

Anti-Zionism versus anti-Semitism

On December 5, the U.S. House of Representatives voted 311 to 14 in favour of a Republican-sponsored resolution which, *inter alia*, declared that "anti-Zionism is antisemitism". When Republican Representative Thomas Massie of Kentucky voted against the resolution and suggested that Congress was more interested in Zionism than American patriotism, the White House condemned him.

There is nothing surprising about the American establishment's enduring sympathy for Zionism. If U.S. President Joe Biden unabashedly called himself a Zionist in Tel Aviv on October 18, the Speaker of the House of Representatives Mike Johnson flaunted his Zionism at a dinner hosted by the hard-right Zionist Organisation of America on December 3. Mr. Johnson's closeness to Israel, reported *Haaretz*, reflects the American evangelist movement's deep ties to the Israeli right.

The effects of the ideological proximity between Jewish and Christian Zionism have long been felt on American foreign policy. In his widely-debated essay, 'God's Country?', Walter Russell Mead wrote that conservative strains within American Protestantism have "changed US foreign policy in profound ways" to the extent that the "rising evangelical power has deepened US support for the Jewish state" in line with the Zionist belief that god blesses those who bless the nation of Israel (Genesis 12:3).

Zionism or occupation

"The aim of Zionism", according to the First Zionist Congress, 1897, "is to create for the Jewish people a home in Eretz Israel secured by law". Zionist Jews claim Palestine to be Eretz Israel or the Land of Israel and believe that it was promised to them by God (Genesis 17:8). Israel's Ambassador to the UN Danny Danon belaboured this specious conviction in April 2019 at the United Nations Security Council. With dramatic flourish, he held up a copy of the Hebrew Bible and announced, "This is our deed to our land" because it proves the "Jewish ownership of the Land of Israel".

Astonishingly, it was this mythologised biblical dogma that ended up being recognised in two of the most momentous pronouncements of the last century – the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and UN



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If anti-Zionism is now limited to the criticism of Israel's policies towards Palestine, any opposition to the land grab that Israel is trying to do in the name of Zionism cannot be called anti-Semitism

Resolution 181(II) of 1947. The Zionists cited both these documents in their May 1948 Declaration of Independence to assert their "natural and historic right" to establish "a Jewish state in Eretz-Israel, to be known as the State of Israel".

An investigative reading of an "appeal" contained in this Declaration would reveal that the "historic right" to establish a Jewish state in Palestine was claimed on the basis of theology, not history. The appeal asks "Jewish people throughout the Diaspora to rally round the Jews of Eretz-Israel... and to stand by them in the great struggle for the realization of the age-old dream – the redemption of Israel".

The "redemption of Israel" is an eschatological concept of Rabbinic Judaism (found in the Jerusalem Talmud called *Yerushalmi*) according to which god will redeem all Jews from exile by bringing them back to the region promised to them in the Bible. Rabbi Avraham Blass of the Yerushalmi Institute believes that "with the revival of the Nation in Eretz Yisrael" the Israelis are experiencing the period of redemption today.

Besides, for more than a millennium, Muslims had ruled Palestine. Although Britain captured it from the Ottomans during World War I, at the time of issuing the Balfour Declaration, it did not possess any jurisdiction over Palestine as Turkey was still the legal sovereign.

In the perceptive words of the renowned Jewish novelist, Arthur Koestler, the Balfour Declaration amounted to "one nation solemnly promising to a second nation the country of a third". Nonetheless, it brought into existence Israel, the only country in modern history to have been created on a land that did not legally belong to it.

Anti-Zionism

As the foregoing arguments show, shorn of its biblical irredentism and rhetoric of autochthony, Zionism gets reduced to just another term for the forcible occupation of entire Palestine. This is what the Israeli Prime Minister was trying to tell the UN on September 22 when he arrogantly waved a map of Greater Israel that included the West Bank and Gaza.

Notwithstanding Mr. Netanyahu's expansionist designs – now in the process of being brutally implemented – anti-Zionism today is not about

denying Israel's right to exist on the land allocated to it by the UN. This right became unassailable after the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) recognised it.

Anti-Zionism of the 21st century is, therefore, limited to the criticism of Israel's policies towards the Palestinians which includes the denunciation of every atrocity (especially the ongoing massacres in Gaza) the Jewish state has been committing against the Palestinians with a view to occupying all their lands after forcing them to leave.

This cannot be anti-Semitic because the Berlin-based International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) defines anti-Semitism as "a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities".

Citing this, the U.S. Department of State clarifies that "criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic".

According to historian Avi Shlaim, the conflation of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism is a "propagandistic ploy" to claim that any criticism of Israel and its policies is anti-Semitic. This is exactly what Mr. Netanyahu did when in March 2021 he condemned the International Criminal Court decision to investigate Israel's alleged war crimes as "undiluted anti-Semitism and the height of hypocrisy".

Certainly, everything must be done to counter undiluted and even diluted forms of anti-Semitism that violate the IHRA's definition of the term. But, it would be hypocritical of the West to suppress free speech and repress critics of Israel to overcome its own anti-Semitic past. Jewish-American philosopher Susan Neiman called the weaponisation of the West's historical guilt "philosemitic McCarthyism".

Put simply, if the occupation of the whole of Palestine is what the Israelis seek to accomplish in the name of Zionism, any opposition to this land grab cannot be anti-Semitism.

