“Palestine is the barometer of Western integrity”

Don’t call me a Palestinian of the Palestinian Territories because it is called Palestine.
Don’t give me a fraction of my homeland and call it a solution.
Don’t give me oppression and call it peace.
Don’t give me a Bantustan and call it a home.
Don’t give me a prison and call it freedom.
Don’t draw the borders of my existence according to your whims and interests and call it a state.
My Palestine is the home that is mine since the dawn of history till the end of history.

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Reports ......

From London/UK

1. Balfour Declaration and the ongoing tragedy for Palestinians
The Balfour Declaration was a pledge from the British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to the influential Zionist Walter Rothchild for transmission to the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland, promising to establish a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine. The Balfour Declaration was a pledge in the form of a letter, made up of 67 words, that still shapes our present today. It was received by Lord Rothschild on 2nd November 1917.

“His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done
which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country”.

The Balfour Declaration has kept only one side of it’s promise, for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people. However, it has failed to protect the rights of the indigenous Palestinians in every aspect. A colossal failure, that has contributed to a bitter 100 year old conflict, of which we cannot currently see the end of.

Agreements such as the Sykes-Picot and Balfour Declaration were the starting points that led to the British colonisation of Palestine under the British Mandate and evolved to the problems we see today. The Declaration was an illegal and immoral promise from one country to offer the land of second people to third people. This paved the way for the Nakba (Catastrophe) that is the mass displacement of Palestinians and the theft of their land, mostly under military assault, causing Palestinians to be one of the largest refugee population in the world.

The British government then surrendered their occupation of Palestine to the United Nations, that in turn with no moral or legal authority got involved to establish and legitimise Israel as a State. To do so, it partitioned Palestine and in essence gave rights to Jewish people by taking away the indigenous Palestinians’ rights, despite a number of UN resolutions resolving against this. One such resolution is the 1948 UN resolution 194 that resolves Palestinian refugees’ right to return to their homes and be financially compensated for their losses. Despite this, Israel forbids to allow Palestinian refugees to return to their land, while encouraging Jews from all of the world to settle in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

Since it’s establishment, Israel has refused to stick within the borders of the UN partition and instead enforced a brutal military occupation on the Palestinian people remaining outside of the Israel border, relentlessly building illegal settlements that are internationally recognised as an obstacle to peace. The Zionist settler colonial project with its ever-growing illegal settlements and apartheid laws in the West Bank, racist policies in Israel and a deadly blockade on Gaza, are all part of this the Zionist political ideology and agenda. Israel’s first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion stated:

“We must use terror, assassination, intimidation, land confiscation, and the cutting of all social services to rid the Galilee of its Arab population.”—David Ben-Gurion, May 1948, to the General Staff. From Ben-Gurion, A Biography, by Michael Ben-Zohar, Delacorte, New York 1978.

This impact has been a menace to the world's peace and relations between Muslims and the West, having caused resentment that Britain did not only stick to their end of the deal, but continue to stand by and support a project that is taking away Palestinians most basic human rights and threatening their very existence. "The tragedy in Palestine is not just a local one; it is a tragedy for the world, because it is an injustice that is a menace to the world's peace.” Arnold Toynbee, British Historian

However, what we witness today in the region, such as colonisation, checkpoints, extrajudicial killings, collective punishment and so on, was not an invention of the Zionist leaders. It was learned from the British, who financed and trained them, until they eventually gave away their rights to Palestine after Jewish terrorist attacks on the British, for the establishment of the Israeli State. Yet, the British government has announced it wants to mark the Balfour Declaration in 2017 for it’s centenary without a hint of shame or guilt. Palestinians leaders and members of the international community have called on the British Government to apologise for the mess they have created. The Palestinians are still waiting. It doesn't seem that the British Government has any intention of rectifying their mistakes as they keep fuelling Israel with arms, diplomatic and economic support and a staunch relationship with Israel and it’s notorious lobby.

Meanwhile, campaigns from all over the world, including within Palestine and the UK, have taken to ensure that the event is marked fairly. On 2nd November 2016, Palestinians officials and activists will be launching a year long campaign in Palestine and around the world with an aim to remind the international community and particularly Britain that they should face their historic responsibility and atone for the big crimes committed against the Palestinian people. The Balfour Project, a UK based initiative, aims to highlight what the Balfour Declaration means for both Jews and Palestinians; to acknowledge that while a home for the Jewish people has been achieved, the promise to protect the rights of the Palestinian people has not yet been fulfilled. The initiatives is also campaigning to urge the people and elected representatives of the UK to take effective action to promote justice, security and peace for both peoples.

The Palestinian Return Centre in London has launched a Balfour Apology Campaign to urge the British establishment to apologise for the Balfour Declaration, that they say marked a historical breach against the aspirations of the Palestinian people and shattered their hopes for freedom and self determination. Activities taking place around the world include demonstrations, talks and lobbying, in addition to a lawsuit being prepared by the Palestinian Authority against the British government over this 1917 document that has paved the way for the brutal reality we see today.


2. Yes, of course the word 'Zionist' is an accusation

A report by a House of Commons select committee published last weekend contained an unprecedented attack on freedom of speech in Britain. Despite this, the media simply used the report as fodder in its ongoing and obsessive campaign against Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn. The most deeply troubling aspect of the report was, therefore, buried. The Home Affairs Select Committee’s inquiry into Anti-Semitism has recommended that, in some circumstances, the use of the word “Zionist” in a critical context could be treated as a criminal offence under hate crime legislation. The report admits that some three-quarters of reported Anti-Semitic incidents come from far-right sources, and yet — amazingly — the authors go on to ignore almost entirely far-right Anti-Semitism. The document instead focuses on two main targets on the left: Corbyn and the President of the National Union of Students, Malia Bouattia. This demonstrates starkly the highly partisan and regrettable approach taken by the Conservative-dominated committee.

In a statement last Sunday, Corbyn said that the committee had failed to look at the combating of Anti-Semitism in other political parties in any meaningful way. “Politicising Anti-Semitism – or using it as a weapon in controversies between and within political parties – does the struggle against it a disservice,” he insisted. What few seem to be criticising, though, is the even more disturbing attempt by the committee to more or less outlaw criticism of Zionism in Britain. “For the purposes of criminal or
disciplinary investigations," the report asserts, "use of the words 'Zionist' or 'Zio' in an accusatory or abusive context should be considered inflammatory and potentially Anti-Semitic."

Over the course of 2016, there has been a witch hunt and a moral panic about the "Anti-Semitism" supposedly devouring the Labour Party. While Labour and the wider left are of course not immune to the sad reality of Anti-Semitism, all available empirical evidence shows that the level of Anti-Semitic racism in the party is in fact of a lower magnitude than across society in general. And yet the false, entirely manufactured "Labour Anti-Semitism crisis" story has endured, because it has just been too useful a stick with which to beat the left-wing leadership of the Labour Party. This goes for both those on the Labour right and the pro-Israel lobby, as well as their respective allies in the media establishment.

