

Rashida Tlaib and That Visit/Non-Visit to Israel

by Hugh Fitzgerald



There are many aspects of Rashida Tlaib's on/off/on again/off again visit to Israel/Palestine that are worth examining. Let's take them in turn.

First, there is the propaganda value of the whole absurd affair – what some are calling, the matter of optics. How do things look? No one quite knows who has come out ahead. Many supporters of Israel think Israel looks bad for cancelling the trip initially, especially as Netanyahu is being depicted as “weak” for acceding to Trump's request.

Others think that whatever advantage the anti-Israel forces gained by Israel's flip-flop, they then lost when, after Israel announced that, as a “humanitarian gesture,” Tlaib could come “to visit her 90-year-old grandmother” as long as she committed herself to not promoting, while in Israel, the BDS Movement. Tlaib at first agreed, but a few hours later, when “Palestinians” expressed their outrage at this agreement,

she suddenly cancelled. Apparently that visit to her grandmother, “possibly the last time I will see her” (said Tlaib), turned out to be less important than in hewing to the anti-Israel script.

Optics, optics – who looks good, who looks bad, who made the right and who the wrong decision? Hard to tell, isn’t it? Some days you think Israel should have welcomed them with open arms, feigning friendship – taqiyya isn’t just for Muslims – with Israelis eager to please and ready to show their country to the clearly unsympathetic visitors, making it harder for Tlaib and Omar to paint them as cruel oppressors, determined to keep them from reporting on Israeli reality. And on other days, you think Israel did exactly the right thing to keep them out, (save for that conditional “humanitarian gesture” made to Rashida Tlaib, which she turned down).

Second, we should learn a little more about those behind the Congresswomens’ intended visit. This was Miftah, an anti-Israel group that sponsored the Omar-Tlaib trip and planned their entire itinerary. Miftah is a Palestinian NGO headed by that longstanding PLO propagandist and Arafat henchman, Hanan Ashrawi. It has done far more than support the BDS movement. On its website, Miftah has praised Palestinian suicide bombers and published antisemitic material.

A report posted on Miftah’s site in 2006 praised Palestinian women who took part in the second intifada. In particular, Miftah praised Wafa Idris, who in a suicide bombing killed one Israeli and wounded 150 others. The report said that Idris, the first female suicide bomber of the second intifada, “marked the beginning of a string of Palestinian women dedicated to sacrificing their lives for the cause.”

After President Obama held a Passover Seder at the White House in 2013, Miftah staffer Nawaf Al Zaru published the following:

“Does Obama in fact know the relationship, for example,

between 'Passover' and 'Christian blood'?! Or 'Passover' and 'Jewish blood rituals?! Much of the chatter and gossip about historical Jewish blood rituals in Europe are real and not fake as they claim; the Jews used the blood of Christians in the Jewish Passover."

This is the Blood Libel from the Middle Ages, that over the centuries prompted many a pogrom. And Miftah was happy to post it. When that Arabic-language post was then discovered by a horrified blogger, Miftah at first defended the article and attacked the blogger who had noticed it, but eventually, when too many outsiders became aware of the original article, Miftah decided to apologize and claimed it had disciplined Al Zaru. Since Al Zaru remained on the staff of Miftah, it's unclear what kind of "discipline" he endured. Al Zaru himself made no apology. Possibly he was told something like this: "Please don't do this , because even if you write in Arabic, too many Zionists will find and report on it. Yes, we know the story about the blood for matzahs is true, but we still have to consider the situation. The Zionists have managed to convince everybody that such a story is 'antisemitic.' So for now, leave that story alone."

Third, what do we know about Rashida Tlaib and her family? She's a vocal supporter of BDS. But is there more to her anti-Israel views than that? Both her mother and her husband (Tlaib is now divorced) come from the village of Beita, a West Bank hotbed for extreme violence, including terrorism, against the Israelis. Her husband and her siblings are a window into her other views. Her sister Layla, for example, has been on the FBI's No-Fly List for the past seven years. We don't know what she did to deserve this, but the FBI's anti-terrorism center does not put people on that list lightly.

Then there are her brothers. Her brother Nader has posted comments online praising "the heroes of Hamas." Hamas has been widely recognized as a terrorist organization in many countries, including the U.S., and here is Tlaib's brother

calling some of its members “heroes.” Nader has also posted as a comment to a news story that “Canada will soon be a Muslim-majority country.” That’s what he chooses to believe; clearly, it is what he hopes will happen. It’s too bad that no one has quoted his remark to Rashida Tlaib and asked her if “she looks forward to the day when America will be a Muslim-majority country.” However she answers, that answer will damn her, among Infidels if she answers “Yes,” and among her fellow Muslims if she answers “No.” That same brother has been peddling the preposterous myth that the Jews in Israel – the “so-called Jews” – are not really Jews at all but impostors, and thus have no valid claim to Israel.

