, as the Israeli Coordination Forum for Countering Anti-Semitism asserted, there was “a sharp rise in the number and intensity of anti-Semitic incidents” during the Gaza massacre; and if “with the ceasefire there has . . . been a marked decline in the number and intensity of anti-Semitic incidents”; and if “another flare-up in the region, similar to the Gaza operation, will probably lead to an even more severe outbreak of anti-Semitic activity against communities worldwide,” then an efficacious method to fight anti-Semitism would appear to be for Israel to stop committing massacres.

It is also true that the growing gap between official support of Israeli war mongering and popular revulsion against it might feed anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. In Germany for example the political establishment and mainstream media do not brook any criticism of Israel because of the “special relationship” growing out of Germany’s “historic responsibility.” Chancellor Angela Merkel surpassed other European leaders in her embrace of Israel during the Gaza invasion. Yet recent polls have shown that 60 per cent of Germans reject the notion of a special German obligation to Israel (70 per cent of young people reject it), 50 per cent believe that Israel is an aggressive country, and 60 per cent believe that it pursues its interests ruthlessly.

More generally, Gideon Levy recalled “the surreal scene at the height of the brutal assault on Gaza when the heads of the European Union came to Israel and dined with the prime minister in a show of unilateral support for the side wreaking the killing and destruction.” And although it was Israel that broke the ceasefire and launched the invasion European leaders parleyed with the U.S. (and Canada) on how to thwart rearmament not of the perpetrators but of the victims. It is only a matter of time before Europeans begin to wonder—if they haven’t already—at whose behest their foreign policy is being made. The ascription of popular Gentile outrage over the Gaza massacre to anti-Semitism appeared all the more preposterous in the face of widespread and vocal Jewish dissent. Whereas established communal Jewish organizations issued statements supporting Israel, ad hoc Jewish organizations and petitions deploring the invasion proliferated.

Most significantly, Jews prominent in communal Jewish life criticized Israel, albeit generally in muted language. As Israel stood poised to launch the ground offensive after a week of aerial attacks, a group of Britain’s most distinguished Jews, describing themselves as “profound and passionate supporters” of Israel, expressed “horror” at the “increasing loss of life on both sides” and called on Israel to cease its military operations in Gaza immediately. On a more acerbic note, British MP and former shadow foreign minister Gerald Kaufman declared during a House of Commons debate on Gaza, “My grandmother was ill in bed when the Nazis came to her home town of Staszow. A German soldier shot her dead in her bed. My grandmother did not die to provide cover for Israeli soldiers murdering Palestinian grandmothers in Gaza.” He went on to indict the Israeli government for having “ruthlessly and cynically exploit[ed] the continuing guilt among Gentiles over the slaughter of Jews in the holocaust as justification for their murder of Palestinians.”

Meanwhile in France the popular Jewish writer Jean-Moïse Braitberg called on the Israeli president to remove his grandfather’s name from the memorial at Yad Vashem dedicated to victims of the Nazi holocaust “so that it can no longer be used to justify the horror which is visited on the Palestinians.” In Germany Evelyn Hecht-Galinski, daughter of a former president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, wrote, “Not the elected Hamas government, but the brutal occupier . . . belongs in the dock at the Hague,” while the German section of European Jews for a Just Peace issued a statement headlined “German Jews Say NO to Israeli Army Killings.”

In Canada eight Jewish women occupying the Israeli consulate called on “all Jews to speak out against this massacre,” and celebrated Canadian pianist Anton Kuerti declared, “The unbelievable war crimes that Israel is committing in Gaza . . . make me ashamed to be a Jew.” In Australia two award-winning novelists and a former federal cabinet minister signed a statement by Jews condemning Israel’s “grossly disproportionate assault.

The Bush administration and the U.S. Congress lent unqualified support to Israel during the invasion. A resolution laying full culpability on Hamas for the resulting death and destruction passed unanimously in the Senate and 390 to 5 in the House. Much of the mainstream media in the U.S. likewise shamelessly toed the Israeli party line. “By New Year’s Day, Israel’s cheering squad had turned the opinion pages of major American newspapers into their own personal romper room,” the journalist Max Blumenthal observed. “Of all the editorial contributions published by the Washington Post, the Wall Street Journal, and the New York Times since the Israeli war on Gaza began, . . . only one offered a skeptical view of the assault.”