Throughout all of this, there has been some debate about Zionism, what it means precisely, and what the difference is between anti-Zionism and Anti-Semitism. Even some influential figures on the pro-Corbyn left have fallen into the trap of saying that we should "stop talking about" Zionism. On the contrary, I believe that in order to identity the problem of injustice in Palestine correctly, we must point to its source. The problem is the foundation ideology of the Israeli state: Zionism.

The select committee's authors submit that we should criticise "the Israeli government" instead of Zionism, but that does not take into account the deeper problems at work in occupied Palestine. It suggests that the problem only extends to the current, hard-right, government of Israel. In fact, though, left wing Israeli governments have been just as inimical to Palestinian rights, if not more so. The Nakba, the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the genesis and largest increases in illegal settlements were all carried out under the leadership of the Zionist left (the Israeli Labour Party or its ideological descendants).

As Ben White wrote in April, missing from most of this debate has been the contemporary and historical reality of what Zionism means for the Palestinians, who are the primary victims of Israeli war crimes and oppression. Zionism is the foundation ideology of the state of Israel. As London School of Economics professor and activist Jonathan Rosenhead put it to me recently, "Zionism has meant grave injustices for the Palestinian people, so in that sense, every usage of the word 'Zionist' is an accusation.

Yes, Zionists, we are accusing you of supporting an oppressive ideology.

Zionism is a violent ideology the followers of which — Zionists — planned and carried out the ethnic cleansing of 750,000 Palestinians as the fundamental fact of the foundation of the state of Israel between 1947 and 1948, commemorated by Palestinians the world over as Al-Nakba, the Catastrophe. Zionism is a racist ideology which denies those Palestinian refugees and their descendants their basic human and legal right to return to their homes, only because they are not Jewish. Zionism is a colonial ideology which still builds exclusively Jewish settlements on top of Palestinian land confiscated violently in the occupied West Bank.

Zionism is an apartheid ideology which denies the vote and basic human rights to 4.5 million Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, and treats the Palestinians within Israel (some 20 per cent of the population) as second or third class citizens who have unequal rights in Israeli law, policies and practices. Draconian attempts by the likes of the Home Affairs Select Committee to legislate away criticism of Israel like this will never work; you cannot suppress criticism of an unjust political ideology. It's true that some on the far-right sometimes use the word "Zionist" as a code word for "Jew" and thus as a thin veneer for their Anti-Semitism. This only makes it all the more important for us to draw the distinction sharply: Judaism is a religion out of which has developed a Jewish ethnic identity; Zionism, on the other hand, is a settler-colonial political ideology. Not all Jews are Zionists and not all Zionists are Jews.

The Chakrabarti Report has many sensible recommendations for the Labour Party around the issue of Anti-Semitism (so it is unfortunate that the select committee also chose to attack it and its author). Among them is the recommendation that the word "Zionist" should be used carefully and advisedly and within context. That seems sensible, but conceding the word altogether would be a deadly mistake. It would be a concession too far to the right-wing, and to the Israeli state and its allies (which campaign ruthlessly around the world to smear all criticism of Israel as "Anti-Semitic", and lobby for local legislation in this regard). It is notable in this context that the two main proponents of the insidious and false "Zionist = Jew" equation are a) the state of Israel, and b) neo-fascist anti-Semites.

As Yasser Arafat put it in his famous 1974 speech to the United Nations general assembly: "Zionism is an ideology that is imperialist, colonialist, racist; it is profoundly reactionary and discriminatory; it is united with Anti-Semitism in its retrograde tenets and is, when all is said and done, another side of the same base coin." In other words, Zionism needs Anti-Semitism. Challenge the former, and we will go a long way towards eradicating the latter.


3. Reclaiming the lost Jewish voices of the Balfour Declaration

A leading British Rabbi has written: "Zionism and Zionist activities not only depress Judaism by putting nationality first and religion second, but they injure Judaism by combining religion and nationality." The same Rabbi, who also happens to be President of the Anglo-Jewish Association, is convinced that non-Jews who support Zionism are, as often as not, "antisemitic".

Meanwhile, The Times newspaper has published a letter co-signed by the President of the Board of Deputies saying: "Zionist theory regards all the Jewish communities of the world as constituting one homeless nationality incapable of complete social and political identification with the nations among whom they dwell and it is argued that for this homeless nationality a political centre and an always available homeland in Palestine are necessary. Against this theory [we] strongly and earnestly protest." A well-respected Jewish journalist and regular contributor to the Jewish Chronicle who helped to draft the Times letter has commented:

"The Jews were always primarily a religious people and their national life in Palestine was a phase of their greater history..." The anti-Zionism goes right to the top of the British establishment with a Jewish member of the Government describing Zionism as "a mischievous political creed, untenable by any patriotic citizen of the United Kingdom". The Foreign Office Minister has
even written a memo to his Cabinet colleagues damning the whole enterprise because it forces Muslims and Christians to “make way for the Jews”.

I haven't made any of this up. It's all true. But it happened a hundred years ago. The Rabbi was Claude Montefiore, the Board of Deputies President was David Alexander, the journalist was Lucien Wolf and Edwin Montagu was Secretary of State for India in Lloyd George's wartime cabinet. Hardly inconsequential figures.

They were all writing in the months leading up to the publication of the Balfour Declaration in November 1917. Sixty-seven deliberately vague words that get blamed for a great deal of trouble. And rightly so.

"His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

Don't be fooled into thinking that the Balfour Declaration was nothing but the British government's gesture of good will in recognition of centuries of Jewish suffering. That's how the new Balfour100 website, set up as a Jewish cross communal resource, likes to present it. "Balfour 100 acknowledges with gratitude the foresight of Lord Arthur Balfour and the British government of Lloyd George. In the midst of the Great War, they looked to the future and chose to recognise the longing of the Jewish people to re-establish its national homeland in the land of Israel."

There's rather more going on than this. You can only understand Balfour by studying British imperialism; the international power politics of the First World War; the history of Western European Colonialism; 2,000 years of Christian/Jewish relations; Christian Zionism; Enlightenment ideas of human rights; and the divisions within the Jewish community over the best response to European antisemitism. Luckily, you now have 12 months to get stuck in to all of this.

Supporters of today's modern state of Israel have already begun commemorating this landmark in the history of Zionism with lectures, conferences, and social media actions. Christian Zionists are firmly onboard the Balfour band waggon with CUFI UK's #AmBalfour campaign. But don't expect to find out anything on the Balfour 100 website about Arab Palestinian reaction to Balfour either at the time or later. The 'natives' didn't count, either then or now. It wasn't until the penultimate draft of the Declaration that there was any mention of protecting the rights of non-Jewish people living in the land.

Immigrant 'isms'

You might suspect that it was only the well-off established Jewish families in the Britain of 1917 that didn't like the idea of Zionism threatening their social acceptance and hard won status in liberal England. Surely the poor Jewish immigrants who had been fleeing the pogroms of Eastern Europe and arriving in London's East End over the previous 30 years would be more predisposed towards Zionism. But it wasn't the case.

Having fled Russia, Poland and Lithuania, the Jewish immigrants (my ancestors among them) brought with them a variety of responses to being Jewish in the early 20th century. In the tailoring sweatshops of Whitechapel you would have found Jewish Communists, Jewish Socialists, Jewish Anarchists, and Jewish Bundists. Within this immigrant political caldron you would have found Zionism too. But you wouldn't have put your money on that particular 'ism' being the one that would triumph.

