**I**[**sraeli apartheid**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1424211/israeli-apartheid)

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BACK in 1961, when Israel voted against apartheid at the United Nations, South Africa’s prime minister Henrik Verwoerd — justly reviled as one of the architects of institutionalised racial discrimination in his homeland — accused the still young Middle Eastern state of inconsistency.

“They took Israel away from the Arabs after the Arabs lived there for a thousand years,” he noted. “In that, I agree with them. Israel, like South Africa, is an apartheid state.”

The comparison is unlikely to have delighted Israel’s prime minister David Ben-Gurion, who had privately acknowledged the logic and legitimacy of Palestinian resistance long before he emerged from retirement in 1967 to argue that Israel must give up the territories it had conquered in the Six-Day War, else the occupation would distort the nation.

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Just over half a century later, the extent of that distortion became clearer when the Knesset effectively overturned the 1948 declaration of independence, which sought to entrench “complete equality of social and political rights” for all of Israel’s inhabitants, regardless of race, religion or sex. In contrast, last month’s legislation formally makes the right of self-determination “unique to the Jewish people” and downgrades Arabic — the native tongue of 22 per cent of Israel’s population — from an official language to one with “special status”.

Israeli policies have long been compared with apartheid — that, coincidentally, South Africa formally put in place the same year that Israel emerged as an independent nation — not only by the likes of Desmond Tutu and Jimmy Carter, but also by intellectuals and even prominent politicians within the country.

The discrimination has now been institutionalised, declaring “the development of Jewish settlement as a national value” and vowing to “encourage and promote its establishment and consolidation”. Dan Yakir, the chief legal counsel for the Association of Civil Rights in Israel, has described it as “a racist law”. One of the obvious intents is to step up the establishment of Jewish settlements in the West Bank. Another is to stave off the likelihood of a one-state solution to the core Middle Eastern dilemma, after the possibility of a two-state solution has been rendered impossible.

Unsurprisingly, the ‘international community’ has barely reacted. It’s worth recalling that for more than a decade the UN overlooked apartheid, deeming it an internal South African affair. Even after the global attitude began to change following instances such as the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, more than two decades later the Thatcher and Reagan administrations were still holding out against sanctions.

In the case of Israel, the shift will be even harder, given the global extent of its lobbying powers — and the deplorable tendency to cast criticism of the state’s egregious violations of human rights as some form of anti-Semitism.

That trend has existed for decades, yet its recent manifestation in Britain exceeds the norm. There, a concerted effort is under way to topple the leader of the opposition by insinuating, occasionally directly alleging, that he is anti-Semitic. Last week, three Jewish community newspapers took the campaign against Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn to a new level of absurdity by claiming that a government led by him would pose an “existential threat” to British Jews.

Amid the Brexit chaos, with Theresa May facing a revolt within Conservative ranks, the possibility of a fresh general election cannot be ruled out; such an exercise may well yield a Labour government led by Corbyn. The very idea of a Western leader who openly advocates for Pales­tinian rights is anathema to most Zionists. Hence he cannot be allowed to succeed, and a number of Labour MPs are complicit in this project.

The latest row revolves around the Labour Party’s adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s definition of anti-Semitism. It has taken the text on board — which in itself is a considerable concession, given that less specific ban on all forms of racism, regardless of ethnicity or religion, ought to have sufficed — but so far refused to accept four of the 11 ‘examples’ cited by the IHRA, some of which arguably delegitimise valid criticisms of Israel merely because it self-identifies as an exclusively Jewish state.

Labour’s pushback ought to have been much more vociferous, not least because large numbers of British Jews — activists, academics and other intellectuals, many of whom have participated in protests against Israel’s overkill in Gaza — are appalled by the pro-Zionist lobby’s actions. Further, Benjamin Netanyahu is happy to cavort with the anti-Semitic leaderships of Poland and Hungary, not to mention the Trump administration. On the other hand, any meaningful impetus to prevent Israel from digging its own grave must come from within the country.

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