The New York Times’s conception of op-ed balance was achieved by juxtaposing Jeffrey

Goldberg's reverie on the unregenerate evil of Hamas with Thomas Friedman's counsel to Israel that it inflict "heavy pain on the Gaza population." Its hometown rival the New York Daily News ran an op-ed by Rabbi Marvin Hier that urged world leaders "not . . . to rebuild Gaza again" even though "many civilians will suffer" because "terrorists and those who support them are not entitled to receive VIP booty for their inhumanity, misdeeds and silence." Hier is the founder and dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and its Museum of Tolerance. In the midst of this lynch-mob atmosphere even human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch reserved their strongest condemnations for Hamas.

These venomous elite outpourings notwithstanding, public opinion polls showed that, although harshly critical of Hamas, only about 40 per cent of Americans approved of the Israeli attack, while among those voting Democratic (the party affiliation of most Jews) approval dropped to 30 per cent. In a dramatic display of independence reminiscent of Jimmy Carter's authorship of *Palestine Peace Not Apartheid*, liberal icon Bill Moyers rebuked Israel on his popular public affairs program *Bill Moyers Journal*, albeit in a context that also took Hamas to task: "By killing indiscriminately the elderly, kids, entire families, by destroying schools and hospitals, Israel did exactly what terrorists do."

Like Carter, Moyers immediately came under fire from Abraham H. Foxman, who accused him of "racism, historical revisionism and indifference to terrorism," and Harvard law professor Alan M. Dershowitz who decried Moyers's "false moral equivalence" between Hamas terrorism and the Israeli army that "inadvertently kill[s] some Palestinian civilians who are used as human shields by Hamas." But again like Carter, Moyers managed to stand his ground and, as fellow liberals rose to his defense, to emerge unscathed after the fusillade of slanders.

As the Gaza invasion unfolded, and the shocking images of the carnage transmitted live by Al-Jazeera could no longer be ignored, cracks started appearing in the moderate mainstream. Under the ominous title "Time Running Out for a Two-State Solution?" the most-watched U.S. news broadcast 60 Minutes aired a devastating segment on Jewish settlers in the West Bank, which included a harrowing scene of "Arabs [who] are occupied inside their own homes" by Israeli soldiers. The right-wing editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal* ran a piece by law professor George E. Bisharat under the headline "Israel Is Committing War Crimes." The normally staid *New York Times* columnist Roger Cohen confessed in a pair of columns to being "shamed by Israeli actions." In the second piece Cohen speculated that "Israel's continued expansion of settlements, Gaza blockade, West Bank walling-in and wanton recourse to high-tech force" was "designed precisely to bludgeon, undermine and humiliate the Palestinian people until their dreams of statehood and dignity evaporate."

Former editor of the *New Republic* and conservative writer Andrew Sullivan judged that the Israeli attack was "far from a close call morally. . . . This is an extremely one-sided war," and he labeled "thugs" the rightwing Jewish apologists for "the terrible human carnage now being inflicted by Israel (and paid for in part by Americans)." Philip Slater, author of the sociological study *The Pursuit of Loneliness*, declared, "The Gaza Strip is little more than a large Israeli concentration camp, in which Palestinians are attacked at will, starved of food, fuel, energy—even deprived of hospital supplies. . . . It would be difficult to have any respect for them if they didn't fire a few rockets back."

Meanwhile the City Council of Cambridge, Massachusetts, a liberal enclave and home to Harvard University, adopted a resolution "condemning the attacks [on] and invasion of Gaza

by the Israeli military and the rocket attacks upon the people of Israel,” and a group of American university professors launched a national campaign calling for an academic and cultural boycott of Israel. A poll of American Jews found that 47 per cent strongly approved of the Israeli assault, but—in a sharp break with the usual wall-to-wall solidarity—53 per cent were either ambivalent (44 per cent “somewhat” approved or “somewhat” disapproved) or strongly disapproved (9 per cent).

Experienced observers of the American Jewish community pointed to a “post-Gaza sea change.” Apart from “the more conservative segment of the pro-Israel community,” M. J. Rosenberg of the Israel Policy Forum noted, “there was little show of support for this war. In New York, a city where crowds of 250,000 have come out for ‘solidarity’ rallies in the past, only 8,000 came to Manhattan for a community demonstration on a sunny Sunday.” In a public clash with the traditional Jewish leadership, mainstream if less-established Jewish organizations such as J Street staked out a middle ground that “recognize[d] that neither Israelis nor Palestinians have a monopoly on right or wrong,” and called for “shedding a narrow us-versus-them approach to the Middle East.”

Founded in 2008, J Street projects itself as a liberal counterweight to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). It is too soon to predict whether J Street—which currently hews to a vaguely progressive political agenda, although it also defines itself as “closest” to Kadima, the Israeli political party headed by Tzipi Livni— will calcify into a “loyal opposition” or escalate its criticism of Israeli policy as the gulf dividing American Jewry from Israel widens.