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India's stationary course in the shipping value chain

The Yangtze river has been China's heartbeat through its long history. Tradition, legend, myth, culture, as well as commerce and industry are integral to the Yangtze lore.

Today, the Yangtze is modern China's lifeline while retaining its antiquity. The Three Gorges project has only added to its lustre.

As one enters the Yangtze from the sea, one can imagine hearing the sound of violins from Chinese opera, or, more recently, from Kung Fu Panda. But, one cannot close one's eyes to the massive merchant ships, often two or three together, flitting in and out of the river.

It is a unique sight. The modern engineering and shipping marvels of Suez or even the Panama canal see a convoy of ships, one behind the other. The Yangtze often sees multiple convoys steaming in parallel. And, in between, smaller barges criss-cross the river, much like the autorickshaws on Indian roads. For a merchant shipman, it is an incredible sight – a story of expert seamanship, logistical planning and piloting skills.

The ships are either bringing in raw materials from across the world including from far away Chinese-owned mines from Peru and Africa or leaving with finished products to all over the world. Some vessels are new, built in shipyards that stand cheek by jowl at every bend in the river. Many are repaired in those same yards and dry docks.

The Yangtze is among the best examples of the tiringly clichéd "look where China is and where we are now" story. Such stories use statistics to show how India and China were on the same boat until the late 1980s and how China has leapfrogged since then, leaving India way behind.

The India versus China story

India was actually ahead of China in the real boat until the end of the 1980s. While China was barely a speck in the global merchant shipping radar, India had the rudiments in place.

While China was a late entrant, the starting gun had gone off earlier for Indians. India boasted of a tradition of modern ship-owning. In fact, the most spectacular case of ship-owning the world has seen was a uniquely Indian contribution. A daring former Indian Navy officer commissioned and owned giant oil tankers that till today remain the biggest merchant ships ever built. India has been associated very closely with



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the International Maritime Organization too.

With private players venturing in an area dominated by large public sector facilities, India had shipyards that were beginning to give hope that they may well build ships competitively for the global market. Labour arbitrage had preceded shipping at least two decades before it happened in IT. English-knowing Indian seafarers were becoming a routine sight in global shipping as the industry took a step back from employing qualified eastern Europeans whose English was not yet up to the mark. Safety is the number one priority in shipping, and knowledge of English is essential for that.

Just as in other fields, India's main source of growth and foreign exchange earning has been the supply of labour; in shipping too, successive governments have focused largely on expanding the seafarer population. In the past, Mumbai and Kolkata were the major centres of seafarer training and employment. The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government decentered maritime training and opened it up to private players. Today, institutions across the country churn out seafarers of various grades and competencies. Across the world, from the Arctic ice class merchant ship to the ore carrier calling on Chilean ports, if there are 20 seafarers on board a ship, it is likely four or five will be Indian.

Along with the growth in seafaring population, Indians, with their talent for value engineering, have grown into ship management. Indians with their ken for bargaining know how to run a tight ship, literally. They can take over a ship, quickly understand its systems and run it. Many ship management companies have sprouted in India, some in-charge of hundreds of ships. Sanjay Prashar, shipping industry professional and former member of the National Shipping Board, estimates that Indian seafarers and their management companies bring in an estimated \$6 billion in foreign exchange every year. According to Sanjaya Baru's article in *The Wire*, India's total foreign remittances are some \$125 billion while China's stands at \$50 billion.

But ship owning, chartering, financing and building remain largely out of bounds for Indians. India has simply not moved up the shipping value chain. With successive Union governments letting the state-owned Shipping Corporation of India bleed, the order book of Indian shipyards has been hit. New private shipowners who are catering to India's own trade growth typically buy

second hand ships as they come cheap and can closely align with their short-term market forecasts that are often the only reliable prediction the Indian market allows, says Hrishikesh Narasimhan, general manager of production and refits at L&F Shipping, Kattupalli, near Chennai.

China stands as a stark contrast. Powered by a dedicated government plan to ramp up shipbuilding and owning, China, by 2020, was making half of all ships in the world. And, just as in Japan and Korea, the previous leaders in shipbuilding, Chinese shipowners dutifully built most of their own ships at state-owned government yards, as Mr. Narasimhan points out.

A negligible share in building

The UPA government came up with a Maritime Agenda 2020 that sought to increase India's share of global shipbuilding from less than 2% to a modest 5% in a decade, and proposed a vague road map that included sops to achieve it. By 2020, however, India's share in global shipbuilding had dropped to practically zero, instead of inching up.

The Bharatiya Janata Party government's Maritime India Vision 2030 outlined 10 key themes that include logistics, environment concerns, port infrastructure and increase in seafarer growth and training, but just does not mention any plan for shipbuilding and owning. There is talk of Sagarmala but the yards are seeing only naval ship orders.

In India, with a long coastline and a strategic location as the geographic pivot of global shipping, shipbuilding would be an integral part of any serious attempt to amp up manufacturing capacity and deepen strategic power. Shipbuilding and owning would give India a seat at the table not only in the global maritime industry but also enhance its presence in the international trade scene too.

Just as overall industrial might is integral to military might, shipbuilding is integral to a strong naval base as well. The movie *Oppenheimer* talked about how the Japanese cities to be destroyed with atom bombs were selected. It did not quite point out that Nagasaki was chosen because the naval shipyard there was continuing to churn out naval boats and had to be destroyed. Only the bomb missed the shipyard and obliterated the civilian quarter. Nagasaki shipyard continues to thrive as an advanced merchant shipyard today.

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