**At their weakest**

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Wednesday, May 15, 2024

The brilliant Palestinian Fayez Sayegh once wrote that when pro-Israel groups appeared to be at their strongest, they were only masking the fact that they were at their weakest. This is clear in the contrast of Israel’s sharp decline in standing among many demographic groups of American voters and the actions and statements by Congress and pro-Israel groups, particularly in evidence during the past week.

It’s an established fact that Israel has been losing ground in American public opinion since well before October 7th. Polls have shown that young people, Black, Latino, and Asian Americans hold somewhat more negative views of Israelis coupled with a rise in support for Palestinians. While Israel, in general, has retained support among Americans, the policies of the state are strongly opposed by majorities among all demographics, with most saying they want to cut US aid to Israel because of settlement construction and other violations of human rights.

During the past decade, in an effort to confront this, pro-Israel groups launched a multi-pronged offensive, components of which included: targeting and smearing both pro-Palestinian activists and members of Congress; passing laws in over two dozen states that penalized supporters of efforts to boycott or sanction Israel and in another dozen states to equate criticism of Israel with antisemitism; and a massive multi-million dollar “hasbara” campaign to improve Israel’s image in the US.

In the aftermath of the Hamas attack, Israel might have experienced sympathy for their tragic losses and made up some ground in lost support, but they squandered that opportunity with the sheer brutality and the wanton disregard for Palestinian lives they demonstrated in the months that followed. The results have only served to further weaken Israel’s standing among many groups of Americans, especially Democrats and key demographic groups that form its core base of support.

Still, Israel has been able to count on continued support from the White House, leaders in both parties in Congress, mainstream media outlets, and a majority of commentators and ‘analysts’ who have remained receptive to the Israeli narrative of ongoing events. Biden administration officials have persistently defended Israeli behaviors, even when attempting to shift gears by suggesting that Palestinian civilians should be protected.

There have been ‘leaks’ from executives of major US television networks and newspapers telling their staff how to cover stories – what must be said and what may not be said – in ways that echo Israel’s positions. And statements by leaders in Congress have been especially shameful in their defense of Israeli actions.

Despite this top-down advantage, trouble is percolating from below. Israel continues to lose support from key Democratic constituents – young and ‘minority’ voters – with that decline now also impacting support for the President. Much has been made of the precipitous decline in Arab American support and the more than one-half million voters who have so far voted for the Arab American-led ‘uncommitted’ campaign in Democratic primaries.

The problem is deeper. For example, a recent Washington Post poll shows a significant drop in President Biden’s support among Black voters, with his backing for Israel being cited by respondents as one reason for that decline.

The changing mood among voters toward Israel has taken an activist bent. Massive demonstrations have been held in most major cities. More than 200 local governments and major institutions, including major unions, have issued strong statements criticizing Israeli actions and calling for an immediate total ceasefire. Publicized statements by over one thousand leading Black clergy, another by the same number of Catholic leaders, most of the major Protestant churches, and prominent groups of young progressive Jews have also called for a ceasefire and for conditions to be placed on military aid to Israel. Sustained anti-war demonstrations on over 200 college campuses and, more recently, protest encampments at more than 50 colleges and universities have been led by students calling for an immediate permanent ceasefire and demanding that their universities divest from US companies supporting Israel.

Congress has also been impacted. While the leadership in both parties remain lockstep in support of Israel, a higher than ever number of Senators and Representatives have either signed letters calling for conditions be placed on aid to Israel or voted against pro-Israel legislation.

It’s clear that change is afoot. And so, in the face of their rapidly deteriorating position, pro-Israel groups have embarked on an all-out campaign not to make their case, but to stomp out their opponents. Their efforts are both ruthless and a threat to our democracy.

One pro-Israel lobbying group has earmarked $100 million to defeat members of Congress who have supported Palestinian rights. To understand the magnitude of this expenditure, note that at the high end a congressional election costs about $5 million. The $20 million they are committing to defeat Rep. Jamaal Bowman is obscene by comparison.

In Congress they are pushing national legislation that would equate opposition to Israel with antisemitism and result in colleges and institutions being denied federal funding if they don’t pass the test of pro-Israel purity. Legislation has also passed the House (but not yet the Senate) removing the tax-exempt status of institutions deemed supportive of terrorist organizations – with ‘support’ being so loosely defined that it can include simply advocating for Palestinian rights.

Congressional leaders have also threatened the International Criminal Court with stepped up sanctions should they charge any Israeli leader with crimes. And they’ve expanded the ban on any US funding to support UNRWA.

Congressional leaders and pro-Israel groups have also been echoing the rhetoric of Israel’s Prime Minister in smearing the protesting students calling them antisemites (even though a disproportionately large number of them are Jewish) and equating their protest with the Nazi antisemitic campaigns that led up to the Holocaust.

Excerpted: ‘Israel’s Brute Show of

Military Strength Shows How Weak It Has Become’.

Courtesy: Commondreams.org