

Is Bernie Burning His Bridges?

No, Bernie Sanders is not a self-hating Jew. Nor are members of the organization J Street because its leader Jeremy Ben-Ami has told us it is not. Yet it remains a puzzlement that these self-proclaimed supporters of Israel, indeed many vitally concerned about the proper “soul” of Israel, are constantly scolding the Jewish State for alleged misbehavior and rarely, if ever, utter a word about its accomplishments or its crucial need for security.

Of course, we know from numerous organizations such as the Jewish Voice for Peace, as well as from Middle East experts such as the novelist Alice Walker and the sanctimonious Archbishop Desmond Tutu much more about the shortcomings of Israel than of the paradise to be found in Iran, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Burundi.

To the delight of the U.S. mainstream press, above all the *New York Times*, Bernie Sanders, the Independent candidate for President has now joined the chorus of those who tell us we must speak the truth about Israel. His critical remarks of Israel in the debate on April 14, 2016 have been heralded as “breaking a taboo” on critical comments, and so important that they could now lead others to follow.

But the mainstream press is evidently unaware that Bernie is a follower, not a leader, and the comments he uttered have been made in countless TV programs, in many journals, on many campuses in the country, by the never ending rhetoric from Palestinian groups and their supporters, from those who suffer from the disease of antisemitism, and from the well-meaning naïve who have swallowed the fallacious Palestinian Narrative of Victimhood. The various organs of the United Nations, especially the UN Human Rights Council, have made anti-Israeli

comments their life work.

Bernie, for all his fulminations about the “establishment”, political and financial, is on this issue the epitome of fashionable, and sometimes bigoted, political correctness.

Bernie has rarely discussed foreign policy during his presidential campaign, except to criticize rival Hillary Clinton for her vote in favor of the war in Iraq, and her “intervention” in Libya. Bernie’s interest in war is limited to just one, the one against “Wall Street.” Though he seems to know nothing about the issue of Iran, Bernie did condemn Israel for its criticism of the nuclear deal with Iran, which almost everyone except President Barack Obama now sees as a major political blunder, and likely to ensure an Iranian nuclear weapon.

About Bernie, it is a matter of choice which is the greater, his ignorance of foreign policy and lack of reality or his poor judgment. He had difficulty overcoming his absurd statement in the *New York Daily News* that in the Gaza Strip fighting in July-August 2014, more than 10,000 Palestinian civilians had been killed. The figures given by the UN were 1,423, and even the terrorist Hamas stated 1,462. Even those numbers are exaggerated because many of the Hamas killed were not civilians, but militants wearing civilian dress.

After recognizing his foolishness, he corrected his gross error by speaking of “10,000 wounded civilians and 1,500 deaths.” What is important in all this is that he did not utter a word of the provocations by Hamas, the constant stream of rockets and missiles attacking Israeli cities and infrastructure, and that the Israeli response was to end the rocket fire and to protect its population.

Moreover, Bernie said nothing, probably because he knew nothing, of the *Amnesty International Report* on the atrocities committed by Hamas on this occasion against their Palestinian

rivals, the Fatah, and their use of torture, abductions, extrajudicial killings, "horrible abuses," and war crimes. Bernie should have known all this is more meaningful because *Amnesty International* is not known to be friendly to Israel.

Instead of making meaningful comments on the issue, Bernie echoes the anti-Israeli chorus who relentlessly exclaim about the "disproportionate" force used against the Hamas terrorists. Of course Bernie does not want the destruction of Israel. But one wonders if he will be asked by the *New York Times*, exactly what would be the correct "proportionate" response?

His error of judgment is one that should destroy Bernie's credibility as a decision maker. He appointed the 25 year-old Simone Zimmerman as his "Jewish outreach coordinator." It is difficult to know her capacity for "co-ordination" since she was a member of the college chapter of J Street, helped found the group IFNOTNOW, a group critical of Israeli "occupation," and opposed funding for Israeli projects in the West Bank. Even Bernie might have appreciated the extent of her "outreach."

Zimmerman's political wisdom was limited to remarking on "grave injustices" committed by Israel, and the rampant racism in Israel society. Her language revealed the extent of her sensibility as well as her deep vocabulary. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was arrogant, deceptive, cynical, and manipulative. Netanyahu was an "asshole," and her message to him was "F...you Bibi." Bernie dismissed her but why did he ever appoint her? Could the answer be that she was Bernie's example of a "balanced approach."

Bernie's call for a "balanced approach" on the Israeli-Palestinian issue does not take courage and integrity to be made. The call, and the urging that the U.S. play an even-handed role, has been made by critics of Israel, as well as by some well-meaning people ever since 5 Arab armies

invaded the newly created State of Israel on May 14, 1948 to destroy it, and the consequent desire by many Palestinians to exterminate the State.

No one will disagree with Bernie's assertion that we should treat the Palestinian people with "respect and dignity," and that changes are desirable, and many Israelis do, or try, to do so. Yet, it is equally important that Bernie and those hostile to Israel, should call for Palestinians to regard Israel and behave towards it in the same way.

The main problem with Bernie's remarks about the Middle East is not dishonesty but naïvete. Like any rational person he desires peace between Israel and the Palestinians, but he is looking at the wrong mirror. He should know that if PLO leader Yasser Arafat had accepted the offer that then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak put on the table during the discussions in July 2000 at Camp David, the Palestinians would have had a state of their own. It was Arafat who ended, at least for many years, the possibility of a final status agreement between the parties.

Some advice to Bernie is in order. He should be aware now of the considerable amount of arms that Iran is sending to Hamas in Gaza Strip and to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Alas, he is less interested in this than in going on a one day trip on April 15, 2016 to Rome to talk of the need for "the most comprehensive climate change legislation, including a tax on carbon." Even the most ardent admirer of Bernie must question his sincerity and the possibility he is hypocritical because of the nature of his short pointless trip. Accompanied by his wife, family and perhaps 50 people Bernie chartered a Delta 767 that burns more than 16,000 gallons of fuel a trip. Presidential voters know an email would have been cheaper and would have saved gas. They should act accordingly.