

**THE STUDENT ENCAMPMENTS AND U.S./ISRAEL RELATIONS:
AN INTERVIEW WITH DUNCAN KENNEDY**

Duncan Kennedy, Raef Zreik

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Abstract

This is the heavily edited transcript of an interview of Duncan Kennedy by Raef Zreik on July 12, 2024. A first edit was translated into Arabic and appears in issue 94 of Qadaya Israeliah (Israeli Affairs, Summer 2024). Zreik is the editor in chief of the journal, which is published by Madar -- The Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies, based in Ramallah but with an audience across the Arab world.

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Duncan Kennedy: I am really looking forward to this and let me remind you that we have a very big plan and you are responsible for keeping me to it rather than getting stuck along the way.

Raef Zreik: Yes, I'll try. So let's go directly to the issue of the recent student protests and the encampment on the Harvard campus. Were you around? What did you see? What were your immediate impressions? How did it feel?

Duncan Kennedy: I should begin by saying that I'm a retired Harvard Law School professor. And that means that I have never taught undergraduates or been involved except peripherally in their political mobilizations. I was here in Cambridge as the events unfolded and following closely as well as reading about other campuses. I participated in my role as a faculty member in various faculty reactions of support of different kinds for the encampments. I knew a number of Harvard graduate students, some Palestinian Americans and some Palestinian citizens of Israel studying here, who were part of the graduate student leadership that emerged as a part of the undergraduate movement. I talked with a dozen American non-Jewish and Jewish and Israeli friends. I visited the encampment for a rally and I visited once during the day and briefly met the undergraduate leaders and the faculty go-between with the administration, a professor of English I've known for many years. I followed the interactions of the administration with the encampment quite closely.

This spring's events were in many ways similar to earlier occupations and encampments at Harvard, going back to the late 1960s but recurring over South African apartheid, Harvard's Gulf Oil holdings during the wars in Angola and Mozambique, for a living wage and against outsourcing of Harvard facilities services. I will get to important differences later but for the moment I was struck by the conscious reiteration of a form, a locally familiar mode of protest with an element of ritual, and a strong sense of participating in what is, and I agree with them, a glorious tradition. As was true in the earlier cases, a strong element is the notion of the study group or teach-in. In the encampment on the day I visited, a graduate student was doing the third or fourth session of a course on the history of the conflict. I myself have taught courses on the conflict, so I stood there just to listen to this guy. The audience was about 30 young people, clearly undergraduates, more women than men, most of them white, more Asian origins than American blacks, sitting on the grass listening attentively as he talked about the controversial question of what exactly provoked the 1973 War? Who was really responsible?

He was good. From my point of view, it was a plausible pro-Arab version of the history, but it wasn't crazily partisan. He noted that many people disagree with his analysis which attributed significant responsibility to Israel for the war, and offered a source you could look at for the critique of the position he was presenting. I was very impressed. My experience on that particular day was of something peaceful, earnest, committed to risk taking by reenacting the tradition. The rally was also peaceful, with nothing overtly anti-Semitic in the speeches. The main chant was "Free free/Palestine" rather than "From the river to the sea." More on that later. The demands were immediate cease fire, divestment of Harvard's Israel

investments, full disclosure of what they are and reassessment of Harvard's institutional ties to Israel without an explicit demand for boycott.

The feeling of drama, surrounding the encampment was intense for several related reasons. There was the question of how the university would react. By the time I visited, it was already well into the second semester, and graduation was approaching. A significant number of the protesters were seniors or graduate students who were waiting for their degrees. The university was under very public pressure, from different inside and outside groups, to do something seriously punitive to them. They were (admittedly) violating the university "time, place and manner" rules about demonstrations and there were well publicized allegations, from some Jewish students, that they had been subjected to anti-Semitic harassment by the encampers.

The Administration kept saying no police would be called but that the rules would be enforced after the fact, but in completely uncertain ways. They kept photographing everyone they could anywhere near the encampment. It was always possible that there would be some kind of on-campus action either by ultras within the group or by deliberate Zionist provocation, as had recently happened at UCLA, that would change that and make police action inevitable with or without physical brutality. Nationally something on the order of 2,000 students had already been arrested, sometimes violently, at hundreds of schools, many of them Harvard's peer schools.

Raef: Okay,

Kennedy: Second, there was a strong consciousness of what you might call the radical Zionist response, which was confrontational in a new way. There had been an at least semi organized campaign by some Jewish and non-Jewish hiring partners in a number of elite law firms and elite finance firms to refuse to hire students who participated in this or other public pro-Palestinian activities. Who knows how many such threats were made? But their authors deliberately publicized them without it being at all clear what particular student conduct would provoke their wrath. Apart from photographing by University agents there was also photographing by unidentified unfriendly students or non-students walking ostentatiously through the encampment to assert the publicness of the space.

So the background experience of the student demonstrators was--and I think this was surprising to some or many of them--that they were in a situation with unforeseeable but possibly serious bad consequences. Would they graduate? have the degree? Would they be arrested? Spend the night in jail? When they went to get a job, would they be able to say I graduated from Harvard, and then would their participation in the encampment stick with them for a very long time, maybe for the rest of their lives? They would be in some list, or lists of bad people.

As though this wasn't enough, there were several more reasons for tension. Unrelated to the hiring threats, Harvard and other elite private universities have

gigantic budgets that depend to a significant degree on the support of super rich alumni referred to collectively as “the donors.” At Harvard some Jewish donors had already organized to cut or eliminate their contributions, which were apparently over-all down sixteen percent for the spring quarter. The donors allied with various Jewish national and local organizations were pushing the line that Harvard was a hot bed not just of academic antisemitic discourse but of widespread student and faculty antisemitic actions of various kinds. They were demanding immediate punitive action to clear the encampments.

Some hard right wing Republican politicians had taken up this line (ironically given their embrace of neo Nazi and Christian right antisemitic groups) as part of their populist anti-intellectual campaign for the November elections. In the national and also local media, liberal and centrist establishment opinion leaders, many but by no means all of them Jewish, had unleashed a torrent of vitriolic rhetorical abuse of the movement.

A significant number of Harvard faculty, some prestigious, participated in the denunciation campaign. On the other side, there was strong faculty sentiment against major punitive responses. But the number of faculty who affirmatively supported the student demands for immediate cease fire and divestment, let alone the analysis of genocide, settler colonialism and apartheid that was a common among the protesters, was truly minuscule—a few hundred out of 6,000 faculty and staff.

Raef Zreik: Do you think that the campaign against the students was influential?

Kennedy: I believe it was extremely influential in several ways at Harvard and elsewhere. Had there been no danger of serious academic sanctions, no threat of arrest for peaceful encampment activity, no hiring campaign and no vilification for anti-Semitism from mainstream media and prestigious faculty, no open campaign of photographing participants ...it seems obvious to me more students would have participated in the encampments, perhaps just in some minor way. My guess is that tens and perhaps hundreds of thousands of students around the country didn't participate even in rallies and demonstrations because it appeared to be risky or because they were persuaded or at least discouraged by the barrage of accusations occurring wherever there was pro-Palestinian protest activity. Moreover, the various reactions may have made it less likely that masses of students will reactivate the resistance this fall, although backfire is also possible.

