

# COMMENTARY

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## **Netanyahu's Policies Are Fuelling Anti-Semitism**

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I am no longer surprised by what Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu says or does. No leader with any pride and sensitivity would have tried to exploit for political gain the tragic deaths of four French Jews who were assassinated in a kosher supermarket in Paris. It is one thing to travel to France and demonstrate solidarity with the French people after the horrific execution of 12 journalists at the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo; it is an entirely different matter to use the occasion to call on French Jews to immigrate to Israel to avoid anti-Semitism and "live secure and peaceful lives."

At this moment, when France has a good deal of soul-searching to do, we may do well to recall the thoughts of Jean-Paul Sartre, whose *Anti-Semite and Jew*, though written over seventy years ago, contains observations that are no less true today, such as his diagnosis of anti-Semitism as an all-consuming passion, a "total choice" that transforms hatred into a faith.

Sartre understood that the answer to anti-Semitism did not lie in the Jews of France leaving their country—"their original fatherland"—to live in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv, as Netanyahu recently proposed.

Any solution to the problem of anti-Semitism (which is on the rise all over Europe) will involve recognizing, in Sartre's closing words, that "[n]ot one Frenchman will be secure so long as a single Jew – in France or in the world at large – can fear for his life."

French Prime Minister Manuel Valls recognized this fact when he expressed deep concerns about the prospect, however remote, that a large segment of French Jews may leave France because of the rise of anti-Israel and anti-Jewish sentiments.

For Valls, the recognition of Jews as full citizens is a founding principle of the 1789 French Revolution and remains one of the central pillars of French democracy.

By calling on French Jews to immigrate to Israel while still on French soil, Netanyahu was rudely suggesting that they are no longer safe in France and only Israel can provide a safe haven where they can live without fear and with security.

Netanyahu conveniently forgets that 80 times more Israelis were killed in Israel by suicide bombers and random acts of violence in the past 20 years than all Jews killed in Europe by terrorists in the same time period.

French, British, and American Jews do not see Israel as the exclusive home for the Jews; they are proud to be citizens of their respective countries. Netanyahu's scare tactics to prompt the Jews to leave their places of birth is an affront to France and to Jews as well.

Yes, the majority of these Jews have a special affinity to Israel, but they do not feel torn between their loyalty to their country of birth and their kinship with Israel.

Although a greater number of Jews left France to live in Israel in 2014 than the previous year, many more immigrated to the US and Canada, among other countries. It should be noted that the overall number of young Western Jews immigrating to Israel has declined over the past ten years.

They no longer view Israel as a pioneering, free, and democratic state the way they envisioned it before. They do not accept the occupation as if it were a way of life; they vilify discrimination against Israeli Arabs and loathe the endemic corruption of Israel's political elite.

While Netanyahu calls for Jews to immigrate to Israel, he has done next to nothing to stem the flow of Israeli Jews emigrating from Israel; nearly one million left in the past 20 years. Ironically, many are leaving because they fear for their security and do not wish to have their children enlisted in the army, as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict grinds on.

Anti-Semitism has existed from time immemorial. There is probably little the Jews can do to change that sad reality, just as African-Americans can hardly change the racism of many white Americans.

Even after the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, the passage of the 13th Amendment outlawing slavery two years later, after decades of struggle for civil rights, and the election of a black President in 2008, racial profiling remains a source of deep resentment for African Americans.

Whether anti-Semitism is instigated by envy, enmity, or is culturally espoused, escaping to Israel would simply hand a victory to the anti-Semites. There will always be Jews living throughout the world (perhaps it's the secret behind their survival) and the anti-Semite will still lurk in the shadows.

The question is, since anti-Semitism cannot be expunged and the Jews will have to live with it, what can they, and particularly Israel, do to allay the disease of anti-Semitism?

Regardless of where they may live, the Jews need not bend backwards to please their enemies, but the onus falls especially on Israel to do the right thing and stop feeding fuel to the fire.

It is not by sheer accident that the whole world, including Israel's closest friend and ally—the US—rejects the settlement enterprise and the continued occupation, and it is not accidental that there is a spike in global anti-Semitic incidents every time the Israeli-Palestinian conflict flares up.

Netanyahu must accept the fact that the occupation is one of the main causes (but not the source) behind the recent rise of anti-Semitism. Instead of focusing on ending it, he is calling on French Jews to immigrate to Israel only to 'become oppressors' of the Palestinians.

Reaching an equitable peace agreement with the Palestinians will not eliminate anti-Semitism, as Sartre observed, "If the Jew did not exist, the anti-Semite would invent him." But it will, at a minimum, regress anti-Semitic fervour.

No, if Netanyahu cannot find his soul, the hour is calling for another Israeli leader to rise and have the courage to answer the call.

**Note:** This article is published in collaboration with Prof. Ben-Meir's web portal. **Web Link:** <http://www.alonben-meir.com/article/netanyahus-policies-fueling-anti-semitism/>

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