The Nation-State Law and revival of UN ‘Zionism-is-racism’ libel

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Israel’s recently passed Nation-State Law has sparked criticism, controversy and confusion. Israelis across the political spectrum – including the “hawkish” Education Minister Naftali Bennett – have criticized the law’s insufficient language regarding Israel’s patriotic Druze and Circassian citizens. The legislation’s final draft could have more clearly reflected the Jewish state’s bedrock principles of democracy, freedom and equality that are firmly rooted in Israel’s Declaration of Independence and Basic Laws. Both of these anchor the new Nation-State Law and protect all Israelis equally in civil, social, economic and religious matters regardless of race, religion or creed.

Confusion and controversy surrounding the legislation have clouded the larger national security context. The law was passed as a response to a spate of resurgent, dangerous ideological threats against Israel’s existence as the nation-state of the Jewish people. Palestine Liberation Organization chairman Mahmoud Abbas, in concert with Israeli Arab Members of Knesset, have for years denounced the law due to their shared historic, immutable, ideological denunciation of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people.

Palestinian and Arab denunciation of Israel as a Jewish and democratic nation-state is a *de facto* continuation of the United Nations’ libelous Resolution 3379, known unofficially as the “Zionism-is-racism resolution,” approved in 1975 and repealed in 1991.

More ominously than its passage 43 years ago, the Zionism-is-racism resolution’s slanderous denunciation of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state continues to enjoy growing support and legitimacy in Western circles in 2018. These threats taken together underscore the importance of passing the Nation-State Law.

The PLO, in close strategic partnership with Israeli Arab parliamentarians, has denounced Israel’s Nation-State Law precisely because it reaffirms Israel’s majority character as a Jewish and democratic state. Jewish sovereignty is an anathema both to PLO and Hamas ideologies and Israeli Arab MK worldviews, whether communist, nationalist or Islamic.

The international community, and even some Diaspora Jewish leaders, have overlooked or neglected this ideological challenge to Israel’s existence.

Many have failed to recognize the Palestinian rejection of a Jewish and democratic state is a *de facto* continuation of the UN’s libelous 1975 resolution 3379 affirming Zionism as racism which was passed in aftermath of PLO leader Yasser Arafat’s infamous November 1974 UNGA speech. That speech was effectively a modern political blood libel in which Arafat stated, “Zionism is imperialist, colonialist, and racist”. And that speech united anti-Zionism with antisemitism in its retrograde tenets.

Arafat’s antisemitic accusations against Israel as the “collective Jew” have been reenergized today. Arab Knesset members, Palestinian leaders, international boycott, divestment and sanctions activists and other Western intellectuals cast Israel as a state version of the world’s European Jew of 70 years ago – criminal, racist, pilfering, illegitimate, and now, purveyors of “apartheid.”

MK Haneen Zoabi, who participated in the terrorist-linked MV Mavi Mamara flotilla in 2010, which was dispatched from Turkey to demonstratively violate Israel’s maritime arms blockade and resupply Hamas in Gaza, told YNET news, “Israel has turned from a racist country to a fascist one.”

VETERAN ARAB MK Dr. Ahmad Tibi opined in a November 2014 *Al Jazeera* interview, “Jewish and democratic state, this is oxymoron. It cannot go together. Israel’s Basic Law institutionalizes apartheid.”

PLO leaders similarly cast Israel as an apartheid state. PLO Secretary-General and chief diplomat Saeb Erekat said the Nation-State Law “turns a ‘de facto’ apartheid regime into a ‘de jure’ reality for all of historic Palestine,” (meaning Israel, the West Bank and Gaza.)

The Palestinian leadership has again besieged the UN. Ahmed Majdalani, a senior PLO official in Ramallah, said the Nation-State Law “exposed the true face of the state of Israel-terrorism, fascism and racism”. He has recently called on the UN to reinstate the General Assembly’s 1975 Zionism-is-racism resolution.

The EU and UN echelons have joined the criminalization and defamation of Israel. Rima Khalaf, UN under secretary-general and ESCWA executive secretary, issued a report in 2017 that concluded, “Israel is a racist state that has established an apartheid system that persecutes the Palestinian people.”

It remains largely unknown in the West that PLO leaders have colluded for decades with Arab Knesset members to delegitimize and undermine Israel. As recently as August 16, former MK Muhammad Barakei, in the keynote speech at the PLO’s Central Committee meeting in Ramallah, called on the PLO to “act together” against Israel’s “conspiracy of the century.”

The “one-state” scheme is not new. It was conjured up by the PLO terrorist organization in 1969 and positioned to replace Israel as a secular bi-national state. The “one-state” plan was reenergized in the late 1990s and promoted in the West by academics hostile to Israel such as former Columbia University professor and PLO adviser Edward Said, New York University’s Tony “Israel is anachronistic” Judt, and Virginia Tilley, professor of political science at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.

In recent years the “one-state” design to replace Israel has even been legitimized at leading academic institutions such as Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government, which hosted the “One State Conference” in March, 2012.

In 2018, a majority of lawmakers in Israel concluded that Israel’s Jewish majority character was anything but self-evident. They recognized the urgent need to codify in law what Israel and the free world had accepted as indisputable at the State of Israel’s rebirth in 1948.

The subversion of Middle East states by radical Islamic forces and international pressure, threatening the integrity of the Jewish nation-state, required that Israel anchor in law its Jewish majority character – its official symbols, holidays and ancient Hebrew language – without prejudicing in any way the legally protected democratic rights and civic freedoms of its minority citizens.

In passing the Nation-State Law, Israel codified in law, following scores of other democracies decades earlier, what it should have legalized with its reestablishment in 1948. It was then that the United Nations and the international community celebrated the rebirth of the world’s one Jewish sovereign democracy after 2,000 years of expulsion and exile.

Today, the Nation-State Law provides a critical protection of Israel’s future in an uncertain region and an unreliable world that is increasingly intent on undermining Israel’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.