At the end of the day, there was a disciplinary showdown in which the university powers presented a fascinating drama of institutional ambivalence and indecision. The President speaking always ambiguously promised alternately leniency, crackdown, and leniency; some university's disciplinary bodies acting apparently independently of him, were silent and then cracked down hard but others were lenient throughout; the Faculty Council, the body of the whole faculty that seemed to have final authority reversed (with limited attendance) the punitive disciplinary bodies. Then in a coup de theatre on the night before Graduation the Governing

Boards, dominated by mega donors and older establishment notables, reversed the reversal and removed the student offenders from the list of graduates.

Raef Zreik: So the final thing was that they were removed from the list

Kennedy: Yes.

Raef Zreik: Okay. That moves us to the issue of the way that American society received this encampment, it's influence, short term, long term influence on American society, as you see it.

Kennedy: The Harvard encampment of course was just one of several hundred at colleges and universities all over the country including in red (conservative) states and all levels of prestige, with, as I mentioned, about 2000 arrests. What happened at Harvard followed one of many scenarios that played out across the country. What's interesting is how American society received the movement as a whole rather than the Harvard one in particular. It's possible to say something already about the consequences for American society of the whole series of events beginning with October 7, the Israeli military response, the Biden Administration response, the mainstream media coverage, the student demonstrations and encampments, the reaction of powerful Jewish individuals and institutions, university administrators' responses and finally the reaction to all those reactions.

To put it bluntly, the upshot of this series of events has been that a large number of educated youth (some-college-and-up) aged say 18-40 have experienced a mass conversion from indifference or sympathy for Israel to very strong antagonism. I think this is one of the rare mass generational events in American political history, with some similarities to and many differences from the late 1960s early 1970s "youth revolt." It's not universal, but irreversible for perhaps 30% of the younger generation, comprising millions of people.¹

How it plays out is deeply uncertain depending on multiple possible turns of events and multiple actors. But the mass conversion is the starting point, an event that has already occurred. I have some ideas about what caused the reaction and its likely durability and about the various actors, young and old, Jewish and not, conservative, liberal and radical who will be responsible for the sequellae.

The student movement, particularly rule-breaking activities, like encampments and building occupations, was a major precipitant of the generational conversion because the demonstrators were expressing in action what millions and millions of others were thinking and above all feeling. Thinking and feeling about what they saw and read about what was happening in Gaza, namely the brutal killing of 1000 then 2000, 3000, 4000 and on and on, people who the Israel air force and Army

¹ A mid-August poll of voters under 40 showed, astonishingly, that "thirtysix per cent of them disapproved of military aid to Israel while 33 per cent approved and 29 per cent had no opinion." NYT 8/20/24 p. A13

seemed to be crushing quite literally as though they were bugs, in their houses and streets and schools and hospitals. The aerial photos looked eerily like pictures of Ukrainian cities with vast spaces with nothing but piles of rubble interspersed with building skeletons with gaping window holes after indiscriminate Russian air strikes. The second shock was the news of the embargo of food and medical supplies, of threatened famine. The pictures evoked not Ukraine but the Southern Sudan, a horrible association even though only a few knew anything about the conflict there.

These pictures cried out for an explanation, for an excuse, a rationale or even an apology or expression of guilt and promises to change. The idea that the Hamas October 7 attack on Israel justified them and that they would continue until Hamas was “eliminated” might have made some sense to many in the very beginning. But certainly by December it had long since ceased to make any sense at all. It looked like an instinctive reaction of vengeance. It looked like the mechanized, long distance, depersonalized version of Hamas stabbing and maiming and disemboweling and the slaughter of pregnant women. The physical impact on human bodies adult and child was similar except multiplied by thirty and followed by death and amputation in ruined hospitals. The demand for immediate cease fire seemed simply incontrovertible.

The demand for immediate cease fire was only half of the mass reaction that the student movement expressed. The second demand was for divestment of university investments in Israel and here the subtext was that American institutions were complicit through our acquiescence in the government’s arming of the IDF in Gaza in every injury our arms inflicted.

The rule breaking students spoke for this slowly awakening generational mass because a whole third outrage beyond Gaza and beyond military aid was the apparent pro-Israel bias in official legislative as well as executive branch statements about the situation. The mainstream media coverage followed the line and intensified it to the point of straightforward disinformation. The coverage changed and became more open to the pro-Palestinian side, but slowly, very slowly. The only thing honest in it was the pictures of devastation which undermined on a daily basis the evident identification of the reporting with the plight of the hostages and their families. They were close to the whole “human interest” in the story for the mainstream.

CNN announced it would have a story about a particular hostage or hostage family every night for months. That was great, but where was the equivalent unrelenting focus on Palestinian suffering? Only from the tiny minority of very young left members of the House of Representatives, notably among them Rashida Tlaib, the only Palestinian in the House, and they were denounced and faced formal censure by majorities of their colleagues. For millions of college age students, there was no communal venue except alternative media where they could learn about and then share even vicariously their revulsion at the destruction of Gaza.

But there was more to it than that: as we've seen already in the story of the encampments, an unknown but I'd bet enormous number of students and young adults sympathizing with them didn't participate in pro-Palestinian activism because normal apathy and disinterest were re-enforced by fear of consequences. The students who encamped or occupied buildings were taking risks to insist on what media bias and pro-Israel institutional power had made unspeakable. My idea is that the repression of pro-Palestinian speech as soon as the demonstrations began produced an underlying anger among students who were themselves passive partly out of fear.

That anger has transmuted into acceptance of the critique not just of the IDF in Gaza but of the Israeli regime over all. As they watched the slaughter on the ground deploying American weapons and listened to endless pro-Israel lectures by older people with authority in government, media and on their own campuses, many began to express not just disapproval but deep outrage and ultimately also hatred not of Jews but of what the Israelis were doing.

I think an important but somewhat counter-intuitive contributing factor to the size and I'd say probable longevity of the anti-Israel reaction is the big changes since the 1980s in the demographics of the college age population. These have produced something new in American social history: a highly ethnically diverse generation that is young, middle class, elite and less elite, but all with some college or more. And access to a vast social media life, outside mainstream media, that is their main source of news and opinion. This mass is culturally and socially integrated into the larger society and identifies with college as a source of ideas and formative experiences even if they hated or were bored by the experience.

Raef Zreik: What do you mean the elite are integrated, integrated into what?

Kennedy: The elite is ethnically integrated. About 39% of the population has some college or more. Of currently enrolled students, including from community colleges to graduate schools, only about half are "white." This is a truly astounding fact, at least for 60s generation people like myself remembering a much smaller college cohort that was overwhelmingly white at all levels. Today 12% are black, 19% Hispanic, 6% Asian, 2% Arab origin. Affirmative action is an important cause of diversity but so is the size of the private sector which offers more or less expensive options for students at all levels of preparation. Just because the current situation is the result of the recent dramatic expansion, a large part of this population are the first in their families to reach the college or higher level and the first to be exposed to the systematically liberal bias of American higher education.

