

Analysis

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Washington Watch

Two US Congressional resolutions that won't advance Mideast peace

By Dr James J Zogby

In the coming week, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs will move on four bills - all of which, I believe, drive more nails in the coffin of Israeli-Palestinian peace. While two of the proposed bills are blatantly pro-Israel, it is the two more benign pieces of legislation that cause me real concern.

House Resolution 246 (HRes246) "Opposing efforts to de-legitimize the State of Israel and the Global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions" is a non-binding resolution putting Congress on record in opposition to BDS. Unlike earlier versions, HRes246 does not impose penalties on BDS supporters nor does it conflate Israel and "areas under Israeli control" - a not too clever way designed to recognize Israeli sovereignty over West Bank settlements. For this reason, this resolution has won the support of several liberal groups and is currently co-sponsored by a bi-partisan group of 338 Members of Congress.

HRes246 also includes language calling for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict "both the Israeli and Palestinian people should be able to live in safe and sovereign states, free from fear and violence, with mutual recognition." And it "urges the Israelis and Palestinians to return to direct negotiations as the only way to achieve an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

The bulk of HRes246, however, is devoted to a series of "Whereas" and "Resolved" clauses opposing BDS. These clauses mischaracterize the goals of the BDS movement, misquote the co-founder of the BDS movement, and falsely claim that BDS targets not just the State of Israel but individual Jews "who support Israel."

HRes246 concerns me for two principal reasons:

- far from being a benign resolution, HRes246 has been correctly described by the Arab American Institute as a "transparent ploy" that delegitimizes a legal and non-violent movement that advocates for Palestinian human rights - and secures the blessing of an overwhelming majority of Congress in this effort. While this non-binding resolution does not criminalize BDS, by defaming the practices advocated by this movement and putting Congress on record in opposition to it, HRes246 opens the door to current state laws and future Congressional efforts to do so.

- HRes246's profession of support for a two-state solution and its implication that the BDS movement is an obstacle to reaching that goal can only be described as naïve, at best, or even disingenuous. Nowhere in the resolution is there any mention of any of the obstacles posed by the Israeli Government: the 620,000 settlers living in settlements that have, by design, carved the areas West Bank open to Palestinians into non-contiguous "bantustans"; the aggressive land grabs, demolition of Palestinian homes; the brutal behavior of the occupation authorities; the policies of both the current Israeli Government and its opposition, both of which see no place for the "viable" Palestinian State called for in HRes246; or the annexationist policies currently underway in the area referred to "East Jerusalem," having a profoundly negative impact on the lives of the 320,000 Palestinian citizens who live there.

All of this is ignored, as is Congressional complicity in these Israeli policies. Despite several past US Administrations calling on Israel to stop settlement construction, not only do they continue, but they continue with Congress' blessing in the form of increased aid and not only no US sanctions, but not even a rebate. When the Palestinians have appealed to the United Nations or other international bodies like the International Criminal Court, the response of US Administrations or Congress has been to punish the Palestinians and/or the international organizations, in question. As a result, the only recourse Palestinians have had is in the court of public opinion, hence, the BDS movement. Their successes have been greeted by Israel and now the US Congress with hysteria. Hence, the effort to delegitimize and defame the movement - with criminalization sure to follow.

The second bill before Congress is House Resolution 326 (HRes326) "Regarding efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a negotiated two-state solution." This is also a non-binding resolution. It is currently sponsored by 144 Members of Congress and has a companion bill before the US Senate (Senate Resolution 234) that is sponsored by nine Democrats - including two presidential aspirants: Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren.

HRes326 includes one very positive "Whereas" clause which calls for "an end to the occupation, including opposing settlement activity and moves toward unilateral annexation in Palestinian territory."

NOTE: Dr James J Zogby is the President of the Arab American Institute

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A man rides a Velib self-service bike by the fence of a roadwork site reading "What is this mess?" in Paris on July 11, 2019. — AFP

Cars make way for Paris two-wheel revolution

With the wind rushing through their hair, they zip past on bikes, electric scooters and mono-wheels, effortlessly passing lines of hot-and-bothered drivers stuck in the endless Paris traffic. In the French capital, the new mobility revolution has caught on fast, with locals and tourists embracing the growing array of app-based ways to get around. And with climate change bringing frequent heatwaves and more peak pollution alerts, Paris is beginning to push back against the dominance of the car.

Not only is the city upgrading its public transport system offering of interurban trains, buses and the metro, it is also enjoying an unparalleled explosion of alternatives. "Our cities have been colonised by cars. They get into the smallest gaps, today we need to put them back into their proper place," says Christophe Najdovski, the city's deputy mayor who has responsibility for transport. "In Paris, they are only used for 10 percent of daily trips but they take up 50 percent of the public space."

