

As Threats to Jews Said to Mount in Europe, Israeli Minister Gets “Excited”

By [Ali Abunimah](#)

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Protestors defying a ban on Palestine solidarity demonstrations in Paris hold a banner saying “Stop the blackmail: Anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism,” 26 July 2014. (Alain Bachellier/[Flickr](#))

In a year-end joint media release, Israel’s Government Press Office and the Jewish Agency trumpet that “aliyah” has hit a “ten-year high.”

According to the emailed release, more than 26,500 Jews moved to Israel in 2014, up about a third from the previous year.

The surge represented a huge increase in “the number of Jews who reached the conclusion that they have no other country,” according to Sofa Landver, minister of “aliyah and immigrant absorption.”

“Aliyah” is the term Israel uses for when Jews emigrate to historic Palestine (Israel and the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip) under the racist “[Law of Return](#)” which benefits only Jews and excludes indigenous Palestinians displaced in and since 1948 from returning home.

“I am excited to see the fruits of our many efforts to encourage aliyah, but we have not yet reached our goal,” the Russian-born Landver adds. “Our ministry continues to work ... to promote the ingathering of the exiles, a vision that has accompanied the people of Israel since the state’s establishment.”

In other words, the Israeli government will not be satisfied until Jewish communities around the world, especially in Europe, have been totally eliminated.

The release does not mention the number of Jews who left Israel during the year for Europe, North America and other places which they deem preferable to live – an estimated [one million Israelis](#) live abroad.

Why are they coming?

“For the first time ever, [France](#) tops the list of countries of origin for immigrants to Israel, with nearly 7,000 new immigrants in 2014, double the 3,400 who came last year,” the release proclaims.

“This development has spurred The Jewish Agency and the Ministry of Aliyah and Immigrant Absorption to encourage Aliyah from France,” it adds.

The [Jewish Agency](#) is the government-backed organization that encourages such colonization.

“Additionally, some 5,840 new immigrants have come from Ukraine over the course of the year, compared to some 2,020 in 2013,” the release states, attributing the dramatic increase to “the ongoing instability in the eastern part of the country.”

“This year also saw a historic shift: for the first time in Israel’s history, the number of immigrants who came to Israel from the free world is greater than that of immigrants fleeing countries in distress,” Jewish Agency chair [Natan Sharansky](#) is quoted as saying.

This trend, Sharansky claims, is “evidence of Israel’s attractiveness as a place.” But this positive spin flatly contradicts Israel’s and the Jewish Agency’s own propaganda: they habitually insist that French Jews are now in greater danger than at any time since the Nazi occupation and must flee to Israel for their lives.

The release does admit that Ukrainian Jews are departing not due to the positive pull of Israel, but because of “instability.”

This means that the more there are incidents or reports of “instability” or prejudice affecting Jews, the more “excited” the Israeli minister of absorption will become.

Targeting France

The term anti-Semitism has historically referred to [European Christian hatred of European Jews](#), as Joseph Massad explains, but it has since come to mean hatred of Jews as Jews in general. It has never meant historically, and should not be used, to mean a generalized hatred of people of the Middle East – mislabeled as “Semites” – including Palestinians.

A decade ago, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon caused outrage when he urged French Jews to move to Israel as soon as possible to escape a life-endangering surge in anti-Semitism. At the time, France deemed Sharon’s comments “[unacceptable](#).”

Yet Israel has continued to target France’s Jewish population because it is the largest in Europe – estimated at half a million people – and is therefore an irresistible reserve in Israel’s attempt to fight off the supposed “[demographic threat](#)” from Palestinians who [will soon](#), if they don’t already, outnumber Jews in all of historic Palestine.

Racism and anti-Semitism

Manifestations of bigotry against Jews do still exist in France. At the most extreme there have been violent and thankfully very rare incidents such as the murders of two children and an adult at a Jewish school in Toulouse in March 2012 by a gunman with [a troubled history](#). The shooter, Mohammed Merah, had also killed four French paratroopers who he had targeted for being Muslim.

In addition to anti-Jewish prejudice, France and Europe more generally have a problem with racism and bigotry against many people who are not seen as coming from a traditional European Christian stock, principally those of African and North African ancestry, and Muslims.

The horrifying mass rallies against Muslims in Germany – which even German Chancellor Angela Merkel lately [felt a need to condemn](#), despite her [earlier encouragement](#) of nativist and racist sentiments – attest to that.

Deliberate distortions

Yet attacks on Jews have often been deliberately distorted and exaggerated by Israel and Zionist organizations for the purpose of creating the impression that Jews face such danger in France that they must leave.

This was the case last summer, when French, Israeli and international media spread false reports of an attack on a Paris synagogue by hordes of Muslim youths protesting Israel's bombardment of Gaza.

The French journalist Nabila Ramdani, who witnessed the events, called these reports “pure fabrication.”

“I was in rue de la Roquette,” where the synagogue is located, [Ramdani wrote last August](#) of the 13 July incident, “and what actually happened was that a vigilante group called the LDJ (Ligue de Défense Juive, or Jewish Defence League) stormed away from the synagogue towards a largely peaceful protest in Place de la Bastille. Armed with metal batons, gas canisters and café chairs and tables, they initiated street fights with their enemies while chanting ‘F*** Palestine.’”