Raef Zreik: Integrated, the word integrated could mean two things. One is simply the elites are diverse, coming from different backgrounds and integrated might mean something like co-opted.

Kennedy: It's both. The new non-white educated mass are part of the tech, educational, financial, health, real estate and government systems as team members,

more or less elite and more or less loyal to the corporate mission whatever it is, just like their white college classmates. They are no more activist than they are either. But Blacks and Hispanics and Asians understand themselves as part of a new form of non-assimilationist diversity. They can have semi-organized mass reactions mediated on line to events that resonate with their historic and/or present association with the Global South. As well as with their real life experiences of American racism directed at them, albeit in a form complexly different from the experiences of Black Americans.

Raef Zreik: But you say they are not activist.

Kennedy: Not at all. They've never signed a petition before in their life, let alone gone to a demonstration. But integration in this form creates the possibility of mutual political understandings across the diverse co-opted groups and with whites who identify with the diversity idea. Based on similar understandings of different colonial or for Blacks pre-colonial pasts and analogous experiences in the U.S. And there is a part of this group with a clear memory of the brutal conduct of the IDF in the two previous Gaza wars.

There is already a precedent for the coalition of white liberals and leftists with this population base of Blacks, Hispanics and South and East Asians in the Black Lives Matter mass demonstrations in the summer of 2020. Apparently somewhere between 15 and 26 million people all over the country, majority white but diverse, participated in some way. Most were young, without prior activist experience but some college. The murder of George Floyd could trigger a mass moment of shared outrage in this group because it drew on the common sense that all people of color in America are vulnerable.

My view is that the IDF in Gaza has triggered something similar. I believe the triggering was partly because the IDF in Gaza evoked the colonial history that is a common memory across diverse groups. And at the same time the Israeli grip on Gaza evokes the racist policeman's chokehold on George Floyd.

Raef Zreik: Do you think this development will have any kind of effect on U.S. policy toward Israel?

Kennedy: Absolutely, but only in the long run. I think over the next 10 years the relationship of the American state to the Israeli state will go through a long period of slow but significant change at every level, including the conditioning to one degree or another of diplomatic support and military aid. I don't think the U.S. will abandon support for Israel, including its security and of course its "right to exist." The change will be weakening of the position of extremist pro-Israel political forces in the U.S. allied with the fascist tendency in Israel and the emergence of a broadly based pro-Palestinian body of opinion. The consequence will be that what was once obvious and uncontroversial in U.S. support will be seriously controversial and moderate pro-Israel forces will emerge to negotiate with the policy elites over how to proceed.

Raef Zreik: But so how do you explain that, given until now the full support of Biden to Israel despite the change happening in society?

Kennedy: Unequivocal support for Israel derives from a bunch of factors, apart from Biden's personal so-called Zionism. It will be many years before the generational change in sympathy for Israel will have full effect, and of course what I am predicting may not lie in the womb of time. For the time being the U.S. is a gerontocracy. The old or very old people who hold political and economic power have in large numbers had just the opposite reaction to Gaza from the young.

A WASP/Jewish alliance is the core group in elite American institutions. WWII ended as they were being born. The older they are the more the Holocaust is present in their consciousness. They grew up with a vivid idea of antisemitism as a malign force in history. Suicide bombings in the Second Intifada and 911 convinced them that "terrorism" is an insidious multi-form enemy analogous to communism in the Cold War. The story of Israel's accomplishments and the American role in them is a shared positive one. It isn't surprising that after Oct 7 they focused on the horror of the attack as a mortal danger justifying very extreme response and then on the antisemitic elements in the Hamas Islamist national liberation ideology.

This generational divide between gerontocrats and the new pro-Palestinian younger generation is not the only factor impeding change. New resistance and negotiation over now-controversial Israel policy is all I'd predict because of the familiar list of material factors in Israeli's astonishing ability to keep American politics on a leash. There's the role of AIPAC which last month spent 15 million dollars to defeat one of the very few pro-Palestinian members of Congress and then \$8,000,000 to defeat another this month. Because in the U.S. there's no limit to political donations, there's the role of Jewish mega donors across the institutional as well as on the political spectrum. Along with the general influence of money there is the specific influence of the defense industry. Each year's new billion or two or three are spent in the U.S. Walt and Mearsheimer's brilliant expose of the Israel lobby is already decades old and nothing has changed. Then there is the imagined geo-political strategy interest dating from the Cold War and the paradoxical notion that alliance with Israel makes our access to oil somehow more secure.

The combination of all these factors means that the obstacles to any rapid change of official Democratic Party policy are I would say obviously insuperable.

Raef Zreik: What element could change in the coming few years that might change that official foreign policy of America toward Israel? So do you expect AIPAC power to weaken? Do you expect the role of money to weaken? or what element will change? What about shared interest of the two countries, etcetera, oil, markets, etc. So where do you see the opening that might cause the change?

Kennedy: I think change will occur and in the direction I just suggested, with pro-Palestinian positions mainstreamed, with a large base of young support, and extreme pro-Israel positions losing ground in mainstream liberal opinion even beyond the

young. But how much and how fast depends on an unpredictable complex interaction between rapidly changing social groups. On one side the existing rival tendencies within American pro-Palestinian politics are already struggling to shape the politics of the new recruits to the “cause.” On the other side, there are different ongoing reconfigurations of elite Jewish identity in response to the perceived antisemitism of the new pro-Palestinian youth movement.

Demography is on the side of the resistance for all the reasons we have been discussing. I believe the younger generation as they get older will vote for pro-Palestinian candidates and particularly in areas that have black or foreign immigrant populations. Arab and Muslims communities (Detroit) will become an organized political faction, supporting only pro Palestinian candidates. There are only a couple of million Arab or Muslim origin Americans but they are both better educated and wealthier than the norm. They will be a stable base for resistance as they realize they have newly large youth support across civil society. As opposed to hunkered down and utterly defensive, they now have the possibility of exploiting their swing state locations.

The single largest factor, I believe, is that the various pro-Israel forces are pursuing a counter-productive ultimately losing strategy of trying to completely silence and institutionally obliterate all manifestations of pro-Palestinian sentiment, no matter how moderate and even pro-Zionist. Because of the very large sums of money at their disposal, much broader than just AIPAC, they can go after university professors and even high school teachers and get them fired or prevent them from getting tenure. This strategy goes along with assimilating the whole variety of pro-Palestinian sentiment to the extremes, including characterizing even the mildest critique as antisemitic and pro-Hamas. Overkill breeds resistance rather than stamping it out. And as the full extent of the generational turn against Israeli in Gaza comes to include a critique of Israeli state and society it will become more and more expensive and require more and more institutional violence to behead each tender shoot of resistance before it can grow and multiply.

As time goes on, it will be more possible for the policy elite to critique the American posture. We have already a bit of that in the people who have resigned positions in the administration and then publically condemned Biden’s approach.

Raef Zreik: Okay, let's move on then. Do you want to say something about the Jewish intelligentsia or the Jewish groups, its reaction to the event, how the events will affect these groups?

Kennedy: Of course it is impossible to offer more than conjecture about this, both in describing the reactions and assessing how many people share them. There’s no data to support the kind of social psychological analysis I’m nonetheless going to offer. So remember I’m claim informed conjecture rather than truth. That said, I think that there are at least four Jewish reactions to the events of October 7 that seem to be consequential.