Meanwhile “American Jews for a Just Peace” circulated a petition calling on “Israeli Soldiers to Stop War Crimes,” “Jews Say No” demonstrated outside the World Zionist Organization and Jewish Agency offices, and “Jews against the Occupation” dropped a banner over New York City’s West Side Highway declaring “Jews Say: End Israel’s War on Gaza NOW!” In the liberal Jewish intellectual milieu only perennial apologists for Israel, most of whom came on board right after the June 1967 war and are now in their 70s, ventured a full-throated defense of the invasion.

It was obvious to moral philosopher Michael Walzer that Israel had exhausted nonviolent options before it attacked and that Hamas bore responsibility for the ensuing civilian deaths. To Walzer the only “hard question” was whether Israel did all it possibly could to reduce these casualties.

It was obvious to Alan M. Dershowitz that Israel made “its best efforts to avoid killing civilians” and that it failed because Hamas pursued a “dead baby” strategy of forcing Israel to kill Palestinian children in order to garner international sympathy.

It was obvious to New Republic editor Martin Peretz from his scrutiny of the Palestinians’ footwear that the Israeli blockade of Gaza was benign: “You have to look closely at the sneakers, seemingly new and, of course, costly.”

It was obvious to writer Paul Berman that if a “possibility” exists that Hamas might threaten Israel someday in the future with genocide “if Hamas were allowed to prosper unimpeded, and if its allies and fellow-thinkers in Hezbollah and the Iranian government and its nuclear program likewise prospered,” then Israel would have the right to launch an attack now.

On such an accumulation of hypotheticals stacked on conditionals, it is hard to conceive

what country in the world would be safe from arbitrary attack, and what country would not be justified in arbitrarily launching an attack. If, apart from this coterie of Israel defenders, Jewish liberals recognized that the Israeli onslaught was morally problematic, they could not yet abide their dirty laundry being aired in front of the goyim. Magazines and journals of opinion pitched to the upscale and urbane Jewish public such as the *New Yorker* and the *New York Review of Books* accordingly sat out the Gaza massacre.

However, one influential contingent of liberal Jewish public intellectuals did not stay silent: the new generation of liberal Jewish bloggers and regular contributors to liberal-Democratic web sites such as Salon.com and the Huffington Post. Less in thrall to establishment Jewish editors, advertisers, funders, and social networks, speaking as and for a generation that came of age when to a large degree Zionist mythology had been dispelled and displaced by sober historical research. The Israeli political establishment had grown squalid and reactionary. Israel's human rights record had been subjected to piercing scrutiny by the human rights community. Holocaust-induced paranoia and anti-Semitism-mongering palpably collided with the quotidian reality of triumphant Jewish assimilation everywhere from the Ivy League to Wall Street, from Hollywood to Washington, and from the country club to the marriage altar. Professionally, mentally, and emotionally emancipated from the shackles of the past, these Jewish habitués of the Internet went on the offensive denouncing the Gaza invasion from its inception.

The symbolism could scarcely be missed. Whereas diehard apologists for Israel such as Walzer, Dershowitz, and Peretz clambered aboard the Zionist ship while in their youth, the generation of youthful Jewish public intellectuals now making their names on the Internet has been jumping off it. "I pity them their hatred of their inheritance," Peretz hissed. "They are pip-squeaks."

Here are the pip-squeaks in their own words. Ezra Klein (age 25; blogger for American Prospect) posted on Day 2 of the invasion, "The rocket attacks were undoubtedly 'deeply disturbing' to Israelis. But so too are the checkpoints, the road closures, the restricted movement, the terrible joblessness, the unflinching oppression, the daily humiliations, the illegal settlement—I'm sorry, 'outpost'—construction 'deeply disturbing' to the Palestinians, and far more injurious. And the 300 dead Palestinians should be disturbing to us all."

Adam Horowitz (age 35; blogger for Mondoweiss) posted on Day 4 in response to Benny Morris's op-ed in the *New York Times*, "It is clear he can only see the reactions, but not the cause. He lists the responses to Israel and to Israel's ongoing Jewish colonization of historic Palestine, without mentioning the elephant in the room, that the walls closing in on Israel are all self-made." Matthew Yglesias (age 28; blogger for Think Progress) posted on Day 6, "While Israel has stated a desire to leave the Gaza Palestinians alone in their tiny, overcrowded, economically unviable enclave, the [2005] 'disengagement' from Gaza has never entailed letting Palestinians control their borders or exercise meaningful sovereignty over the area. The proposal has basically been that if Palestinians cease violence against Israel, then the Gaza Strip will be treated like an Indian reservation."