"The dawn of our faith"?

Contrast all this Jewish ambivalence towards Zionism with the evidence given to the Home Affairs Select Committee report on antisemitism published last month. Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis told the committee: "Zionism has been an integral part of Judaism from the dawn of our faith".

Earlier this year Mirvis wrote in the Daily Telegraph that Zionism was:

"...a noble and integral part of Judiasm".
"...one of the axioms of Jewish belief".

And that:

"...one can no more separate it from Judaism than separate the City of London from Great Britain."

Sir Mick Davis, Chairman of the Jewish Leadership Council, told the committee that criticising Zionism is the same as antisemitism.

"Zionism is so totally identified with how the Jew thinks of himself, and is so associated with the right of the Jewish people to have their own country and to have self-determination within that country, that if you attack Zionism, you attack the very fundamentals of how the Jews believe in themselves."

Hard to believe now, but in 1917 it was perfectly acceptable to be non or even anti-Zionist without anyone calling you a self-hating Jew or of being accused of being out of line with thousands of years of Jewish teaching. In fact, the exact opposite idea, that Zionism equalled antisemitism, had greater currency because Zionism insisted that Jews would never be fully accepted as Jews apart from in their own national home.

So the current definitions of Zionism, Judaism and antisemitism given by Mirvis and Davis have only held good for a short time in our history. But when and how did the change from Montefiore to Mirvis happen? When did Zionism achieve its seamless merger with Judaism?

The trauma of the Holocaust

It wasn't until after the Second World War that Zionism in Britain won the debate over the meaning of Jewish history, the nature of antisemitism and the 'correct way' to be Jewish in the 20th century. It was the Holocaust and the realisation of a Jewish State that led to an emotional (rather than ideological) change in British Jewish attitudes. You can never hope to understand Zionism and Israel without understanding the Holocaust and the collective Jewish trauma that continues to play itself out 70 years on. The sense of Jewish abandonment by the world during the Nazi era is still strong and Zionism has nurtured the conviction that the only response to this catastrophe was the need for a safe national haven that could 'guarantee Jewish security'.

Once the Jewish State was real, and not merely a political or ideological debate, everything changed. The anti-Zionist arguments by Montefiore, Montagu, Alexander and Wolf were forgotten. History, it seemed, had proved them tragically wrong in
their assessment. But the second half of the 20th century provides an entirely different perspective. If the ‘homelessness’ of the Jews and their lack of acceptance is now an “axiom” of Judaism how do we account for the success story that is the American Jewish experience? The evidence suggests that Jews thrive in liberal open democracies where the principle of equal rights is enshrined. Narrow nationalism with built-in discrimination was never the only good response to the Holocaust.

However, the opinion polling looks like it supports Sir Mick Davis rather than me.

Research published in 2015 by City University, and quoted by the Home Affairs Select Committee, found that 90% of British Jews support Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state and 93% say that it forms some part of their identity. It’s this that allows the argument to be made by Davis and others that criticism of Israel is antisemitic.

But it begs a bigger political and philosophical question. Can a belief (Zionism) held by the majority within one particular group mean it becomes sacrosanct, holy and therefore untouchable? And what happens to that sacrosanct understanding of ‘being Jewish’ when another people have experienced the same belief as a catastrophe?

Inevitable displacement

The tragedy of Zionism is that its implementation could never be achieved without the displacement of another people. Jewish national self-determination meant a Jewish majority directing its own affairs. The vast majority of Jews still see this as nothing more than a very necessary and noble endeavour. But to make that ambition a reality required the maximum amount of Palestinian land with the minimum number of non-Jews. One way or another, for the Palestinians, Balfour was always going to turn out badly. But to point this out has now become an act of antisemitism. The Balfour anniversary is an opportunity to study the multiple motives, intentions and consequences of the Declaration and acknowledge, unlike the Balfour 100 website, what it has meant for all concerned.

Lost Jewish voices

The centenary should also be the moment when we reclaim the lost Jewish voices of 1917 and recognise that Zionism was never integral to Judaism. We can recognise and honour our connection to the biblical Land of Israel without using that to nullify or trump all other ethical considerations. In short Rabbi Mirvis, there is an important difference between ‘Zion’ and ‘Zionism’. But we shouldn’t get misty-eyed about the motives of the Jewish anti-Zionists. They were not acting out of solidarity with the Palestinian Arabs. Primarily, they wanted what they thought was good for the Jews. Just as the Zionists did. But their thinking about Jewish history and the ability of Jews to be equal citizens making safe and secure Jewish homes in the nations of the world needs celebrating too. Their outlook and their belief in equal rights for all citizens may just help us to find a way back out of the Jewish moral cul-de-sac created by Zionist thinking.


4. One Hundred Years and Counting: Britain, Balfour, and the Cultural Repression of Palestinians

Overview

If Palestinian poet Dareen Tatour passes over the perimeter of her home’s driveway in her village of Reineh in the Galilee, an alarm will sound at the British multinational security firm G4S and the Israeli authorities will be alerted. Israeli police arrested Tatour in the early hours of October 11, 2015 for her poem “Qawem ya sha’abi qawemhum” (Resist My People, Resist Them), which was posted to her YouTube account earlier that month. On November 2, Israel charged her with incitement to violence and support for a terrorist organization.

In January, after three months in prison, Tatour was placed under house arrest near Tel Aviv, far from her village. After a lengthy struggle, the prosecution conceded in July that she could be held in her family’s home. While Tatour’s trial proceeds, she will remain under house arrest and will continue to be monitored by G4S as a “threat” to Israel’s security.

Such British complicity in the cultural repression of Palestinians is not a recent phenomenon. One can argue that it has its roots in the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which, by calling for the establishment of a nation for the Jewish people while all but disregarding the existence of the Palestinians inhabiting the land in question, set in motion the process of dispossession, exile, and social and cultural fragmentation that continues to the present day. And this was but the beginning of a British approach to the Palestinian people that has suppressed their culture and history.

Indeed, today, as Israel funnels substantial financial resources into promoting its cultural output internationally, the United Kingdom (UK) is taking measures to censor Palestinian cultural expression and creativity. From the involvement of private companies such as G4S in the house arrest of Tatour to ministerial moves to block the cultural boycott and stifle academic debate, while UK visas are frequently denied to Palestinian artists and educators, Britain’s repressive actions are aiding Israel by supporting its one-sided narrative – a narrative that helps Israel continue its occupation of Palestinian territory and deepen its apartheid regime.

There will likely be much scholarly and policy analysis of the fallout from the Balfour Declaration for Palestine and the surrounding countries over the past 100 years (including by think tanks such as Middle East Monitor.) This commentary makes the case for a focus on the cultural dimension and provides the background and arguments for such a focus by examining the British role, then and now.