What Hamas did fit perfectly into one of the perennial Jewish understanding of the Palestinians, the one according to which they are savages, sub-human, and live by and for murderous hatred. Rape and murder and bodily mutilation in this view is the true expression of who the Palestinians “really” are and what they “really” want behind every apparently good faith interaction with Israelis. This is an openly racial characterization and it certainly looks racist. It is also parallel to one strand of non-Jewish white racism against American blacks that we associate with the traditional South, and with far right American antisemitism (as opposed to the mainstream version) and then with a part of the Northern working and lower middle class ethnic racism in different directions.

There is nothing new about this but the second reaction is not only new but already seriously consequential. A part of the Jewish leadership in Jewish organizations, media and universities, and in the donor class, represents Israel-identified and at least somewhat observant American Jews with a long history of support for Likud policies. These leaders, loudly claiming to represent Jews generally, have seized on university pro-Palestinian activism to create a scary imaginary alliance between the “woke” race and gender movements and youth antisemitism.

“Woke” is a reform agenda that has come into existence in the wake of the (very relative) successes of affirmative action for white women, black men and women of color in all institutions at all hierarchical levels. It was tied to the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. But the movement came over time to include a much deeper and also much broader agenda, arguing that educational institutions from pre school to graduate school should be leaders in reforming typical straight white male racist, sexist and homophobic attitudes and behaviors reflecting those attitudes. In one common characterization, woke was/is more about recognition and respect for all self-defining identities at all levels of social interaction than it is about redistributing material goods and privileges in favor of discriminated groups.

The pro-Israel Jewish elite innovators put forward the claim that pro-Palestinian activism and the antisemitic pro-Hamas ideas and actions that it propagated, were the direct product of the hegemony of Woke faculty and administrators over campuses all over America. This view appealed to some conservative Republicans and conservative Democrats who had been opposed to any kind of affirmative action or social mission for the university long before Wokism.

In their new totalizing narrative, the crypto-socialist Democrats controlling elite institutions lowered standards to bring in unqualified women and blacks. The early recruits became professors. They naturally favored extreme identity politics and allied tightly with the other identity movements on campus, including pro-Palestinian groups that equate Zionism with racism and Israeli security protection with apartheid. According to the narrative, Palestinian identity politics is antisemitic to its very core. Its true eliminationist motive was revealed when students and faculty supported Hamas after October 7, bringing with them the ranks of wokist feminists, critical race theorists and advocates for the trans-sexual movement. Within this narrative it was common to ask whether it was naivete or “something

more sinister” that allowed gender, race and sexuality radicals to ally with a repressive fundamentalist Islamic state that would have imprisoned or killed them if they had set foot in Gaza before the war.²

The conflation of Woke and antisemitism enabled a new Alliance between conservative pro-Israel Jewish leaders and an important part of the non-Jewish Trumpist Republican Party, ramping up as the 2024 election approaches. That bloc has pseudo-populist anti-elitism as a central rhetorical mode and sees itself as waging what they call a “culture war” against the elite universities, specifically, Harvard, Yale, Stanford and elite liberal state universities like Berkeley and Wisconsin. This group joins conservative Catholics with Protestant evangelicals in the fight against moral/cultural decline caused by the decadent liberal ideas that dominate mainstream media and educational institutions, epitomized by Woke.

The Alliance had its first triumph in the resignation of Claudine Gay, a moderately liberal Black woman Harvard professor who had recently been elevated by the Corporation to be President of the University. Her overt act was declaring that challenging Israel’s “right to exist” might or might not violate University rules depending on the circumstances (the speech might be First Amendment protected). But the clear background idea was that she perfectly represented the Woke: the apologist for rampant campus antisemitism was a Black woman who owed her high position to the triumph of diversity over merit. Trumpist congressmen and congresswomen exposed her in public hearings and the donors finished the job by threatening Harvard with a funding boycott.

Raef Zreik: I got that category. Is there a category that actually views Israel as a burden on their Jewish identity and actually want to de link themselves partially or completely from Jewish support for Israel?

Kennedy: Yes there is. There is of course a long tradition of secular and religious Jewish anti-Zionism, some rooted in different parts of American radicalism, including the peace movement founded in the 1950’s. Human rights is a dominant part of left consciousness in the U.S. today, including for many Jews who frame their critique of Israel in those terms. Then there are many more or less radical currents among avowedly anti-Zionist Jews. They generally share the demand for an immediate cease fire in Gaza and an end to U.S. military aid to Israel, the settler colonialism analysis of the nature of the Israeli state, the critique of Israel as an apartheid regime at least in the West Bank, support for the BDS movement and the view that the current Israeli assault on Gaza is genocidal.

Jewish Voice for Peace (of which I am a non-Jewish member), founded in 1996, is the most prominent of these, with activist practices derived from the 1960s/70s anti war movement including civil disobedience, disruptive protests at AIPAC meetings, and a brief “occupation” of the Capital demanding a cease fire. Their slogan is “Judaism beyond Zionism” and they identify their militant anti-Israel actions with

² Ruth Wisse, Can Josh Shapiro’s Party... WSJ August 11 or 12, 2024.

their version of a Jewish tradition of resistance to oppression. My guess is that the Jewish audience for radical critiques of this kind, including mailing lists and list-serves and podcasts might be several hundred thousand today, including large numbers of children and grandchildren of intermarriages, and that has recently grown rapidly and will continue to grow along with the war. It starts, however, from a very small base in the larger Jewish community with somewhere between 20 and 30,000 members in around 40 chapters.

Anti-zionism means being against the idea of a state “for the Jewish people” in Israel/Palestine and in favor of some one of the many alternative proposals or even for deferring to the Palestinian resistance rather than taking a position. But there are Jews who fully share the anti-Zionist critique of Israeli state and society but understand themselves to be Zionists because they identify with and support Israel as a Jewish homeland, with a commitment to its radical transformation in the directions pointed by the critique.

Raef Zreik: Okay, I actually I might have an interview with one of their leaders. All of that is interesting, but could we move on to your fourth category of Jewish reactions to the campus events?

Kennedy: This is the secular liberal Jewish intelligentsia which I will call the LJI. It works in academia, government, media, the professions (e.g., law, medicine and also tech) and civil society organizations of all kinds. Here is my speculative portrait of ideal typical members of this group. They understand themselves to be Jewish with more or less identification with Jews in general but Israel has not been the center of their liberal intelligentsia projects. They believe that “Israel has a right to exist,” for sure, and they have been happy that it has been able to defend itself against threats to that existence. They sympathize with the Palestinian desire for a state but not at the expense of Israeli Jewish security. Long ago they identified with Israel as a left social democratic state but were long ago disappointed by its right turn. They think Netanyahu is terrible without maintaining much current interest, until recently, in Israeli internal politics or the endlessly stalled “peace process.”