Car crush

But the city has been at the forefront of innovation, setting up a pioneering bike-share service back in 2007. Known as Velib', it has since been copied across the globe, from London to Chicago. Then came the Autolib' electric car-sharing scheme which was followed by a flood of dockless bikes, and then the overnight appearance of e-scooters that exploded onto the streets in the summer of 2018. And that's without mentioning other private mobility devices such as two-wheeled e-hoverboards or electric

unicycles. But is there enough space? Not according to the taxi drivers, who are already infuriated with the growing demands on their space and the planned 1,000-km of bike lanes that are due to be completed by 2020. And the estimated 15,000 e-scooters on the streets have also triggered a backlash, with riders initially dumping them randomly on pavements, cluttering the curb and creating a nuisance for pedestrians. "I'd like to slap them," fumes Nordine, a woman in her 40s walking through the Marais district, muttering furiously about "the lack of public spirit". "Paris is a great playing field but the space is saturated. They need to bring it back down to two or three operators, like San Francisco, which has just two," says Najdovski from the mayor's office. At its height, Paris had 13 companies running scooter fleets, but that number dropped to around seven earlier this month after the city brought in a raft of demands for operators.

37% of Parisians own a car

Every day, there are some 41 million trips made in the Paris region, of which 15 million are by car and 10 million by public transport. Since July 1, all diesel vehicles registered before 2006 have been banned from entering the city, but should the authorities go further and shut the entire city centre to cars? Today, just over a third - 37 percent - of Parisian homes have a car, and that drops to one in five in the city centre, according to the mayor's office. "The priority is to enable city dwellers to get around," says Jean-Pierre Orfeuil, an engineer who spe-

cializes in urban mobility. "Generally speaking, those who are using these new means of transport are people who used to use the metro," he said. "So they haven't played a role in easing the traffic."

Dumping diesel, passing on petrol

To get away from fuel-powered vehicles, the focus should be on electric bikes, which could potentially help those living in the suburbs, he says. But even there, the infrastructure is lacking. "In France, we are two or three times worse off than Germany or the Netherlands" in terms of the number of electric bikes, he said. Although car-sharing has been slow to take off in France compared with its neighbours, one way to encourage this could be shared lanes, notably on the city's choked periphery, its 34-kilometre ring road. "At rush hour, you have an average of 1.1 people in every car. If you increased that to 1.7 it would get rid of the congestion," Najdovski said.

But these new forms of transport don't work for everyone, notably raising questions for those with families. And for many city dwellers, the car is a private space akin to their living room which offers a certain form of intimacy, says Orfeuil. "You can make private calls, you can listen to music." For Mireille Apel-Muller, a sociologist who heads the City on the Move Institute, mobility is about more than just transport. "It's a way of life," she said. "All these new forms of transport require a smartphone and applications which you have to master. Otherwise, it becomes exclusive." — AFP

Rehabilitating Indonesia's child bombers

Thrown off a motorbike as her parents blew themselves up, nine-year-old Mila was the sole survivor of a family suicide bombing, part of a wave of such attacks involving children that rocked Indonesia. Orphaned and radicalized, there were concerns for her future after the Islamic State-inspired strike, but a renewed focus on rehabilitating the children of terror suspects may offer Mila, and others like her, a chance at normality.

She is among a small group who are being treated at a Jakarta safe house in a unique scheme that provides psychological and social care to the offspring of suicide bombers or children directly involved in terror plots. The world's biggest Muslim majority nation is grappling with the growing global threat of 'family attacks' and also with how to reintegrate returning IS jihadists and their relatives as the extremist group's caliphate lies in ruins, a challenge faced by many nations including France

and the United States. "It hasn't been easy dealing with (the children) because they believed in radicalism...and that bombing was a good thing," said safe-house head Neneng Heryani, who gave AFP exclusive access to the state-run compound on the edge of Indonesia's capital. "They were taught that jihad was essential to go to heaven and that you must kill non-believers. It was very hard to change that mindset," she added. Social workers and psychologists are trying to re-socialize the children with counselling and an emphasis on normal daily routines which include lessons, mosque visits, and regular playtime.

'Indefensible and deplorable'

For Mila - a name given by AFP to protect her identity - this treatment means helping her find a way to cope with her parents' suicide bombing and living with the knowledge they involved her in mass murder, and intended for her to die. Other children of terror suspects, including those linked to the deadly suicide bombings in Surabaya last year, are also undergoing this dedicated treatment. "Deploying children in such a way is indefensible and deplorable," Human Rights Watch campaigner Andreas Harsono said, adding that the 2018 incidents were the first time suicide bombers used their own kids in attacks in Indonesia.

