

Patrick Lawrence

Britain sanctions the West Bank settlements: Policy as performance.

Condemning the violence of vile mobs of Zionist settlers in the West Bank seems to be the fashion of the season. As noted in [my last commentary for *Global Bridge*](#), two of Israel's most visible political figures, Bibi Netanyahu, the prime minister, and Isaac Herzog, Israel's president, rushed to denounce frenzied settlers after they attacked Palestinians in two West Bank villages late last month. A few days later a group of retired military and intelligence officers, all of them senior, many of them veterans of service in the West Bank, went public to vilify "Jewish terrorism," as one of these figures called the incessant savagery of Zionist settlers.

Not that anything has changed in consequence of these vitriolic displays of disapproval. Nothing has.

A short while after these purposely public displays, none other than Mike Huckabee, the freakishly zealous Christian Zionist now serving as the Trump regime's ambassador to "the Jewish state," traveled to Turmus Aya, a West Bank town with a large population of Palestinian-Americans, to "grieve" and to "get some resolution to things." All of this was reported at length in *The New York Times*, the newspaper of liberal Zionism the world over.

These professions of outrage are now beginning to take shape as policy among some of the Western powers. Last week a dozen Western nations, with Britain in the lead, declared their intention to sanction all trade in products produced in West

Bank settlements. Here is part of the statement the 12 foreign ministers issued last Tuesday, 8 September:

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Today, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK confirm their intention to introduce national and/or support European restrictions on trade in goods with settlements which are illegal under international law, or that they are actively considering these and other measures, in accordance with their national procedures.

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It is a fine thing that these nations, especially those among them that have long supported the Zionist state, are at last censuring the vicious conduct of West Bank settlers and, more broadly, their illegal presence as they destroy Palestinian farms and villages on the way to stealing their land. But there is text and subtext here: *We Europeans cannot stand by idly as Jewish settlers attack Palestinians. We Europeans have no intention to do anything that would force the Zionist state to stop these barbarous people and, in accordance with international law, begin to dismantle the 500-plus settlements and outposts where they live.*

This is not a difficult read. When Ed Miliband announced last week that Britain will ban imports of all goods produced in West Bank settlements, he did so “as a proud British Jew”—this in the first sentence of his speech to Parliament, after which the foreign secretary went sentimentally on about his “deep gratitude to the State of Israel” and his “joyful childhood memories picking oranges as a kid on the kibbutz where my cousins lived.”

Why did Miliband give over the opening moments of his speech to his pledge of allegiance to the Jewish state? What are a foreign minister's fond childhood recollections doing in [a statement announcing measures against a genocidal state](#) whose declared intent is to ethnic-cleanse the West Bank of its three million Palestinians? In short, how are we to read Miliband's mawkish drivel if not as a barely disguised reassurance to the Israelis and their supporters elsewhere that the Israeli project to take over the West Bank will not be disrupted?

The Israelis reacted instantly after Miliband spoke and 11 other foreign ministers issued their statement in support of his sanctions policy. Tel Aviv ordered the British consulate in Jerusalem closed, demanded the removal of British officials from a multilateral committee overseeing the Gaza "ceasefire," and declared *non grata* 11 British MPs who have been critical of Israel's terror campaigns in Gaza and the West Bank.

There seems to me (and a few others) only one way to interpret these latest turns on the West Bank question. Gideon Levy, the *Haaretz* journalist and one of the few Israelis to comment honestly and publicly about the Zionist state's conduct, got it exactly right in a column published 10 September under the headline, "The U.K. Sanctions Are a Joke. Israel Is the Settlements, and the Settlements Are Israel."

Levy's lead paragraph:

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Everyone is playing the game: Britain supposedly imposes sanctions, about a dozen other European countries pretend to join them and Israel responds with measures akin to a mouse striking back at an elephant so we can show the British a thing or two. Everyone is happy with themselves. The

construction of settler homes on stolen Palestinian land will not stop, nor will the theft of livestock, because of what Britain has done, even if the world is delighting in these sanctions.

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All is gesture, then—policy as performance, just as it was mere gesture last month when Israeli officials of some visibility denounced the serial attacks of settlers on Palestinian homes, villages, and farms. Not two weeks after he traveled to the West Bank to grieve and resolve things, to drive this point home, Mike Huckabee protested the import ban as “Jew hate.”

Last week’s events reminded me of the 15 nations that declared at the U.N. General Assembly a year ago this month that they would formally recognize the Palestinian state. What has come of that rather ostentatious display? Many of those 15, I should note, are on the list of those whose foreign ministers just endorsed Miliband’s import ban.

I see two ways to interpret these recent events.

One, performative policies devoid of substance suggest the Western powers are more or less entirely unserious about addressing in any effective way the Israelis’ campaigns of terror in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, and elsewhere in West Asia. There is no escaping this conclusion, it seems to me. If anything, any atrocity or brutality, is to prove sufficient to prompt a strong response against the Zionist state, Israel has not yet committed it. Nothing it has so far done has been enough to reverse what amounts to the “unconditional support” the Americans have professed for decades.

Two, it is evident that policy as gesture, the prevalent program in the Western capitals, is intended primarily for public consumption. It is a response, it follows

directly, to the marked rise in public reactions across the West against Zionist terror in all its manifestations. The conclusion here should be obvious. The force necessary to defeat Zionism—and defeating Zionism must be the final objective—originates in the acts of citizens: in demonstrations, varieties of civil disobedience, in whatever means may be available to each of us.

Own Jones, a British commentator, remarked last week that the British public forced Ed Milliband's hand. It is very true. The U.K.'s import ban is not much, but it is not nothing, just as the 15 pledges of recognition at the U.N. were not much but not nothing. However gently, the wind blows in the right direction.

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