In the U.S. they are highly conscious of the history of antisemitism. They are no less conscious that they themselves are socially and culturally integrated into the mainstream and have been amazingly successful within it. They hadn’t thought that American antisemitism was a major issue for their lives. They attribute Jewish success to the incomplete but still important societal commitment to reward merit rather than race. Some significant but unknown number of them with liberal parents were nonetheless brought up and went to school and summer camp in an intense pro-Israel milieu but have since distanced themselves from it. They are actually critics of Israel but silent critics, because isolated from other critics and intimidated, or just plain conflict-averse.

I believe that the LJI (not an organized group) will have to play the key role if a new U.S. politics around the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is to emerge. It is uncertain in the extreme how it will align, whether uniformly or fragmented, in a new

configuration. To put it bluntly, if a significant part of it aligns with and eventually leads the generational turn against Israel in Gaza, without necessarily adopting any of the radical ideas that now often come with it, its spokespeople could emerge as the crucial mediators in the next stage of the U.S./Israel relationship. This might be a dynamic process beginning from the latent anger generated by the repressive tactics of community leaders and spreading to the previously ill-informed and indifferent. But there is also the dark possibility that all or most of the LJI could break in the opposite direction, adopting the Alliance (AIPAC/Jewish mega donors/Trump) posture of unequivocal support of Israeli state policy and the view that current antisemitism poses an imminent mortal threat to American Jews.

The LJI is still reacting to October 7. The attack was horrifying for the vast majority of people, Jewish or not, who learned about the killing, maiming, violating, burning to death, of civilian men, women and children. An aspect of what made it so horrifying was the specifically sadistic form of Hamas racial vengeance. I think this was a shock to many Jews who thought that Hamas might be jihadist but not that it was diabolical. It was hard to imagine ever being at peace with Hamas as it appeared at that moment. And then of course there was the bungled Israeli military response on the ground revealed afterward to have gone along with massive intelligence failures and then obvious lack of a plan for the endgame and after-game. The picture was blundering self-righteous arrogance, just the opposite of the view of Israeli military super-competence and ethical discipline.

I was reminded of the reaction of a couple of leftist Jewish friends to the 1973 war who said it made them rethink their Jewishness. They understood that Israel was saved from defeat only by Kissinger's intervention at the last minute. It was far more vulnerable and so far more worthy of their support as American Jews than they had thought. An unreformed Marxisant friend started sending his children to religious services.

Raef Zreik: okay. So that was the change in 1973. What makes some people rethink their Jewishness today, in your opinion?

Kennedy: Exactly the same thing. If Hamas was that competent and also insanely sadistically vengeful, and Israel was that incompetent for reasons that appear structural not accidental, Israel is much more vulnerable than we imagined, even without taking Iran into account. This LJI has no allegiance to the "Zionist project" beyond wanting Israel to exist as a Jewish haven, ideally but not necessarily committed to liberal democratic values. But what's happening may be an existential threat even to that. So now you might have to rethink your relative distance from the conflict.

I think that for a very large part of the LJI, horror at October 7 is now doubled by horror and sometimes shame over what Israel has done and is still doing every day in response. The LJI is fully equipped with the human rights ethical and legal categories that seem relevant, such as genocide or not, crimes against humanity or not, apartheid or not, and so on. But these abstractions don't settle the question

whether the threat from Hamas plus Hezbollah plus Iran is so great that the only valid course is to keep quiet about what is happening to avoid weakening an already reeling Israeli state and society.

What are the alternatives? Human rights institutions are nice but powerless. Conditioning military aid to Israel? BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions)? A massive diplomatic campaign for an immediate cease fire, backed by the threat to end military aid completely? I think it is completely unclear how this body of sentiment will work out its ambivalence. Not least because there is a Jewish generational revolt against Israel in Gaza within the general one, and it too is spreading to question the fundamentals of Israeli state and society. The Jewish version is in many ways the opposite of the general one.

The vast majority of the hundreds of thousands of young people drawn to the critique by the shock of the IDF in Gaza had, like the vast majority of Americans, no more than sketchy knowledge of the history and politics of the Arab/Israeli conflict. In fact, as we will see the defining trait of the current moment is the struggle of competing existing pro-Palestinian groups to fill the void with their own conflicting partisan versions of that history and politics. For young Jewish protesters, there is no void. The young have to one degree or another, although not universally, a lifelong exposure to a particular wildly pro-Israel version of the issues. A big question about October 7 was how it ought to affect one's long held previous understanding of Israel and the Palestinians.

Some young participants in the shift come from the conservative religious current in the larger Jewish community and they are doing classical generational revolt against fundamental beliefs of their parents that were the ethos of their childhood. This involves dis-identification with Israel and turning their parents' narrative on its head. This is obviously painful all around. For the children of the LJI, it is more the charge that their parents are wholly committed to the critique of injustice in the U.S. and around the world—everywhere except in the case of Israel. Is the exception explained by ignorance or bias or intimidation? This makes for a tense dinner table but still likely to be less dire than for orthodox families. For that reason there is the possibility that a substantial part of the LJI older generation will follow their children, as did many many older liberals during the Vietnam War.

I think it is clear that which way they go—toward the pro-Palestinian resistance or toward the Trump, AIPAC, mega-donor Alliance—the LJI will be the most important factor influencing the character of public and private U.S. involvement in the conflict. And which way they go will in turn depend on the evolution of campus protest activity between radicalization and cooptation under the influence of the conflicting political lines in the leadership groups purporting to speak for the movement.

A crucial factor here will be the ability of the pro-Palestinian movement's diverse leadership to control or at least mute what seems to me an absolutely inevitable

increase in classic European and classic Muslim antisemitic speech and action as well as Wokist accusations of Jewish racism followed by informal retaliations.

But however well the leaderships avoid the classic pitfalls of radicalizing student action in the second year of a mass movement, the way the LJI understands what is happening will also depend on the success of the Alliance in deflecting LJI attention and outrage from the IDF in Gaza onto their narrative of the campus gone mad with mass support for Hamas powered by rampant antisemitism. And then using the expanded definition of antisemitism as the excuse to repress as much as possible of the pro-Palestinian movement. Finally, much depends on whether non-Jewish liberal intelligentsia opinion, backed by a whole new set of pro-Palestinian social sanctions, turns so sharply against Israel that the American Jews of the LJI are backed into a corner with no plausible way to exercise mediating power. What is going on in all these areas is opaque and when known subject to wildly different interpretations by the groups in struggle.

Raef Zreik: so we can move forward to the pro-Palestinian politics in all of this, the pro-Palestinian slogans, the pro-Palestinian alliances, the pro-Palestinian groups who are participating, if there is this Black Palestinian coalition? What are the future of these coalition's? Do they have a future? Can they recruit new groups to the struggle or did they reach a ceiling? How do you see Palestinian politics in Israel/Palestine in all of this?

Kennedy: My view of the situation is that a variety of small pro-Palestinian tendencies, some of them predominantly Jewish, with radically different lines had the historic good fortune to have been present already in college communities when Israel began its counter-attack in Gaza. Some of them had formed an important alliance with on-campus Black radical students identifying with Black Lives Matter. They rose to the occasion and organized protests of all kinds ranging from the mild to the very disruptive. Their efforts were almost miraculously effective.