Another of Rashida’s siblings, Ibrahim Elhabet, praised a post that said “Zionists control the media.” Does Rashdia Tlaib share that view? And if she does, how does she explain her rapid rise to political stardom? Why couldn’t the “Zionist-controlled media” have prevented that, or even prevented her election?

Finally, her former husband Fayeze Tlaib has posted online his deep admiration for that arch-terrorist Yassir Arafat, head of the PLO.

By her husband, sister, brothers shall we know her? Is it fair to attribute to her the venomous views that her relatives seem to share? Of course it is.

In January 2019, Rashida Tlaib attended, with her family, friends, and supporters from across the country, a private dinner in Detroit to celebrate her election. Among the invited guests was the pro-Hamas and pro-Hezbollah activist Abbas Hamideh, the co-founder and executive director of Al Awda, which means “right of return.”

Hamideh once tweeted: “Criminal Zionism will eventually die just like Nazism. No racist and supremacist political ideology should maintain itself. Israel does not have a right to exist.

The terrorist entity is illegal and has no basis to exist other than a delusional ISIS-like ideology.” He’s an ardent supporter of Hezbollah. In August 2015 he tweeted: “Happy Birthday to the most honorable Arab-Muslim leader of our lifetime.” He was referring to Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, the man who routinely utters bloodcurdling threats to destroy Israel.

In March 2019, Rashida Tlaib posed for a picture with Nader Jalaleh, a Palestinian activist who in 2018 mourned the death of Ahmed Jarrar, a terrorist who led an attack in which a rabbi was murdered. Above the image of Jarrar, Jalaleh wrote “Allah Yerhamo,” or “May God have mercy on him.” He died “after a long battle resisting the brutal Israeli occupation and defending his people and his land. We will never forget.” That sounds like support for terrorism to me. How likely is it that Tlaib knew nothing of Nader Jalaleh’s views?

The itinerary Miftah had planned for Omar and Tlaib was titled “U.S. Congressional Delegation to Palestine.” It was to have taken Omar and Tlaib through the major Palestinian population centers in Jerusalem and the West Bank, and a string of meetings with Palestinian non-profits and activists, and international human rights groups. There were to be no meetings with any Israeli officials, whatever their views, and no meetings with Arab members of the Knesset. Nor were there plans for the two Congresswomen to spend any time within the pre-1967 borders of Israel. On August 16, after the visit had been called off, Omar tweeted that “I planned to hold meetings with members of the Knesset (both Jewish and Arab) along with Israeli security officials.” Of course she did.

They were due to meet with Hanan Ashrawi, a long-time PLO propagandist and member of its executive committee. They were also to meet with members of B’tselem, a “human rights” group of Israeli far-left activists, and with three other non-Israeli organizations, similarly dedicated to finding fault with Israel.

Tlaib and Omar were to visit Hebron, accompanied by yet another left-wing Israeli group, Breaking the Silence. No doubt that group would have pointed out the tiny Jewish enclave of Kiryat Arba, (population 7,400), describing it as a permanent provocation to the Palestinians (pop. 215,000) in Hebron, and thus ultimately responsible for the Arab terrorism in the area.

In Jerusalem, Omar and Tlaib were to visit certain holy sites: the Temple Mount (or as they refer to it, Haram al-Sharif), which would have been described in their accounts as if it were an exclusively Islamic site; the Buraq Wall, similarly appropriated from the Jews (who know it as the Western Wall), where, from its plaza, Muhammad supposedly made his Night Journey to Heaven and back, on his fabulous winged steed Al-Buraq.

That's what those intrepid travelers Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar were scheduled to do on their visit to "Palestine." What they were not scheduled to do, on a visit to Israel, is even more telling.

Let's see what Miftah, the group that planned the trip to Israel/Palestine for Tlaib and Omar, left out of their itinerary, and why. No visit, apparently, was to have been made to Yad Vashem, which would have been an easy propaganda win for Omar and Tlaib. Feigned sympathy, a ready tear, some lines written in the guestbook. "How antisemitic can we be, if we went to Yad Vashem and declared our sorrow?" But so implacable were the Palestinian organizers that they would not permit any reminders of Jewish suffering to intrude, even if such a visit would have redounded to the credit of the two Congresswomen.