Balfour and the Origins of Cultural Repression

Despite its devastating impact on Palestinians, the Balfour Declaration means little to most people in Britain. If you were to ask the average person on a UK street what it was, they would most likely know next to nothing about the document. However, the British government is planning to commemorate the centenary of the declaration in November 2017. Earlier this year, former British Prime Minister David Cameron said he wanted the UK government to mark the anniversary together with the Jewish community “in the most appropriate way.” At the time, it was not altogether clear what he meant by “appropriate.” Today, we are none the wiser, but plans to mark the occasion are nonetheless still rumored to be in the pipeline, though now under the auspices of Britain’s controversial new foreign secretary, Boris Johnson.

In his brief but fateful 1917 declaration, then Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour proclaimed the British government would “use their best endeavors” to facilitate “the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people.” Thus, even before the British Mandate had officially begun, Balfour promised Palestine to the Zionist Federation without the consent of its Palestinian
instances of institutional censorship and manipulation were reported.

The legacy of Balfour and the British Mandate includes a long history of Israel repressing Palestinian expression, from the plundering of Palestinian libraries and the imprisonment of Palestinian writers to the banning of Palestinian cultural activities and the obliteration of cultural sites and schools in Gaza. Immediately after the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948, Palestinians who remained within the borders of what then became “Israel” were forbidden to study their cultural inheritance or to remember their immediate past.

An obituary of Mahmoud Darwish in 2008 recalled how, when he was eight years old, the young poet recited a poem at his school's annual celebration of Israel's birth about the inequality he noticed between the lives of Arab boys and Jewish boys. Afterward, the Israeli military governor summoned him. "If you go on writing such poetry" he said, "I’ll stop your father working in the quarry." The utterance of the simplest of truths by a Palestinian child clearly frightened the Israeli military governor enough to threaten the livelihood of his family.

Then, as now, the Israeli authorities could not countenance the cultural expression of a Palestinian consciousness. Darwish went on to be imprisoned five times by the Israeli authorities, mostly charged with reciting poetry thought to be seditious and detrimental to Israel's status and stability. Attempts to stifle Darwish's voice have continued beyond his death. In July 2016, Israel's defense minister, Avigdor Lieberman, went so far as to enquire the poet's work to Mein Kampf after Israeli army radio unexpectedly broadcast Darwish's poem, "ID Card." Lieberman's comments came after the Israeli culture minister, Miri Regev, called on him to stop funding the radio station on the grounds that it had "gone off the rails" and was providing a platform for the Palestinian narrative.

It would thus seem that very little has changed since the early days of Israel’s establishment. And recent moves by the UK to block the cultural boycott and stifle academic debate show a significant rise in the extent to which Britain has become openly involved in the censorship of those speaking out against Israel.

Current British Complicity

It is not only corporate entities such as G4S in the case of Dareen Tatour that are infringing on free speech on Israel's behalf. At a time when international pressure on Israel is increasing, the UK government and a number of British institutions are moving in the opposite direction, deepening their support for a Zionist ideology bent on repressing Palestinian culture and history. Efforts to freeze the funding of arts groups and productions deemed “pro-Palestinian” by Israel's Culture Minister Miri Regev follow on the heels of 2011's “Nakba law,” which enables the withholding of funds to public institutions deemed to be involved in challenging the founding of Israel or any activity “denying the existence of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.” This draconian law appears to have provided a template for the UK government to start censoring cultural voices in Britain that critique the state of Israel.

This development came to light in August 2014, when London’s Tricycle Theatre refused to host the UK Jewish Film Festival (UKJFF) while it was partially funded by the Israeli embassy – a response to the loss of life resulting from Israel's bombardment of Gaza. Although the Tricycle offered to provide alternative funding to cover the cost of the contribution from the Israeli embassy, the UKJFF was unwilling to decline embassy sponsorship and withdrew its festival from the theatre. The Tricycle came under sustained attack and was soon subject to an intervention from the then secretary of state for culture, Sajid Javid. Together with the minister for culture and the digital economy, Ed Vaizey, Javid worked closely with the Israeli ambassador at the time, Daniel Taub, to pressure the Tricycle to withdraw its objections to Israeli embassy funds. Unable to stand fast against threats to its own funding, the small venue withdrew its objection and invited the UKJFF back on the same terms as the previous year.

"Israel's policies and practices are no longer simply being ignored by UK ministers; now they are being adopted."

While attending an event organized by the Board of Deputies of British Jews in 2015, Javid noted that his intervention the year before was also intended to deter other organizations from exercising their right to boycott. "I have made it absolutely clear what might happen to [the theater’s] funding if they try, or if anyone tries, that kind of thing again," he said.

Javid's message rang loud and clear: Any boycott of Israel by British cultural institutions is out of bounds if they wish to receive funding. Israel's policies and practices are no longer simply being ignored by UK ministers; now they are being adopted. The Tricycle's stance, while short-lived, nevertheless marked the beginning of a public debate about threats from pro-Israel government advocates to the independence of cultural institutions in the UK. In October 2014, a public discussion entitled “After the Tricycle: Can Arts Organizations Say ‘No’ to Embassy Funding?” was held at Amnesty International Action Center. During the discussion the need for effective strategies to contest political pressure on the arts became more apparent as other instances of institutional censorship and manipulation were reported.
One example cited was the April 2014 decision by the Donmar Warehouse, a theater located in London's West End, to censor a podcast that was part of a discussion series that accompanied Peter Gill's production of "Versailles." Entitled "Impossible Conversations," the series featured leading political and cultural commentators exploring the legacy of World War I. Twenty-four hours prior to one of the discussions – "Mr. Balfour’s Letter to Lord Rothschild: How the Great War Remapped the World" – the Donmar Warehouse received a complaint from a funder claiming that the event was an attack on the state of Israel, an anti-Israel rally, and anti-Semitic. Threats to withdraw funding accompanied the complaint, as well as a pledge to raise grievances with publicly funded cultural institutions at which the event's programmer worked or served as a trustee. Although the Donmar Warehouse held the discussion, it chose not to post the podcast online along with the other discussions that took place.

Institutional and government censorship in support of Israel has also entered the academic sphere. In 2015, Eric Pickles, then secretary of state for communities and local government, ensured the cancellation of an academic conference on the legal status of the state of Israel at the University of Southampton. The conference included both an Israeli law professor and a Palestinian human rights activist, but Pickles claimed that the event would give voice to "the far-left's bashing of Israel, which often descends into anti-Semitism," rather than offer "a platform to all sides of the debate." Michael Gove, then chief whip, joined the fray, declaring that "it was not a conference, it was an anti-Israel hate-fest."

In response to the government's intervention, the university withdrew permission for the conference to be held on its property on health and safety grounds. The university claimed that the event could give rise to protests and that it did not have the resources to mitigate this risk, despite a statement from the police confirming they could ensure the security of the event. In April 2016, the conference was blocked for a second year when organizers were not able to pay the £24,000 ($29,000) the university required of them to cover the cost of hiring private security and erecting fencing.