Not only did many previously unengaged people actively participate but they precipitated an outpouring of previously repressed anti-Israel sentiment. The change in opinion—it was not exactly a movement—was large enough to register in the national political domain and to influence, albeit very marginally, the 2024 presidential and congressional electoral campaigns now going on. Politicians had to reckon with it and adjusted in different ways, from doubling down for Israel in Gaza to equivocating. That AIPAC has crushed many political careers doesn't change that amazing fact.

What held the pro-Palestinian organizing groups together was that all of them favored immediate permanent cease fire and ending American military aid to the IDF. It seems inevitable that in the next stage they will splinter. If the student movement lasts into another year it will be because a whole new generation of student activists who gained leadership as effective organizers in 2023-4 will be able to keep it together from campus to campus around local versions of pro-Palestinian campus policy demands, for example divestment, BDS and the like.

Both on campuses and in a newly constituted national non-student on-line space for Arab and Muslim activism, there will be something else going on, namely a protracted argument between the wildly different substantive agendas of the original little groups now struggling for shares of the new and unformed youth audience. Their struggle is to be convincing interpreters of the horrifying Gaza situation, its causes and possible outcomes. In short the activity in the Harvard Yard encampment that I described at the beginning of the interview. Thirty or so white undergraduate women with a smattering of white men, Asians and American blacks listening to a graduate student lecture on who was responsible for the 1973 war.

A rough catalogue of positions the graduate student might be pushing, with reading lists, would be something like:

--an Islamist jihadist tendency committed to liberation for Palestinians on the basis of military defeat of the Israeli state to be replaced by a Muslim ethno-nationalist state, Sunni but aligned with the Iran/Hezbollah Shia alliance.

--a secular fanonist, third worldist Marxist or post Marxist tendency, also with roots in radical groups in the middle east, with capitalism, imperialism, class analysis and revolution rather than race or religion as key concepts

-- a one state solution based on the Palestinian people's right to self-determination which implies an end to the settler colonial state and full Palestinian sovereignty over the territory. While violence against the colonial regime is justified, it requires observing the laws of war including the prohibition of killing or expelling enemy civilians after military victory. Palestine will be the State of the Palestinian People defined as an ethnicity. Its non-Palestinian citizens will enjoy equal civil and political rights. The consequences for land and property will emerge from the settlement that ends the conflict. In other words, a non-oppressive flip of the current situation.

-- a binational state, as in Belgium, with all kinds of guarantees for each group over a background of liberal democratic constitutionalism and human rights with or without redistribution/reparations between the constituent nations

--a two state solution with security guarantees for both sides. "Full" sovereignty on both sides without transformation of the economic/property relations between them.

All of these tendencies and more are actually present in the emerging discussion at the national public, the on-line and the campus levels. My belief is that at the moment there is no dominant tendency and it is still very unclear what are the relative numbers of the tendencies and which have effective leaders. The configuration is dramatically different from what it was in, say, the early 1980s after the limited mobilization provoked by the Sabra and Shatila massacres. The difference is directly related to the transformation of the college age cohort since then.

There is the dramatic increase in the number of Arab/Muslim students with some kind of at least cultural connection to Middle Eastern politics and the number of students of color with some Global South identification. And the rise of international human rights as the dominant left discourse of white leftists in the U.S. And of great importance, the “death of the two state solution” among commentators and activists on both sides while purported neutrals continue to proclaim it as obvious and still viable. The way these positions evolve as they struggle to interpret the horror of the existing situation for the new and unformed younger generation mass is going to be highly consequential for the future of U.S.—Israel relations.

This will be paradoxically true in spite of the fact that neither the positions (except the two state one), nor their pro-Palestinian protagonists, have or could ever have any significant audience in the larger public or the policy elite. They are far too complex and too radical for that. Nonetheless how much influence they gain among student and non-student resisters and how they conduct themselves will have a major influence on the rhetoric and the disruptiveness of student and non-student protest. That will in turn have a large effect on whether the LJI tilts toward the critique of U.S. policy or toward the Alliance.

A real possibility is the radicalization of the campus movement, not around a particular theory but around the ethos of competitive challenges to “up the ante.” To respond to the immobility of the “system” by demanding more and more radical actions combined with rhetorics that skirt or go over the border of blatant antisemitism. In other words, some pro-Palestinians abandoning the historically grounded rhetorics and analytics of anti-Zionism, settler colonialism, apartheid and the norms of international law to take up racial demonization. Political organizers are tempted, as soon as the movement stalls as it is sure to do, to instill the idea that you are not serious if you won’t take risks for the cause, overt acts risking arrest or secret acts that would likely be prosecuted if discovered.³

The Alliance strategy as I mentioned above is to persuade the public and the policy elites that pro-Palestinian opinion and action are antisemitic, aligned with Hamas and “rampant” on campuses. A Harvard campus group aligned with AIPAC produced a beautiful summary of the position in the opening paragraph of their complaint in a lawsuit, filed in January, charging Harvard with failure to protect Jewish students from discrimination on the basis of their race. Here it is :

Harvard, America’s leading university, has become a bastion of rampant anti-Jewish hatred and harassment. Since October 7, 2023, when Hamas terrorists invaded Israel and slaughtered, tortured, raped, burned, and mutilated 1,200 people—including infants, children, and the elderly—

³In August, apparently pro-Palestinian activists painted resistance symbols on the apartment door of a top Columbia administrator, smashed a window, and hung a poster showing him with devil’s ears and denouncing him for having called the police on the protesters. This was an apparently political not an antisemitic turn to violence since the victim’s name is Christopher Holloway, so he’s not likely Jewish. NYT, 8/10/24 p. A17

antisemitism at Harvard has been particularly severe and pervasive. Mobs of pro-Hamas students and faculty have marched by the hundreds through Harvard's campus, shouting vile antisemitic slogans and calling for death to Jews and Israel. Those mobs have occupied buildings, classrooms, libraries, student lounges, plazas, and study halls, often for days or weeks at a time, promoting violence against Jews and harassing and assaulting them on campus. Jewish students have been attacked on social media, and Harvard faculty members have promulgated antisemitism in their courses and dismissed and intimidated students who object. What is most striking about all of this is Harvard's abject failure and refusal to lift a finger to stop and deter this outrageous antisemitic conduct and penalize the students and faculty who perpetrate it. Case 1:24-cv-10092 Document 1 Filed 01/10/24 Page 1 of 77.

I don't know anyone at Harvard who thinks this is anything but wild exaggeration and paranoid fantasy. But to understand the depth of liberal Jewish anxiety I need to clarify, in case you thought the Trump/AIPAC/Donor Alliance people were completely crazy. Many universities but particularly the liberal elite ones have indeed recruited large numbers of blacks and women faculty, often by replacing the primitive selection criteria that kept them out, and also Asians who have replaced white elites as the champions according to those criteria, and smaller numbers of Hispanics. As I noted above, the diversification of the faculties has happened at the same time as the shift at the level of the student body from a battle for jobs to a battle for "recognition," "Woke" being the radical fringe of this development.