Yet the Jewish Agency's online propagandist [Avi Mayer](#) didn't wait for the facts to emerge to begin spreading incendiary reports:

Terrifying: Anti-Israel rioters have besieged a Paris synagogue, attacking it with rocks and bricks and trapping worshipers inside. (Chan 2)

— Avi Mayer (@AviMayer) [July 13, 2014](#)

The mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, has confirmed that anti-Israel rioters attempted to force their way into two synagogues in central Paris.

— Avi Mayer (@AviMayer) [July 13, 2014](#)

The listed media contact on the Israeli government's press release about rising “aliyah” numbers is none other than Mayer.

The president of the synagogue, Serge Benhaim, can be seen on video a few days after the events [categorically denying](#) any attack on the synagogue. But this did not stop media from spreading the false reports even further.

This false incident was specifically cited by Liam Hoare as an example of the “factors pushing Jews out of France” in an article for *The Jewish Daily Forward* headlined “[Brazen Anti-Semitism Sends French Jews Racing To Leave in Record Numbers](#).”

Based on the pretext of anti-Semitism at Palestine solidarity rallies, Paris authorities

immediately [banned](#) demonstrations protesting Israel's attack on Gaza, which at that moment was killing dozens of Palestinians every day.

(For an excellent analysis of these incidents, also read Richard Seymour's article "[The Anti-Zionism of Fools](#).")

Conflating Judaism and Zionism

In addition to such false reports, Israel and its lobby groups have worked relentlessly to redefine "anti-Semitism" to include not just hatred of Jews as Jews, but any criticism of Israel's racist and colonial practices toward Palestinians.

It's so unnecessary by now, but here I go anyway: Anyone who believes anti-Zionism is anything but a form of anti-Semitism is delusional.

— Avi Mayer (@AviMayer) [July 13, 2014](#)

This attempt to silence criticism of Israel by claiming it is anti-Semitic is neatly encapsulated in a statement from Jewish Agency chair Natan Sharansky [last May](#). In the wake of the lethal shooting at the Jewish Museum in Brussels, Sharansky admonished European leaders for allegedly failing to declare "all-out war against the demonization of the Jewish state."

"While Jews as individuals are no longer demonized in Europe as they were in previous centuries," Sharansky acknowledged, "the demonization of Israel – the collective Jew – continues to rise to new heights, creating a toxic atmosphere in which Jews live in fear and those who target them flourish."

In Sharansky's disturbing conception, Europe's Jews are not only identified totally with Israel, but Israel actually comes to supplant them. Individual Jews and local Jewish communities in all their diversity are replaced by Israel, which claims to be the "collective Jew."

"When Israel is singled out for condemnation and scorn, even as crimes against humanity and genuine humanitarian catastrophes rage throughout the Middle East and around the world, the message to those seeking a pretext to harm Jews is clear," Sharansky added. "Until Europe declares war on the demonization of Israel, no security measure will help."

Muddying the waters in this manner makes it much harder to identify and fight real instances of anti-Jewish prejudice. It also encourages the poorly informed to conflate Judaism with Zionism and to falsely blame Jews collectively for Israel's policies.

The Israeli army's [use of the Paris Grand Synagogue as a recruitment center](#) is perhaps the most insidious and dangerous way that Israel conflates its interests with those of Jews, to the detriment of Jews.

"Self-fulfilling prophecy"

The Paris synagogue incident is not an isolated case. In 2013, for instance, the Jewish Agency's Avi Mayer [actively promoted](#) false claims that Israeli filmmaker [Yariv Horowitz](#) had been the victim of a brutal anti-Semitic beating "by a gang of Arab teens" while visiting France.

The report was disseminated by French and Israeli media, including *Haaretz*.

Richard Prasquier, head of CRIF, France's main Jewish communal body, [later apologized](#) for his organization's dissemination of the report, admitting it was "false news."

But Prasquier – one of the most prominent pro-Israel advocates in France – raised an important question about why the false report spread so widely.

"Did this testimony not receive all this publicity precisely because it bolsters the common sentiment in Israel that anti-Semitism is rife all over France and a Jew is at risk the moment he sets foot on the street?" Prasquier asked.

"If yes, then this is a typical case of what the Americans call 'self-fulfilling prophecy' because such false reports cannot but generate anti-Semitism in response," he concluded.

Prasquier seems to implicitly understand that fabricated and exaggerated reports of hate crimes are bad for Jews, bad for harmonious community relations in France and bad for everyone committed to fighting racism in all its forms.

Such false reports, it should be added, which typically blame Arabs or Muslims, may very well contribute to Europe's surging tide of Islamophobia.

But it is "good" for Israel and the consistent strategy of Zionism, past and present. As Joseph Massad has [written](#), Zionism has from its inception relied on and sought alliances with anti-Semites in pursuit of its goals.

The excitement of Israeli minister Sofa Landver shows that nothing has changed.

Principled anti-racists should not be less vigilant about fighting anti-Semitism just because Israel and its Zionist affiliates habitually exaggerate, exploit and on occasion fabricate reports of hatred directed against Jews.

But they should be prepared to call it out and refuse to play along.

Fighting racism means fighting Zionism *and* anti-Semitism.

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