Britain's increasing involvement in the cultural repression of Palestinians is also occurring through the denial of UK visas. Arts, culture, and education help create spaces in which difficult problems can be addressed creatively—especially when people from different backgrounds and contexts are brought together in them. This is why cultural and educational exchanges between Palestinian and international artists and academics have been blocked by Israel's occupation regime for decades. Most recently, Israel banned UK academic Dr. Adam Hanieh from entering Israel or Palestine for 10 years after he attempted to travel to Birzeit University to deliver a series of lectures. Israel also refused entry to the UK-based Palestinian writer Ahmed Masoud to participate in the Palestinian Festival of Literature in the West Bank earlier this year.

Lately, an increasing number of reports have also emerged regarding the denial of visas by UK authorities to Palestinian artists and academics seeking to come to Britain to participate in exhibitions, theater productions, speaking tours, and conferences. Hamde Abu Rahma, a Palestinian photojournalist, was twice denied a UK visa despite financial backing and support from a number of British MPs before he was finally granted permission to come to Scotland for this year's Edinburgh Festival. Other Palestinian artists whose denied visas have been made public in recent years include Ali Abuukhattab and Samah al-Sheikh, writers who were due to appear at the Institute of Contemporary Arts as part of the Shubbak festival, and Nabil al-Raaee, artistic director of the Jenin Freedom Theater who was supposed to speak at a number of UK events. The UK visa system is also becoming more of an obstacle to developing academic partnerships with Palestinian universities. Because it is extremely difficult to obtain clear information about the visa process, institutions' ability to work collaboratively is hindered. Palestinian academics and students alike are being denied entry. According to the British Council, this year for the first time five out of ten of their sponsored Palestinian students were refused visas.

"It is essential that British institutions are not discouraged from inviting Palestinians to participate in their cultural activities."

Arts and education organizations have largely been dealing with such access issues individually, in the hope of reaching a solution by working quietly with the UK authorities on a case-by-case basis. Israeli artists and academics, however, are not subject to the same restrictions, even if they come from illegal settlements in the West Bank. While an Israeli settler can simply obtain a visa on arrival in the UK, a Palestinian living down the road must go through an expensive and complicated application process before they travel, with dwindling hopes of success.

It is essential that British institutions are not discouraged from inviting Palestinians to participate in their activities, especially while the UK government cracks down on the cultural boycott and stifles academic debate under the guise of ensuring a platform for "all sides."

Promoting Palestinian Cultural Production
Changing attitudes and practices in the UK toward Palestinian culture and identity, which have been relegated to an inferior role ever since the days of Balfour, is no easy task. There is, however, much that Palestinian civil society and solidarity groups are doing, and can do more of, in the run-up to the centenary of the Balfour Declaration to create conditions to put an end to British complicity in the censorship of Palestinians and to the UK government's prejudicial policies in support of Israel.

Organized public pressure is a key element in creating such conditions. The Palestinian poet Dareen Tatour's imprisonment has received increasing international attention and the support of over 250 renowned writers, poets, translators, editors, artists, public intellectuals, and cultural workers. Tatour believes this international response could influence the final outcome of her case. "Public pressure," she says, "may force the Israeli authorities to reconsider the persecution of Palestinian artists, writers, and young activists just because they express their rejection of oppression." As such, Palestinian civil society and solidarity groups can work jointly to increase international pressure for the release of Tatour and to intensify the Stop G4S campaign in solidarity with all Palestinian political prisoners.

More generally, these groups can also:

- Use the media, public forums, and other outreach to increase understanding of the Balfour Declaration's devastating impact on the Palestinian people through its negation of Palestinian culture and identity and keep calling on the UK government to issue an official apology;
- Coordinate a creative public communications campaign focusing on Israel's attacks on Palestinian culture and history and on the legitimacy of Palestinian civil society's call for the cultural and academic boycott of Israel until it complies with international law;
- Provide legal and other support to artists, academics, and cultural programmers facing political pressure from pro-Israel advocates and coordinate activities to stop UK ministers from threatening the independence of British cultural and academic institutions;
18,000 people have signed a pledge not to buy HP products and this past June activists in over 20 locations, the nongovernmental organization Un ponte per…, the Italian Forum of Water Movements, the nongovernmental organization Un ponte per…, and the COBAS trade union have made similar pledges. The UK-based Palestine Solidarity Campaign has also chosen HP as a key boycott target. More than 5,700 employees there, and is one of the Israeli military's main information technology suppliers.

The US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation — now renamed the US Campaign for Palestinian Rights — and the Palestinian BDS National Committee recently hosted two webinars on the HP boycott. The first, with approximately 120 participants from 18 countries, covered the reasons behind the campaign and included a talk with Caroline Hunter, who led the boycott of Polaroid due to its involvement in apartheid South Africa. In 1970, Hunter, at the time a chemist with Polaroid, discovered use of the company's instant photograph technology for the notorious passbooks used to control and limit movement of black South Africans. She was fired from her job over her activism to hold Polaroid to account. The seven-year campaign, which was ultimately successful, initiated the anti-apartheid boycott and divestment movement in the United States and also served to educate the general public about South Africa.

The second webinar focused on how to implement HP boycott and divestment campaigns.

“Just as Polaroid was a critical boycott target in the apartheid era for providing imaging to South Africa's notorious pass system, it's time for the international community to come together to boycott HP companies for providing imaging to Israel's notorious checkpoints today,” Anna Baltzer, an organizing director with the US Campaign, told The Electronic Intifada.

Key military player
HP is deeply invested in Israel's military and security infrastructure, supplying the IT systems for Israel's defense ministry, supplying and managing the computer servers for the army and administering the IT infrastructure for the navy. EDS Israel, now known as HP Enterprise Services Israel, developed, installed and services the Basel System, a biometric identification system.

In addition to limiting Palestinian movement and enforcing a regime of segregation, the system collects biometric data as well as personal information on Palestinians. The company provides printers and administers IT systems for the Israeli Prison Service. HP also maintains a development center in the Israeli settlement of Beitar Illit. It has provided data storage systems to the settlement of Ariel, and described it in an HP case study as the “capital of Samaria” — Israel's term for the northern portion of the occupied West Bank — “in the heart of Israel.” The map in this case study depicts an Israel from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, with no reference to the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

A recent report by Public Knowledge Workshop, an Israeli transparency nonprofit, found that exclusive of Israel's defense ministry, “HP has the largest number of contracts with the government exempt from tenders of any private sector entity.”

Underpinning Israeli oppression
It is the technological underpinning of Israeli oppression that prompted an HP boycott campaign across all of historic Palestine. The campaign Mutharkeen, or “movers,” was initiated by the Palestinian Youth Together for Change project, and has been raising awareness through presentations to community groups, students and universities in Gaza, the West Bank and present-day Israel. The group is collecting signatures for a pledge that, according to its literature, defines the HP boycott as a “rejection of the geographical and moral fragmentation imposed on us by Zionist colonization, and the suppression of our collective Palestinian identity.”

The HP boycott is also a national focus for the campaign group BDS Italy, which is encouraging organizations to pledge to free their offices of the company's products. The Italian trade union Unione Sindacale di Base recently voted unanimously to endorse the BDS campaign and called all its offices and 250,000 members not to purchase HP products.