From my point of view, the amazing flourishing brought by student and some faculty diversity also has a price, but one well worth paying. Woke activists have sometime seemed to intimidate parts of university administrations, turning their race, gender, sexuality program into a dogma with punitive teeth. The liberal intelligentsia in general and the Jewish part in particular tend to be horrified by woke excesses, like defacing statues of Thomas Jefferson because he was a slave holder, or requiring students to formally acknowledge their white privilege before participating in a discussion or arguing for definitions of sexual harassment that cater to extreme victim sensibilities.

It seems clear that on campus, and to some extent, in the encampments, there were students who expressed one form or another of hostility to Jewish students in what one might call the Woke confrontational style, and that dynamic was very widely reported as part of the Alliance critique of the encampments. Personal confrontations as well as collective denunciations for racism or sexism or homophobia are key. What is understood to be at stake are bad attitudes that underlie bad practices and bad structures. The accused person has a choice whether to verbally perform chastened virtue or endure sanctions, the most famous of which is "cancelling" meaning a semi-collective decision of a network to cut on-line connections to a supposed wrongdoer. Herd mentality is, I would opine as censorious elder, pretty key to Woke sensibility.

Nonetheless, over the spring, it became clear that something close to all of what some Jewish students and their faculty sympathizers experienced as antisemitism was non-violent campus speech virulently denouncing Israel, not just the IDF in Gaza, as a racist settler colonial state and sometimes asserting that violence against Israel was ethically justifiable given all that. Sometimes this speech aggressively accused Israeli students on campus, or clearly Israel-identified American Jews, of guilt by association, whether or not they supported Israel in Gaza. And some Jewish students reported one or another form of shunning or exclusion from student social life.

The spokespeople for the pro-Palestinian movement vehemently deny that denunciations of Israel for racism, apartheid or settler colonialism are antisemitic. According to them anti-Zionism, for example denying that Jews have a right to a specifically Jewish state in Israel/Palestine, has a long Jewish tradition and it is mere name-calling to treat it as antisemitic per se. Likewise there is a long-standing legal argument that violent resistance to colonialism is justifiable under international law so long as it obeys the laws of war forbidding atrocities (like those of October 7).

The pro-Israel Alliance considers all such speech and action to be antisemitic per se and interprets it to be also per se eliminationist and supportive of Hamas and of the October 7th massacre. The ADL (Anti-Defamation League) lists the shouted slogans in a single category along with Neo-Nazi physical violence against Jews. In a striking twist in the story, the statistics have helped the Alliance persuade the mainstream media that antisemitism is a major problem on campus on the basis of very little other evidence. A short list of confirmed incidents were recycled hundreds of times even many months after they occurred.

A Jewish friend who is a senior adjunct teaching a course at Columbia recounted that he understood antisemitism had exploded at Columbia though he himself had seen no evidence of it. He also stated unequivocally that he didn't consider From the River to the Sea or denunciation of Israel apartheid to be antisemitic because they are political not racial opinions. I think a good part of the LJI has been misled about antisemitism versus political critique on campus by the Alliance's successful conflation of the two.

Of course it is possible, as the Alliance argues, that the pro-Palestinian claim of merely political/ethical/legal opposition to the state of Israel is a disguise for, a euphemistic rephrasing of the underlying intent to destroy the Jewish people. I don't think this is true, for the vast majority of participants, even in the most famous case of "From the River to the Sea/Palestine Shall be Free."

My guess is that some students chanting "from the river" are adherents of the jihadist or fanonist student tendencies. And that some see it, on the contrary, as no more than the demand for human rights for Palestinians everywhere in historic Palestine. But my guess is that by now many of the chanters understand that most of Jewish opinion has decided that chant advocates for the elimination of the Jewish state and maybe the Jewish population. And that is no longer just about the occupation of the West Bank and the assault on Gaza, but now about "Israel proper"

and the Nakba as well. They chant it as a provocation of the American Jewish and non-Jewish pro-Israel audience. The motives for provocation vary and are likely partly self-righteously cruel and sadistic. But I don't think the motive is hatred of Jews as opposed to hatred of what Israel is doing in Gaza, and for what more and more of the new recruits are learning from their non-mainstream media sources about Israel in general.

When many campus groups responded to media outrage by changing the chant to "Free Free Palestine," you could interpret it as disavowing an antisemitic interpretation of "From the River." Or, according to the Alliance, as no change at all. In their reading, Palestine needs to be free could just as well mean free of Jews. This meant that the new chant, while appearing conciliatory, could still give sadistic chanters pleasure.

A still truly murky series of events involving Students for Justice in Palestine illustrates the chaotic interface of splintered pro-Palestinian positions with the as yet unformed mass of student opinion and also the Alliance drive to make antisemitism the issue with all forms of protest. On October 9, while the incursion was still going on, an organization presenting itself as National Students for Justice in Palestine issued an elaborate "outline plan of action" for its chapters to use to support Hamas and the attack. In fact, Students for Justice in Palestine is a network of branches and there is no national organ that speaks for the branches.

On the 50th anniversary of the 1973 war, the resistance in Gaza launched a surprise operation against the Zionist enemy which disrupted the very foundation of Zionist settler society. On the morning of October 8th, the Palestinian resistance stormed the illegitimate border fence, gaining control of the Gaza checkpoint at Erez, and re-entering 1948 Palestine. Referred to as Operation Towfan Al-Aqsa (Al-Aqsa Flood), the resistance has taken occupation soldiers hostage, fired thousands of rockets, taken over Israeli military vehicles, and gained control over illegal Israeli settlements.... Fearlessly, our people struggle for complete liberation and return. Today, we witness a historic win for the Palestinian resistance: across land, air, and sea, our people have broken down the artificial barriers of the Zionist entity, taking with it the facade of an impenetrable settler colony and reminding each of us that total return and liberation to Palestine is near. As the Palestinian student movement, we have an unshakable responsibility to join the call for mass mobilization. National liberation is near— glory to our resistance, to our martyrs, and to our steadfast people.

The plan was a typical fanonist/jihadist document, sounding eerily like a press release from a Palestinian militant group of the 1960s or 70s. It called for American supporters to bring the struggle home to the U.S. which was an indispensable ally of the Zionist project. The proposals, unlike the rhetoric were conventional: organize rallies, invite speakers to campus, nothing violent or even illegal.

Of course, we wonder whether it was an Israeli provocation designed to disgrace the student movement. Whether or not authentic, it was seized on by pro-Israel Jewish commentators writing in the mainstream media, including repeatedly in the *The Atlantic*. They linked to the statement, and only to the statement, to document the claim that there is a great deal of support for Hamas in the student movement. Op-eds by pro-Israel commentators in the mainstream liberal media repeated the accusation without the link because it was so well known that no documentation was necessary.

Some local chapters of SJP actually endorsed the plan and some of them provoked some local outrage. Brandeis suspended the local branch apparently because it didn't disavow the "national" statement. As pro-Israel commentators continuously circulated the link as conclusive evidence of pro-Hamas student sentiment, it was notable that liberal mainstream news media, with the exception of a puzzled report in the *New Yorker*, completely ignored the story. Perhaps (who knows?) because they anticipated the damage it might do to the whole movement.

