

Making Enemies: How We Fuel the Opposition

Political Homeless Shelters

In 2024 and 2025, the escalation of the crisis in Gaza has created a massive disconnect between two distinct interpretive frameworks: the humanitarian perspective, and the diplomatic security perspective. This chasm has created a structural failure in our civic dialogue. When deep political grief is felt by a population but feels unaddressed or "evicted" from the mainstream, it does not disappear. Instead, it renders individuals politically homeless. This isolation raises the very real potential for them to be co-opted by predatory political forces willing to validate their frustration.

To understand this dynamic, we must first examine the two entrenched perspectives that dominate the conflict. Each possesses a coherent internal logic, a distinct vocabulary, and a set of values that make dialogue nearly impossible.

Perspective I: Existential Defense

From the perspective of the "Existential Defense," the State of Israel is a necessary refuge for a persecuted people, maintaining its sovereignty in a hostile region. This viewpoint argues that the events of October 7, 2023, were a call to action, the last straw for a nation whose people refuse to be terrorized by an external extremist regime any longer.

Self-Defense and Intent Proponents of this view emphasize that Israel is fighting a defensive war against Hamas, an organization explicitly committed to its destruction. From a legal perspective, this defense is articulated by figures such as Aharon Barak, the former President of the Israeli Supreme Court and Judge at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). In his dissenting opinion regarding the ICJ's provisional measures, Barak argued that the accusations of genocide against Israel distort the meaning of the term. He emphasized that Israel's military actions are directed at combatants embedded within civilian areas, not at the Palestinian people as a group. For Barak, the tragedy of civilian death in war, however heartbreaking, does not constitute the "specific intent" required for the crime of genocide. It instead reflects the grim reality of asymmetric warfare forced upon a democratic state defending itself and its citizens.

The Policing of Antisemitism This perspective asserts that much of the current criticism leveled at Israel is a masquerade for antisemitism. The American Jewish Committee (AJC) provides a framework for identifying when political speech crosses this line. They argue that when critics chant "From the river to the sea" or demand the dismantling of the Jewish state, they are not advocating for human rights but are engaging in "denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination." The AJC highlights that holding Jews collectively responsible for the actions of the State of Israel—or applying "double standards" by requiring behavior of Israel not expected of other democratic nations—are modern manifestations of ancient hatreds. From this vantage

point, the policing of discourse is a protective measure to prevent the normalization of antisemitism.

Perspective II: Apartheid and Genocide

Diametrically opposed is the "Colonial Critique," which views the conflict not as a war between two states, but as a structural struggle against a colonizing power.

This perspective is anchored in the findings of major international human rights bodies. Amnesty International has concluded that Israel's treatment of Palestinians constitutes the crime of apartheid, which is a system of domination and segregation enforced through laws, policies, and practices. Their reports detail how the seizure of land, the denial of residency rights, and the restrictions on movement are designed to fragment the Palestinian population and maintain Jewish Israeli domination.

Perhaps more pertinently, this view argues that the war in Gaza has escalated into genocide. Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories, has reported "reasonable grounds" to believe that Israel is committing acts of genocide. Her analysis frames the violence not as self-defense, but as "colonial erasure," citing the destruction of life-sustaining infrastructure, the use of starvation as a weapon of war, and the dehumanizing rhetoric from Israeli leaders as evidence of an intent to physically destroy the group in whole or in part. For proponents of this view, this narrative of "security" is essentially a cover for the erasure of the Palestinian people.

The Pipeline to the Far Right

While these two perspectives remain deadlocked, a third, more insidious dynamic has emerged. The refusal of the political center to engage with the substance of Perspective II, frequently labeling harsh criticism of Israel as antisemitic has created a "Legitimacy Trap."

Predatory Validation

The mechanism of predatory validation specifically targets the progressive or humanitarian observer. Those disillusioned by the images of mass casualty events in Gaza while simultaneously hearing their political leaders deny the context of these images or label those who describe them as "antisemitic." The result is a severe crisis of trust.

This is where the ever-loomng far right steps in. As detailed by analysts at *Jewish Currents*, figures within the "America First" movement and the "New Right" have skillfully co-opted anti-Zionist rhetoric. Influencers like Nick Fuentes or Jackson Hinkle (a self-described "MAGA Communist") engage in this predatory validation. They tell the disillusioned progressive: "You are right! The media is lying to you!"

Once trust is established through this shared truth, the "bait-and-switch" occurs. The narrative pivots from a human rights critique (Israel is violating international law) to a conspiratorial critique ("The Jews control the media"). The valid anger regarding the bombing of Gaza is

siphoned off and made into classic antisemitic tropes about the government, news, and banks. By conflating Humanitarian Anti-Zionism (based on equality) with Strategic Antisemitism (based on isolationism and white nationalism), the mainstream establishment validates the latter and suppresses the former, effectively handing the Far Right a moral camouflage for their hate.

Conclusion: A politics of Survivors

The current discourse is stagnant because it demands a binary choice: one must either endorse the "Existential Defense" and ignore the reality of apartheid or risk social ostracization. The binary fuels the pipeline to extremism.

Political theorist Mahmood Mamdani, in *Neither Settler nor Native*, argues that as long as political identity is tethered to these permanent categories where the "Native" seeks to cleanse the "Settler" and the "Settler" seeks to dominate the "Native," violence is inevitable. He proposes the category of the "Survivor." In this framework, both Jews and Palestinians are viewed as survivors of catastrophic histories (the Holocaust and the Nakba). Survivors have no choice but to build a political community together, not based on shared ancestry, but on shared residence and a shared future.

We see glimpses of this potential in the recent, surprising convergence on "affordability" between Donald Trump and the socialist Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani (Mahmood Mamdani's son). While their ideologies are opposed, their focus on material survival ("cost of living") allowed for a momentary exit from the identity culture war.

To seal off this pipeline to the Far Right, the political center must stop policing the grief of the colonial critique and instead offer a political home for it. One that validates the horrors being committed against the Palestinian people without validating the broad-spanning hate and conspiracies of the antisemitic. If Western media continues to leave no room for accountability in its narrative, it will continue to drive the disillusioned into the arms of those who truly wish to burn the (our) house down.

Works Cited

International Court of Justice (ICJ). (2024). *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)*. Dissenting Opinion of Judge ad hoc Barak. <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/203454>

American Jewish Committee (AJC). (2021). *A Guide to Recognizing When Anti-Israel Actions Become Antisemitic*. <https://www.ajc.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2021-10/A%20Guide%20to%20Recognizing%20When%20Anti-Israel%20Actions%20Become%20Antisemitic.pdf>

Amnesty International. (2024). "You Feel Like You Are Subhuman": Israel's Genocide Against Palestinians in Gaza. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/12/amnesty-international-concludes-israel-is-committing-genocide-against-palestinians-in-gaza/>

Albanese, Francesca. (2024). *Anatomy of a Genocide: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967*. United Nations Human Rights Council. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session55/advance-versions/a-hrc-55-73-auv.pdf>

Lorber, Ben. (2024). "The Right's Anti-Israel Insurgents." *Jewish Currents*. <https://jewishcurrents.org/the-rights-anti-israel-insurgents>

Mamdani, Mahmood. (2020). *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.