The Italian Forum of Water Movements, the nongovernmental organization Un ponte per…, and the COBAS trade union have made similar pledges. The UK-based Palestine Solidarity Campaign has also chosen HP as a key boycott target. More than 18,000 people have signed a pledge not to buy HP products and this past June activists in over 20 locations participated in a national day of action to protest the company's involvement in Israel's rights abuses.
Palestine via South Africa and Burma

HP has previously yielded to external pressure. In 1989, due to mounting anti-apartheid campaigns, HP distanced itself from South Africa, saying it would sell off its local unit, though it would continue to sell computers in the country. In 1996, HP pulled out of Burma following a Massachusetts law on "selective purchasing" under which the commonwealth government avoided contracts with companies doing business there.

In 2014, the Presbyterian Church USA voted to divest from the company over its role in the Israeli occupation. Prior to the vote, HP attempted damage control with a letter to the church claiming the Basel System reduces "friction" at Israeli checkpoints. Hewlett-Packard did not respond to a request for comment for this article.


**From Europe**

1. **EU High Representative, Federica Mogherini, affirms the right to BDS**

   Federica Mogherini, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, condemns attacks on human rights defenders and affirms the rights of European citizens to freedom of expression and association, including through participation in the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. In response to a question on whether the EU commission will commit to defending BDS activists' right to exercise their democratic freedom of expression, put forward by MEP Martina Anderson, the EU High Representative stated:

   "The EU stands firm in protecting freedom of expression and freedom of association in line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which is applicable on EU Member States' territory, including with regard to BDS actions carried out on this territory."

   Mogherini also affirmed that "Freedom of expression, as underlined by the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, is also applicable to information or ideas 'that offend, shock or disturb the State or any sector of the population.'"

   Having failed to hinder the growing support and impact of the BDS movement in the mainstream, Israel has launched an unprecedented anti-democratic campaign to silence Palestine rights activism and outlaw BDS. The Israeli-induced attacks on the BDS movement include pressure on governments, legislators and officials to fight BDS activity through implementation of repressive measures that pose a threat to civil and political liberties at large.

   When asked about the Commission's assessment of statements made by Israeli Minister of Intelligence Yisrael Katz that 'targeted civil elimination' should be carried out against Palestinian and international leaders for the BDS movement, the EU High Representative stated that "The EU firmly condemns threats and violence against human rights defenders under all circumstances."

   Riya Hassan, European Campaigns Officer of the Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC), the largest coalition in Palestinian civil society that leads the global BDS movement, commented:

   "We welcome the EU's belated defense of the right of European and other citizens to stand in solidarity with Palestinian rights, including through BDS tactics. But Palestinian civil society expects the EU to respect its obligations under international law and its own principles and laws by, at the very least, imposing a military embargo on Israel, banning products of companies that do business in Israel's illegal colonies, and suspending the EU-Israel Association Agreement until Israel fully complies with the human rights clause of the agreement."

   A letter signed by more than 30 MEPs had called on Federica Mogherini, to take measures assuring freedom of expression regarding the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement for justice and equality and recognising Omar Barghouti, a co-founder of the BDS movement, as a human rights defender. This letter echoes growing European political and civil society calls for protecting the freedom of expression of activists and organisations involved in BDS activity for Palestinian rights under international law.

   More than 350 European human rights organizations, trade unions, church groups and political parties, have called on the European Union to defend citizens and organisations right to boycott Israel in response to its occupation and violations of Palestinian rights. Representatives of the Swedish, Irish and Dutch governments have publicly defended the right to advocate and campaign for Palestinian rights under international law through BDS.


2. **EU diplomats visit demolition-threatened Palestinian communities, Jerusalem**

   A group of EU diplomats based in Jerusalem and Ramallah, including some Heads of Mission, visited today communities facing the threat of demolition and displacement in the Jerusalem periphery. The objective of this field trip was to gain a first-hand impression of the coercive environment these communities find themselves in, to be informed of recent developments, to demonstrate concern at the humanitarian impact of any demolitions and forced transfer of population, and to express the EU's commitment to a sustainable future for the Palestinian communities in Area C. During the visit, the group met with community leaders who briefed them about demolitions taking place in their communities, including of the local schools.

   The group started its visit in Abu Nuwar, a community which is designated for relocation by the Israeli authorities. So far in 2016, the Israeli authorities have demolished 10 housing units in the community, leaving 26 people homeless, including 17 children. In February a number of caravans being donated to the local school were confiscated. The alternative structure that was constructed instead was demolished on 27 September, leaving pupils without shelter.
From Palestine/Israel

1. Severely injured Palestinian mother Israa Jaabis sentenced to 11 years in Israeli prison

Palestinian prisoner Israa Jaabis, 32, was sentenced to 11 years in prison on Monday, 7 November by an Israeli court in HaSharon prison before the completion of her treatment. Due to her severe injuries and lack of support inside the prison, she must rely on her fellow women prisoners to assist her with basic tasks. She is not receiving supplemental treatment despite her massive burns and severe injuries. In order to convict Jaabis of "attempted murder" for a fire contained to the inside of her own car, Israeli prosecutors referenced her Facebook and social media posts expressing support for the Palestinian resistance and liberation for Palestine. In addition to the 11 year prison sentence, Jaabis was ordered to pay a fine of 20,000 NIS (approximately $5,000 USD).

Jaabis’ airbag went off in the front seat of the car. Israeli occupation forces accused her of attempting to detonate a car bomb; an Israeli police officer was injured when the car fire broke out. However, Jaabis was severely burned, especially on her face and hands. Eight of her fingers were amputated when she was hospitalized. She is married and her family repeatedly stated that she was carrying the gas canister as part of her move; in order to preserve her Jerusalem residency, she had recently rented a new apartment and had been moving furniture in her car for days. Palestinian Jerusalemites, especially those with family members in the West Bank, are systematically targeted for the revocation of their Jerusalem IDs by the Israeli occupation.

Jaabis was moved to HaSharon prison before the completion of her treatment. Due to her severe injuries and lack of support inside the prison, she must rely on her fellow women prisoners to assist her with basic tasks. She is not receiving supplemental treatment despite her massive burns and severe injuries. In order to convict Jaabis of "attempted murder" for a fire contained to the inside of her own car, Israeli prosecutors referenced her Facebook and social media posts expressing support for the Palestinian resistance and liberation for Palestine. In addition to the 11 year prison sentence, Jaabis was ordered to pay a fine of 20,000 NIS (approximately $5,000 USD).

Jaabis’ sentence comes alongside multiple other lengthy sentences meted out by Israeli courts to severely injured Palestinians, particularly children. Ahmad Manasrah, 14, was sentenced yesterday to 12 years imprisonment, while Munther Abu Mayala, 15, and Mohamed Taha, 16, were sentenced to 11 years each. These excessive prison sentences come alongside the extrajudicial execution of 238 Palestinians by occupation forces, including 57 children.

2. Medicinal herb industry takes root in Palestine

RAMALLAH, West Bank — Cultivating medicinal herbs is one of the most promising and productive agricultural sectors in Palestine. Palestinian medicinal plants reached global markets after almost 10 years of work that started on May 3, 2007. In cooperation with al-Khazarian Company for Agricultural Products, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) had launched the greenhouse project for medicinal herbs in Ras al-Fara, northeast of Nablus, north of the West Bank, as part of the Palestinian Agriculture Rehabilitation Activity. With that, the cultivation of medicinal herbs for export began and continues to grow.