The youngsters that survived had been subjected to years of jihadi indoctrination by their families and often shown violent propaganda, counsellors say. Gaining their trust has not been easy but staff at the safe house believe their approach could help neutralize the years of radicalization. At the heart of the rehabilitation effort are lessons about Indonesia's national heroes, building trust and Pancasila, the nation's ideology which stresses unity and respect for ethnic and religious minorities in a country of some 260 million spread across thousands of islands.

"We still teach them that the Quran is the foundation for everything and that they have to believe in it. But if you violate other people's rights, then that's not okay" said social worker Sri Musfiah Handayani. Trying to help rehabilitate the children of suicide bombers is largely uncharted territory. "This is the first time that we know of. It's not a common phenomenon," said Sidney Jones, director of Jakarta-based Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC).

'Family attacks'

While children are easy prey for extremists, "that vulnerability can also provide a starting point for treatment", said Haula Noor, an expert in radicalized families at Australian National University

(ANU). "We should view these children as both victims as well as potential perpetrators" she added. A surge in Islamist attacks in the past decade has dented Indonesia's reputation for religious tolerance.

Mila was wedged between her parents on a motorcycle as they detonated themselves at a Surabaya police post last May. That attack came after another family - including a nine and 12-year-old girl - from the same Quran study group staged suicide bombings at several Surabaya churches, killing themselves and a dozen congregants, while injuring scores more.

Then, in March, the wife of a suspected Indonesian militant blew up herself and child at their home after an hours-long standoff with police. The incidents have aggravated international fears that women and their children would be increasingly used, as they tend to attract less scrutiny. "There are going to be two main trends in the future - attacks carried out by families and also by lone wolves," said Stanislaus Riyanta, a terrorism expert at the University of Indonesia.

In April, the pregnant wife of one of those involved in the Sri Lanka bombings that left nearly 260 dead, detonated her own suicide vest killing herself, her three young children, and several police officers when authorities raided their home. — AFP

Lobster fishing in Honduras: A poisoned chalice

Diving for lobsters in the Caribbean waters around Honduras provides a vital source of income for the local indigenous population in La Mosquitia, but it's an extremely hazardous occupation. After his last dive, 44-year-old Ernesto McLean lost the ability to walk. "I got dizzy, I had a pain in my stomach and when I got out of the water I tried to stand up but my legs were paralyzed," McLean told AFP. He and La Mosquitia's 100,000 strong indigenous community in the far east of the Central American country have been in mourning since July 3, when 27 fishermen died and another six went missing after the Capitan Waly boat, with 88 people aboard, sank.

The lobster fishing season had only opened two days earlier, when thousands of fishermen using rudimentary oxygen cylinders clambered aboard boats, like every year, to go in search of the prized seafood that constitutes their main, if not only, source of revenue for the entire year. The season, which lasts eight months, begins with people renting boats and hiring divers from the poor Gracias a Dios state, says Oswaldo Echeverria, the president of the Association of La Mosquitia divers. But there is a lack of government



Disabled diver Jaime Lemus Maturé, 60, using a makeshift walking stick, stands between boats in Prummitara, Puerto Lempira, Honduras, on July 8, 2019. — AFP

control on the industry, particularly in terms of health and safety. Workers complain of being subject to labor exploitation while many have died and thousands more have suffered severe and irreversible physical disabilities.

Decompression sickness

Back in 2004, the local handicapped divers' association asked the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) to intervene to force Honduran authorities to regulate commercial under-water fishing. The association claims that some bosses have even threatened workers with a gun to force them to dive down as much as 40 m

without adequate equipment. Thousands have suffered from decompression sickness.

The latest health ministry statistics, which already date back to 2004, show that of the 9,000 professional divers in La Mosquitia, 4,200 are handicapped. Boat captains pay divers three US dollars per pound of lobster. On a two-week fishing expedition, the most successful, or luckiest, divers can collect up to 400 pounds of crustaceans, while others might only bring in 40 pounds, Echeverria told AFP. Most of the produce is exported to the United States.

Echeverria says things won't improve for divers until authorities "grant financing" so they can buy their own boats and not be so dependent on owners and contractors. Since his 1998 accident, McLean moves around in a wheelchair or by using crutches and has reinvented himself as a cobbler. "I don't have a house, (friends) put me up at night," he said. "I'm in a bad situation." It was 50 hours after emerging from the water that he was taken to the hospital at nearby Puerto Lempira for hyperbaric oxygen therapy, which reverses the effects of decompression in the joints, bones and muscular tissue - as long as it's done within 24 hours. Jaime Lemus, 60, is another who walks with crutches now since coming back up from a 36.5 m dive in 2004. "All these years without getting any help," he complained. He was another whose hyperbaric oxygen therapy came too late and now he survives by transporting passengers on the Caratasca lagoon - the largest in Honduras - in his canoe for \$8 a day: When there are customers. Around 15-18 divers a month need hospital treatment in Puerto Lempira for decompression, physiotherapist Danyra Tylor told AFP. — AFP