Dana Goldstein (age 24; blogger for American Prospect) posted on Day 12, "I want to believe that the collective, historical experience of Jewishness and Zionism leads to something better—something more humane—than what we've witnessed in the Middle East this past week." Glenn Greenwald (age 42; blogger for Salon.com) posted on Day 13, "This is not so much of a war as it is a completely one-sided massacre," and on 30 January 2009, "It's just not possible to make real progress in the domestic aims of restoring the

Constitution and reversing our military and intelligence expansions if we are simultaneously enabling and blindly supporting Israel's various wars (and therefore dragging ourselves into those wars)."

On 20 February 2009 Greenwald responded to an insinuation by Jeffrey Goldberg that he was a Jew-hating Israelbasher, "People like Jeffrey Goldberg . . . have so abused, overused, manipulated and exploited the 'anti-Semitism' and 'anti-Israel' accusations for improper and nakedly political ends that those terms have become drained of their meaning, have almost entirely lost their sting, and have become trivialized virtually to the point of caricature. . . . Indeed, people like Goldberg are becoming extra rancid and reckless in their rhetoric precisely because they know that these rhetorical devices have ceased working." "There is a definite sea change when it comes to American policy debates toward Israel," Greenwald concluded. "They no longer possess the ability to stifle dissent through thuggish intimidation tactics and they know that, which is why they can now do nothing but turn up the volume on their name-calling attacks. The Israeli devastation of Gaza and its trapped, defenseless civilian population—using American bombs, arms, money and diplomatic cover—was so brutal and horrific to watch that it inevitably changed the way people view that Middle East conflict."

Soon after the Gaza invasion ended, the phalanx of liberal Jewish bloggers again went tit-for-tat with the Israel lobby when the lobby sought to block the Obama administration's appointment of Chas Freeman, an official critical of Israeli policy. Another very hefty straw in the wind was a sketch titled "Strip Maul" that aired on the Comedy Channel's Daily Show on 5 January 2009. The host of the program, comedian Jon Stewart, is Jewish and has a huge following among young people. To roars of approval from the studio audience, he ridiculed the numbingly unanimous and cliché-ridden support for Israel among politicians ("It's the Möbius strip of issues—there's only one side!"); adverted to "the soul-crushing segmentation and blockading of Gaza"; and likened a Palestinian's plight to forcing someone "to live in my hallway and make him go through checkpoints every time he has to take a s**t."

The generational metamorphosis regarding Israel was most evident on college campuses. "A shift toward more visible pro-Palestinian or anti-Israel sentiment has been profound on some campuses," Inside Higher Ed reported, "prompted, in part, by the winter war in Gaza." Large halls filled to overflow for lectures deploring the Gaza massacre. Whereas "pro"-Israel groups used to protest inside or outside such lectures, they were now barely seen.

Students at Cornell University lined pathways with 1,300 black flags commemorating the dead in Gaza. (The display was later vandalized.)

Students at University of Rochester, University of Massachusetts, New York University, Columbia University, Haverford College, Bryn Mawr College, and Hampshire College held petition drives, protests, and sit-ins demanding financial support for Palestinian students and divestment from arms companies and companies doing business with the illegal Jewish settlements. Hampshire College students successfully pressured the college's trustees to divest from American corporations that directly profit from the occupation.

Although "pro"-Israel organizations alleged that "college and university campuses . . . have become hotbeds of a virulent new strain of anti-Semitism," at many campuses Jewish students have played a leading role on the local "Students for Justice in Palestine" committees, and creative and dedicated young Jewish activists in Birthright Unplugged and

Anarchists Against the Wall, alongside individuals such as Anna Baltzer, author of the memoir *Witness in Palestine*, have gone from school to school offering personal testimony on the daily horrors unfolding in Palestine.

The bonds of solidarity being forged between young Jews and Muslims opposing the occupation—the core group on many campuses consists of secular Jewish radicals and observant Muslim women—give reason for hope that a just and lasting peace may yet be achieved. After speaking on the Gaza massacre at a Canadian university, the sponsors presented me with a button reading “I ♥ GAZA.” I pinned the button to my backpack and headed for the airport. As I stood on the queue to board the plane, a passenger behind me whispered in my ear “I like your button.” Hmm, I thought, the times they are a-changing. A couple of hours later I asked the airline attendant for a cup of water. Handing me the cup he leaned over and whispered “I like your button.” Hmm, I thought, there’s something happening here.

Norman Finkelstein is author of five books, including [Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict](#), [Beyond Chutzpah](#) and [The Holocaust Industry](#), which have been translated into more than 40 foreign editions. This article is a chapter from his new book [“This Time We Went Too Far - Truth and Consequences of the Gaza Invasion.”](#)

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