On Oct. 30, Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah opened the Agripal Garden for Fresh Herbs where medicinal herbs like coriander, parsley and sweet basil are grown and exported. The garden is located in the northern al-Aghwar area, on the eastern side of the West Bank on the Jordanian border. The herbs are cultivated on 1,200 dunams (297 acres) in the West Bank. The total production capacity is estimated at 2,500 tons per year and is worth $20 million, Mohammad al-Lahham, the director of the Vegetables Department at the Ministry of Agriculture, told Al-Monitor. Lahham said these products are too expensive to be sold in the local market, explaining that 95% of it is "exported to the United States and Europe due to the high cost of production."
Two key factors have contributed to the success of medicinal herb cultivation: cooperation with and funding from international organizations like USAID and participation in international expositions. Both helped enable Palestinian workers who worked in Israeli settlements to be employed by Palestinian companies. Tarek Abu Khaizaran, the director of Agrigal Garden and Factory, told Al-Monitor, “The field of medicinal herbs started in Palestine 10 years ago, and it benefited from the experience of Palestinian settlement workers after they were hired by Palestinian plants and farms.” Abu Khaizaran noted that Agrigal Garden and Factory has hired 100 workers who were employed in Israeli settlements to benefit from their practical experience in machinery, agriculture and packaging. Specialists also came on with their expertise in the type and quality of plants, he said, and Palestinian companies are offering competitive salaries and work environments that encourage workers to quit their jobs in the settlements.

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics data published on Aug. 8 showed that 22,000 Palestinian employees worked in Israeli settlements during the first quarter of 2016, and this figure dropped to about 19,000 during the second quarter. President Mahmoud Abbas issued a decree on April 26, 2010, banning the sale of settlement products in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The decree bans any technical, material or artisanal act that would benefit the settlements financially. But the Palestinian government’s inability to provide thousands of alternative job opportunities for settlement workers has led it to forego prosecution and restrict itself to a ban on settlement products.

Moussa Daraghma established the Jannat Adan for Medicinal Herbs Company in Tayasir village in Tubas province 10 years ago, after two decades of working in Israeli settlements. He told Al-Monitor, “After having worked in the settlements for 20 years, I gained comprehensive experience about planting medicinal herbs and exporting them. So I established my own factory to compete with Israel’s.” Daraghma’s project employs 400 Palestinians who worked in settlements. He exports 700 tons of medicinal herbs per year. He noted that he exports 22 kinds of medicinal herbs, mainly sage, mint, coriander, local thyme and wild thyme to the United States and Europe. He markets his products at international expos in Germany, Russia and Georgia. He is planning to invest in herb farming in six new areas in the West Bank in the next five years. Daraghma asserted that planting herbs is potentially a strategic field for the national economy, though it doesn’t receive the subsidies it needs from the Ministry of Agriculture or the Ministry of Local Economy, even though the National Strategy for Export 2014-2018, prepared by the Palestinian Ministry of Economy and the Palestine Trade Center, prioritized the medicinal herb sector.

Palestinians are often compelled to work in settlements due to the lack of job opportunities in the West Bank. But if there is a viable alternative, they are happy to change jobs. Fatima al-Nabibri, who has been working in Jannat Adan for Medicinal Herbs Company for six years after having worked in al-Hamra settlement in al-Aghwar for a year, told Al-Monitor, “Working in the West Bank is psychologically and socially comfortable, and it bears working in settlements. Financially, it is the same income.” Nabibri, who supports her parents and her brother’s two children, works in packaging and processing herbs and managing 12 workers. She said, “My work shift in the settlements started at 7 in the morning. I would leave my house at 4 in the morning and wait at al-Hamra checkpoint in Tubas for hours. The shift ended at 2 p.m. and I would arrive home at 5 p.m., even though I live nearby.” She added, “Working in the settlements is risky, because we are always afraid of settler attacks while heading to work or returning home. The work environment is not comfortable, and bosses or employment agencies can easily dupe employees on salaries.”

Source: Ahmad Melhem, Al Monitor, 9.11.2016
Ahmad Melhem is a Palestinian journalist and photographer based in Ramallah for Al-Watan News. He writes for a number of Arabic outlets.


3. Israel refuses entry to 115 British citizens in 2016 amid ‘discriminatory’ treatment of pro-Palestinian activists

More than 100 British citizens have been refused entry to Israel so far this year as lawyers raise concern over the "discriminatory" use of immigration laws against pro-Palestinian activists. Dr Adam Hanieh, a senior lecturer at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) was among those turned away at the border in what university leaders called an "arbitrary breach of academic freedom". The development studies lecturer, who was due to deliver three classes at Birzeit University in the West Bank, was held for 10 hours after landing at Ben Gurion Airport on 12 September.

University officials said he was put in a detention centre overnight, before being returned to London the following morning and given a 10-year ban from entering Israel. Dr Hanieh is among of at least 115 British citizens refused entry to Israel since the start of this year, according to Israeli government figures. In response to a Parliamentary question from Mark Durkan, the SDLP MP for Foyle, Middle East minister Tobias Ellwood said 129,000 British nationals had visited the country in the same period. He confirmed 50 were turned away from Ben Gurion Airport – the only international airport in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories - and 65 at the Allenby Bridge crossing from Jordan into the West Bank.

No breakdown was available of the reasons for the refusals, which can include administrative issues such as having an incorrect visa, “presenting false information” about plans and security concerns. Emily Schaeffer Omer-Man, a human rights lawyer who represents foreigners denied entry, said legitimate rules were sometimes applied “in a discriminatory way”. “What we’ve seen as a pattern in cases over the past five years is that those who are of Palestinian or Arab heritage, or who are coming in to do humanitarian work particularly in the West Bank, are disproportionately targeted,” she added. “Typically someone who is either Jewish, does not have a history of activism, or who is not of Palestinian or Arab heritage, will have an easier time getting quickly through passport control. A lot of times issues only come up because questioning goes deeper, because the person raises a flag in the mind of border control.”

Visitors arriving at the airport in Tel Aviv or other border crossings are questioned on arrival by officials who use the interview to decide the extent of access granted. People may be given entry cards or passport stamps granting leave to enter for a period of up to three months, or taken for further questioning if concerns are raised. Travel advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) warns that Israeli border officials may require travellers to sign plenets not to enter the Palestinian territories without authorisation. It says access to travellers’ personal e-mail or social media accounts has been requested as a condition of entry and cautions that British nationals of Palestinian origin “may face problems”.

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Following interrogation, officials can refuse entry and impose travel bans for up to 10 years, detaining visitors until they can be returned to their country of origin. Those who are allowed to enter Israel are questioned again upon departure and have their baggage searched, with officials able to inspect electrical items such as laptops, phones and cameras. The information gathered is then stored and may be used as evidence to deny someone entry in the future. The vast majority of refusals are not believed to be politically-motivated, but there is growing concern over the establishment of a taskforce with the aim of identifying and blocking supporters of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

"Boycott activists must not be allowed to enter Israel," said public security minister Gilad Erdan in August.

