

How Netanyahu's Son Became the Poster Boy for White Supremacists

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The eldest son of Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has found himself an unlikely poster boy for David Duke, a former Ku Klux Klan leader, and the neo-Nazi website Daily Stormer.

Last week these cheerleaders for Jew hatred described 27-year-old Yair Netanyahu as “awesome” and “a total bro” for posting a grossly anti-semitic image on social media.

It depicts an Illuminati-like figure and a reptilian creature controlling the world through money and dark arts. Alongside them are a cabal of conspirators, their faces altered to show Netanyahu's main opponents. They include George Soros, a Holocaust survivor who has invested billions in pro-democracy movements, and Ehud Barak, a former Israeli prime minister turned government critic.

This is not Yair's first troubling outburst. Last month he emulated US President Donald Trump in decrying demonstrators who opposed a rally by white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia, that left a woman dead.

These might be dismissed as the immature rantings of a wayward son, had Yair not been groomed by his father as Israel's “crown prince”. Netanyahu Jnr was supposedly behind an online media strategy that steered Netanyahu to electoral victory in 2015. He can be seen at his father's side at meetings with world leaders.

The Israeli media were shocked not only by the post but Netanyahu's determined refusal to criticise his son. An editorial in the Haaretz daily concluded that the prime minister's silence signaled his “consent to the ongoing demonization of anyone who doesn't get in line with the Israeli right”.

Yair's choice of targets was revealing, particularly the image's “Grand Jew” – George Soros.

In July, Netanyahu met his Hungarian counterpart Viktor Orban, an ultra-nationalist who has led a xenophobic campaign against immigrants. In a bid to crush opposition, the Orban government has vilified Soros, an American-Hungarian who promotes progressive causes. A billboard campaign against the billionaire unleashed a wave of anti-semitism across the country.

As leader of a Jewish state professing to be the world's only refuge against anti-Semitism, Netanyahu ought to have rushed to Soros's defence. Instead he echoed Orban's incitement. Soros, he said, had “undermined” and “defamed” Israel too – by funding human rights groups opposed to the occupation.

Sympathy with the European and US far-right is not restricted to the Netanyahu camp. It is moving into the Israeli mainstream. Last week the Herzliya conference – an annual jamboree for Israel’s security establishment – invited Sebastian Gorka as a keynote speaker.

Gorka, another American-Hungarian and Trump’s former terrorism adviser, is a figurehead of the alt-right, a term for US white supremacist groups. Gorka told the conference that Israel and the US were “founding members of the Judeo-Christian civilization” and would defeat their “common enemies”.

Meanwhile, another US alt-right leader, Richard Spencer, appeared on Israeli TV last month to call himself a “white Zionist”.

The affinity between Netanyahu’s Israel and the west’s far-right is understandable. Both detest a human rights discourse they have yet to crush. Both mobilise their supporters with dog-whistle Islamophobia. Both prefer militarised, fear-based societies. And both share an obsession with Jew hatred.

Israel is so esteemed by white supremacists because it offers a double whammy of anti-semitism. For decades Israel has sought to persuade the west that it faces an endless war against Arab and Muslim “terror”; while Israel also declares itself the only true home for Jews.

For an alt-right bristling with hatred for all semites, Jews and Muslims alike, this is manna from heaven. It too wants an apocalyptic battle against Islam, and it too is happy to see the west cleared of Jews by herding them into the Middle East.

At first sight, that has created an ideological inconsistency on the Israeli right that Yair Netanyahu’s meme highlights.

The Israeli prime minister has repeatedly called on all Jews to come to Israel, claiming it as the only safe haven from an immutable global anti-semitism. And yet Netanyahu is also introducing a political test before he opens the door.

Jews supporting a boycott of Israel are already barred. Now liberal Jews and critics of the occupation like Soros are increasingly not welcome either. Israel is rapidly redefining the extent of the sanctuary it offers – for Jewish supremacists only.

The paradox may turn out to be more apparent than real, however. For Netanyahu may believe he has much to gain by abandoning liberal Jews to their fate, as the alt-right asserts its power in western capitals.

The “white Zionists” are committed to making life ever harder for minorities in the west, in a bid to be rid of them. Sooner or later, on Netanyahu’s logic, liberal Jews will face a reckoning. They will have to concede that Israel’s ultra-nationalists were right all along, and that Israel is their only sanctuary.

Guided by this cynical convergence of interests, Jewish and white supremacists are counting on a revival of anti-semitism that will benefit them both.

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