At Harvard, two days after the attack, the lead pro-Palestinian organization circulated a post declaring Israel solely responsible for the Hamas attack and two dozen varied student organizations representing the diverse campus identities signed on. In the next two days they all retracted and renounced the statement, with profuse apologies to fellow students whose feelings might have been hurt (!). A donor nonetheless paid for a truck to circle Harvard Square with a film loop on the back showing pictures of those students with some coordinates and the label "biggest anti-Semite at Harvard."

I don't doubt that there are small fanonist/jihadist currents in Muslim immigrant communities. Perhaps it's the eldest son radicalized on line who in the old days would have been tempted to travel to Afghanistan to fight the Americans with ISIS, as not a few did in fact. I see this as a permanent threat of a catastrophic event although Arab cultural communities discipline their children to prevent it. Their arrival on campus is another result of diversification. Fanonist/jihadist rhetoric appeals to a small part of the student body, often students with personal ties to the region and fits with the militant tone of the radical part of Black Lives Matter. Adding them to the list along with one state, two state, binational state advocacy makes the rhetorical mixture on campus even more confusing and confused.

Students in this group are in fact a major asset not of fanonist/jihadist groups in the Middle East but of the Alliance here in the US. With their partially true stories magnified and then sent in search of viral status on the internet they justify the Alliance demand for harsh measures. Harsh measures generate solidarity from large numbers of more typical anti-Israel students, who have no jihadist or fanonist beliefs and don't understand themselves as antisemitic. They join them in more and more provocative actions making university administrators and the local police into key actors without clear mandates making risky decisions about the use of force.

Alongside the still completely uncertain evolution of student politics under the eye of the Alliance and under the material threat of state force, I think the other major factor in the fate of the LJI will be the way the adult non-Jewish liberal/left intelligentsia treats Jewish colleagues, friends and enemies as they undergo their own anti-Israel transition. It seems clear that along with the intra-family strain, many liberal Jews were surprised and hurt (or more) by the sudden shift in the liberal networks they belong to from intense empathy with the massacre victims and the hostages to intense empathy with the civilian victims of the IDF in Gaza. The Alliance continually pointed out the complete absence of outrage over civilian victims of the Syrian civil war, to take just one example. Combined with the younger/older split in many many families, the sudden intense widespread one-sided condemnation of Israel was isolating for LJI adults dealing with their own rethinking crisis.

Non-Jewish liberals and radicals began to occasionally dominate professional conversation with heated denunciation of Israel in Gaza. There seemed to some LJI professional people to be a deliberate push back against Jewish participation in conferences, seminars, invited panels. If there were a lot of young people in the milieu it was hard to miss the chill in their attitudes. The experience was described to me as of being held silently but effectively responsible, without regard to whatever you might actually think about them, for the actions of AIPAC, Biden and the IDF. A friend described for me the creepy experience that a non-Jewish professional acquaintance probed for his Gaza position before inviting him out for lunch. It is of course possible that these reports are unrepresentative and that if they aren't they will turn out to be a temporary turn in immediate reaction to a shocking situation.⁴

This is nonetheless a lose/lose situation for the LJI. The increasing anger provoked by Alliance repression is sure to amplify the sense of some in the pro-Palestinian movement that American Jews who aren't for the war have a duty to speak up. If they don't, the pro-Israel forces get away with claiming to speak for all but a tiny traitorous minority of a united Jewish community. Silence is complicity in that idea, which is one of the bases of the public power of the Alliance, and so of the American hand in Gaza slaughter.

On the other side, pro-Israel media, influencing friends, acquaintances, colleagues, denounces any refusal to join with full throated enthusiasm in the denunciation of a dramatically expanded definition of antisemitism. It now includes not just its obvious forms but also BDS, so-called anti-Zionism and charges of settler colonialism, apartheid and genocide. Here it is the pro-Israel side that interprets LJI silence as complicity.

⁴ Another factor has turned out to be the non-student militant pro-Palestinian left, resorting to classic supposedly radical tactics like shutting down liberal speakers who are or are deemed to be Zionist (whatever that may mean in the context).

My idea of a good scenario, let me repeat is that an influential part of the LJI shifts against the war in Gaza and then against unconditional arms aid and then against blind acceptance of the fascist turn of Israel's West Bank annexation project. The dystopian spiral of reciprocal provocation of the pro-Palestinian student movement and the Alliance, combined with the growth of non-Jewish liberal/left intelligentsia blaming of American Jews for Israel's misdeeds, may make that impossible. Pro-Palestinian sentiment in the LJI may well subside along with engagement and the conflict over U.S. government support for Israel would re-polarize as just another element in the familiar red/blue polarization of American politics in general.

Raef Zreik: Okay now, with this as the description, do you want to be now in the seat of an advisor? You might say I don't want to take that position. If we push you to the wall, and we asked you to be: Where do you think that solidarity might have a future in this difficult morally fraught situation?

Kennedy: I do not have a position on the question of what would be required for a transformation of the evils of the current situation into a new just system for the diverse groups involved. I think that question can't be sensibly answered except in the actual process of a transformation toward justice and there are a wide variety of conceivably just institutional outcomes (obviously not including the "elimination" of the Jewish population). But I do believe that a new institutional system couldn't be just unless based on a very substantial redistribution of power and wealth between the groups. This both as compensation for the radically unjust situation that the Jewish state has imposed on the Arab population over the whole period since the Nakba and as a condition of a stable peace under whatever new system.

I think that there is a highly plausible academic strategy for pro-Palestinian American academics like myself who are also leftists. That strategy is:

- to articulate very clearly a strong, and for the U.S. a shockingly strong secular left pro-Palestinian position,
- including the critique of Israeli apartheid, of the subordinate status of Palestinian citizens of Israel and of the strangulation of Gaza since Israel disengaged in 2005
- acknowledging that violence, but not war crimes, may be justified as resistance to oppression,
- while denouncing the October 7th massacre as morally horrific
- accepting that an Israeli military response to October 7th was justified but
- denouncing what Israel has actually done and is doing in Gaza and the West Bank as morally horrific,
- denouncing anti-Semitism when it appears in the pro-Palestinian movement,
- denouncing the glorification of violence when it happens on either side
- rejecting the idea that American Jews share guilt by association for what AIPAC and the IDF do in their name
- and I would mildly suggest that Jewish critics of Israel have some moral obligation to at least consider speaking out, to weaken the pro-Israel claim to speak for all Jews because that claim is effective in shaping American government policy.

Raef Zreik: There's a difference between guilt and responsibility. You're responsible because you can, you are guilty because you did something bad in your life.

Kennedy: And then politically we should direct what limited means we have at our disposal to strongly support the embattled and vulnerable left wing congressional and other political figures whose line we share. We should support left pro-Palestinian voices and pro-Palestinian actions in the academy, including students, staff and professors.

A final point: there don't have to be a lot of activists for the good trend to continue. The secular liberal Jewish intelligentsia is full of people struggling in good faith to figure out the meaning of the crisis for them as Jews. The pro-Palestinian movement is full of people who would welcome them as moderate allies of their own much more left pro-Palestinian positions if the spiral of radicalization and repression can be avoided. I think horror is the key, each side sharing imaginatively the horror of the other's experience.

Pessimism of the intellect optimism of the will.