Ms Schaeffer Omer-Man said the taskforce is "legally problematic", adding: "Every state has the right to protect its borders but political leanings alone are not sufficient grounds." She detailed cases where foreigners who have joined pro-Palestinian demonstrations, supported the BDS movement on social media or critiqued the Israeli government elsewhere have been denied entry to the country. Visitors being interrogated may be asked to name their Palestinian contacts, or give over the Facebook account details, allowing Israeli officials to search their friend lists, communications, comments and event history.

“All of this is very effective at intimidating people and discouraging them from coming if they’ve been active in non-violent demonstrations,” Ms Schaeffer Omer-Man said. “It is not a coincidence that these procedures are long and exhausting.”

Gary Spedding, a former organiser for the Alliance Party’s youth wing in Northern Ireland, is among those refused and he believes he was targeted because of his pro-Palestinian activism. The 26-year-old attempted to visit Israel and the West Bank in January 2014 to meet Israeli politicians and humanitarian groups but was detained at Ben Gurion Airport. Mr Spedding told The Independent he was held for eight hours, “interrogated intensely” and strip-searched twice as officials took his mobile phone and allegedly examined his messages, photos, emails and contacts. He was held overnight in a detention centre before being put on a flight back to the UK the following day, with a 10-year travel ban. “It was an awful experience,” Mr Spedding said. “The facility was abysmal, it struck me very much that I was one of the few people who are white or of a Western background. “The vast majority of people I saw were African refugees or migrants – we were kept separate from the Palestinian or Arab detainees."

The human rights activist, who is currently studying for a masters at Ulster University, is fighting a legal battle to scrap his 10-year travel ban, which was lowered to five years on appeal, with the next court date in November. Documents from a 2014 decision at the Jerusalem immigration tribunal said Mr Spedding was denied entry for “security reasons” as the organiser of a protest at Queen’s University in Belfast where an Israeli guest lecturer was attacked in 2011. Mr Spedding said he had been “completely vindicated” over direct involvement in the violence and said allegations that his presence in the West Bank amounted to a risk to public order were “nonsense”. "The way I’ve been treated in the past two years has hindered my work,” he added. "It’s had a significant impact on my life … I still have nightmares (about the detention facility)."

An Israeli official declined to comment on the case and said those refused entry to Israel were a small proportion of visitors. "165,000 British nationals have entered Israel since January 2016, enjoying what Israel has to offer in tourism, business and so much more, as part of the ever-growing relationship between the two countries," he added. "Those who were refused entry – who make up just 0.07 per cent of the total number of visitors – are eligible to appeal the decision through Israel's independent court system, in a similar process to the one available to Israelis who are refused entry to the UK." A spokesperson for the FCO said the British Government has raised concerns with Israeli authorities when receiving reports of the “mistreatment” of citizens, adding: “We do not routinely raise the matter of British nationals being refused entry to Israel. Israel’s border controls are sovereign, just as the UK’s are.”


4. Israel tries to block PA bid to join Interpol

The Israeli authorities are preparing to start a campaign to convince the International Criminal Police Organisation, Interpol, to reject the membership application from the Palestinian Authority, Quds Press reported on Sunday. Using its diplomatic representation overseas, the foreign ministry is trying to explain Israel’s stance on the PA’s bid to join the organisation. According to the Walla website, the move to join Interpol is part of the PA’s strategy to join international organisations. After the UN, Interpol is the largest of such bodies.

When the application was submitted a very short time before the last annual meeting of Interpol members, it was rejected. Earlier this year, the PA renewed its request to join the organisation, but the executive committee decided in May not to vote on any new applications. According to Quds Press, though, Interpol then set up an independent committee of experts to decide on the criteria for potential new members, including the PA, Kosovo and the Solomon Islands. The newspaper said that Turkey has announced that it has added the PA request to join Interpol to the agenda for the 2016 meeting and that it has been agreed to put the application to a vote.

The Israelis claim that if the PA is a member of Interpol, it could leak intelligence information to terrorist organisations. Source: MEMO/EuroPal Forum, 31.10.2016

5. Israel bombs Gaza as Lieberman says next war ‘will be the last’

Israel’s air force hit a Hamas post in the Gaza Strip on Monday after a rocket was fired from the Palestinian enclave toward Israel, the military said. There were no initial reports that the rocket caused any casualties. “A rocket was fired at southern Israel from the Gaza Strip,” an army statement said, but “no rockets hit Israeli territory”. Israeli public radio said it was believed the rocket fell short and landed within Gaza, which is run by Palestinian movement Hamas.

"In response to the attack Israel Air Force aircraft targeted a Hamas military post in the northern Gaza Strip," the army said. Hamas officials said there were no casualties in the attack on the post, at Beit Hanoun, near the border with Israel. Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza have fought three wars since 2008 and there are frequent flare-ups along the border. On Monday
Israel's far-right defence minister, Avigdor Lieberman, told a Palestinian newspaper Israel's next war in Gaza would be its last "because we will completely destroy them".

Lieberman however said he had no intention of starting a new war in Gaza, which would be the fourth since 2008. He urged Palestinians to pressure Hamas to "stop your crazy policies". "As minister of defence, I would like to clarify that we have no intention of starting a new war against our neighbours in the Gaza Strip or the West Bank, Lebanon or Syria," he said in the interview with Jerusalem-based Al-Quds newspaper. "But in Gaza, like the Iranians, they intend to eliminate the state of Israel... If they impose the next war on Israel, it will be their last. I would like to emphasise again: It will be their last confrontation because we will completely destroy them."

Lieberman is part of what is seen as the most right-wing government in Israeli history, with several prominent members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition openly opposing a Palestinian state. But while known as a security-minded hardliner, Lieberman believes in a two-state solution to the conflict based on land swaps. He reiterated that position in the interview, saying he sees the main settlement blocks in the occupied West Bank remaining part of Israel under a final peace deal. Lieberman, who took office in May, also criticised Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, accusing him of failing to make tough compromises that could lead to peace.

He predicted Abbas would lose if elections were held, with polls showing most Palestinians would like the 81-year-old to resign. Such elections could lead to Hamas taking power in the West Bank, where Abbas's secular Fatah party currently dominates, but Lieberman said he believed a different outcome was possible. "There are enough sensible people in the (Palestinian Authority) who understand the situation and know if there is a choice to make between Hamas and Israel, they think partnering with Israel will be better for them," he said. Lieberman has recently spoken of trying to bypass Palestinian leaders and reach out directly to communities, and his interview appeared to be part of that effort.

Al-Quds was heavily criticised on social media by Palestinians who say it should not have agreed to an interview with an Israeli official as it amounted to sanctioning "normalisation" with an occupying power. Before taking over as defence minister, Lieberman made a series of controversial statements, including one directed at Ismail Haniya, Hamas's leader in the Gaza Strip. Lieberman said he would give Haniya 48 hours to hand over two detained Israeli civilians and the bodies of soldiers killed in a 2014 war "or you're dead". He has since backed off such statements and said he is committed to "responsible, reasonable policy".


Media Group, Haringey Justice for Palestinians