No visit to the Knesset, to see how Israeli democracy works. That visit would have included the twelve Arab members of the Knesset, and the less the world knows about them, and their complete freedom of expression, the better. Nor would there

have been a visit to Israel's Supreme Court, where one might learn about the Arabs who have served as judges on the Court. Neither visit would serve the apartheid narrative.

No visit to the venerable Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives was planned for Tlaib and Omar. Such a visit to that vast and venerable cemetery would only provide evidence of the long Jewish presence in the land, and there must be no reminders of that. Still worse, a visit to the cemetery might lead others to find out that 38,000 Jewish headstones had been pulled up and used by the Jordanian army to line the floors of their latrines, or crushed into bits to use as gravel at building sites.

Another place in Jerusalem that Tlaib and Omar would not have been visiting is the Jewish Quarter of the Old City. For the newness of the stones in the Jewish Quarter is evidence of the destruction wrought there by the Jordanians from 1949 to 1967. It was during those years that the Arabs destroyed all 58 of the Jewish Quarter's synagogues, and many other ancient structures besides. If the horde of Western journalists accompanying Omar and Tlaib were to see the "new" Jewish Quarter, they might begin to ask disturbing questions. Why does the Jewish Quarter look so much newer than the rest of the Old City? Tlaib and Omar would have stayed well away from the Jewish Quarter.

Haifa is another place the congresswomen would not have visited. Bustling, high-tech, entrepreneurial Haifa, home to the Technion, shouldn't be visited, because it is a city that is half-Jewish and half-Arab, where Arabs and Jews play, go to school, receive medical care, obtain higher education, and work together, in peace – a standing reproach to those who describe Israel as an "apartheid state." It is the very existence of Haifa as a mixed city, and a success in every regard, that must be kept from view.

In Hebron, Miftah had arranged for left-wing Israelis to serve

as guides. Much better that the preposterous narrative of Arab victimhood come from Jews. In their telling, the Jewish enclave of Kiryat Arba on the edge of Hebron, by existing at all has only created ill-will among the much more populous Arabs of Hebron. It's the Jews who should be blamed, in this topsy-turvy moral universe, for any Arab aggression, including terrorism, against the Jews living in Kiryat Arba.

Had the trip to that city been allowed, one hopes that Israeli commentators would have made sure that the horde of journalists received more information about Hebron than Tlaib and Omar's guides would have wanted them to receive. How many people know that Hebron is the second holiest city in Judaism? And how many people know that there was a continuous Jewish presence in Hebron for thousands of years, until 1929, when the Arabs of Hebron, having heard rumors that the Jews were about to destroy the Al-Aqsa Mosque, rose up and massacred, or drove out, all the Jews in the city? A few returned in 1931, but left again in 1936 because of the Arab Revolt. Wouldn't knowing how important Hebron is to Jews, and about the 1929 massacre that brought their continuous presence in the city to an end, put a different slant on the Jewish desire to reestablish that presence, at the urban settlement of Kiryat Arba, right on the city's outskirts?

There was no provision made for having Tlaib and Omar visit the Israel Museum, where they might have seen the Dead Sea Scrolls, which date from 150 B.C. to 70 A.D. The Scrolls would have reminded the journalists accompanying them of the Jewish presence in the Land of Israel at least 600 years before Muslim Arabs arrived. No need to draw attention to that.

Skip the museum.

And certainly Tlaib and Omar would not under any conditions have been taken to the L. A. Mayer Museum in Jerusalem, built by Israelis to show the splendors of Islamic art. What kind of "oppressors" of Muslim Arabs would build such a museum? Best

not even to mention it.

It is clear from the published itinerary for their trip to "Palestine" that Tlaib and Omar were to have avoided visiting any site that might in any way have helped the Israelis. No visit to Yad Vashem; it generates too much sympathy for the Jews. No visit to Haifa, where Jews and Arabs live, study, work together in complete security, for that gives the lie to the "apartheid state" business. For the same reason, no visits to the Knesset, where Arabs serve as members, or to the Israeli Supreme Court, on which Arab judges have sat. No visits to the "new" Jewish Quarter in the Old City, or to the Mount of Olives Cemetery, where the effects of the Arab destruction of Jewish sites can be seen. On a visit to Hebron, no mention of why that city matters to Jews, and what makes Kiryat Arba, as a consequence, so important to them. No visit to the Israel Museum, where the Dead Sea Scrolls remind us that Jews lived long ago in the Land of Israel 600 years before there were any Muslims. No visits to that Museum of Islamic Art, whose existence shows an Israeli openness, curiosity, and generosity of spirit toward other cultures that Tlaib and Omar, and their backers, would prefer you never learn about.

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