

## Analysis

**Kuwait Times**  
Established 1961  
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT  
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF  
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher  
**YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN**

Editor-in-Chief  
**ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN**

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432  
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7  
FAX : 24835620/1  
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163  
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125  
COMMERCIAL : 24835618

P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.  
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com  
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

## Washington Watch

## Game over!

By Dr James J Zogby

Hardline supporters of Israel are in panic mode. It was in evidence earlier last week with the all-out assault on the first Somali, African-born immigrant, refugee, Muslim woman elected to serve in the US Congress. Her crime was that she dared to point out, as a leading New York Times columnist and so many others have in the past, the intimidating role that AIPAC plays in shaping US policy toward Israel. The response was nearly hysterical.

Republicans used her as a scapegoat, hoping to turn her into a wedge issue to show that Democrats could no longer be trusted as unquestionable supporters of any and all Israeli policies. Sadly, some Democrats, covering, piled on and joined in the denunciation.

The problem, quite simply, is that those who have given Israel a blank cheque are losing ground among young and minority voters and don't know what to do. Polls show a deep partisan/demographic split on American support for Israel - with millennials and minority voters moving away from Israel toward a more balanced, and even pro-Palestinian, direction. While Republicans are quite pleased with this rift and seek to exploit it to their advantage, some Democrats want to have it both ways. They want to maintain the support from these key constituencies, while at the same time silencing their opposition to Israeli policies.

Reflecting this shift in attitudes, most of the 2020 Democratic presidential aspirants voted against a Senate bill that encourage states to violate the First Amendment by punishing individuals who participate in boycotting Israel. And, of course, the 116th Congress includes two Muslim women, a Somali and a Palestinian, who make no bones about their criticism of Israeli policies that violate Palestinian human rights.

Given this changing landscape, the reasons for the panic are clear enough. What is outrageous, however, has been the way supporters of Israel have decided to respond. They have weaponized anti-Semitism, turning it into a blunt instrument in a crude effort to pummel opponents and silence legitimate debate on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There are currently bills before Congress that redefine anti-Semitism to include criticism of Israel, criminalize participation in the boycott of Israel, and another that condemns anti-Semitism, but conflates criticism of Israel with heinous behaviors that defame the Jewish people.

As further evidence of the change that's afoot, a few weeks back, one of the New York Times newest opinion writers, Michelle Alexander, penned a significant piece tracing how and why she, an African American civil rights champion, had come to "make a break with Israel". This past Sunday, most likely in response to Alexander's column, the Times published an article by another of their writers, Bret Stephens. The piece was a dizzying mess of faulty logic, bogus "straw men" and fictive history clumsily patched together in an effort to equate what he calls "the progressive left's criticism of Israel" with anti-Semitism.

Stephens rhetorically asks why the left is so critical of Israel and begins his answer by outlining what he claims is their indictment against Israel: "More than a half-century of occupation of Palestinian territories that fair-minded people can no longer ignore, especially given America's financial support for Israel. Continued settlement expansion in the West Bank proves Israel has no interest in making peace on equitable terms. And endless occupation makes Israel's democracy less about Jewish self-determination than it is about ethnic subjugation."

Sounds right to me. But to Stephens this progressive argument is patently false. To make his case, he relies on fictional accounts of history - that are, at best, half true. To establish that Israel has long wanted to recognize a Palestinian state, he claims that Israeli prime ministers offered a state in 2000 and 2008, but were rebuffed. In fact, both offers were made by prime ministers who were on their way out the door - both with single-digit favorable ratings and soon to be booted out of office.

Stephens neglected to mention that even then-Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami had conceded that the offer made to the Palestinians in 2000 was inadequate and unworthy of acceptance. His boasting that Ariel Sharon removed every single settlement from Gaza ignores the reality that the withdrawal was done unilaterally without consultation with the Palestinian Authority, as the US had insisted. And that Israel never "left" Gaza, but had simply pulled out the illegal settlements, then turned it into a captive open-air prison.

To demonstrate Palestinian cruelty, Stephens notes the number of Israelis killed by Palestinians in this century, but ignores the fact that eight times more Palestinians have been killed by Israelis during the same period. To prove his bona fides, Stephens declares "I support a two-state solution," but goes on to argue against those who oppose the very Israeli settlement construction that has made that outcome impossible to realize. He says that those who say that Israel ought to stop building in the occupied lands and make peace with the Palestinians are guilty of "calumny." In fact, he's the one guilty of calumny since he claims that the opponents of settlements are all guilty of charging Israel with "boundless greed for Palestinian land and wicked indifference to their plight."

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



In this file photo taken on Aug 6, 2011, farmers harvest barbary figs in the Moroccan region of Skhour Rhamna region near Marrakech. — AFP

## 'Humble' cactus brings hope to Algeria

For generations Algerians like the Gueldasmi family have barely eked out a living growing prickly pear fruits, but thanks to the cactus's new found virtues their lives are steadily improving. "Now, my future is here. There is no need to go abroad" to find work, said Fethi Gueldasmi, 40, whose family's revenues have been growing thanks to what agronomists and biologists now call the "green gold". Scientific reports indicate that the *Opuntia* species of prickly pears which thrives in arid regions like Algeria's northern Sidi Fredj contains a plethora of virtues.

Everything from the cactus - once considered sacred by the ancient Aztecs - can be transformed to yield nutritional and medical benefits except for its prickly spines. The green spiny discs known as cladodes are used for fodder while their tender inner flesh is a star of the cuisine of Mexico, where the cactus originated and figures on its national flag. Oil extracted from the seeds of fruit has antioxidant benefits and is used in cosmetics for its anti-ageing properties, besides being rich in vitamin C, calcium and magnesium.

The flowers of the cactus go into making herbal tea while the pulp of the red fruit is turned into juice, vinegar, jams and even sorbets. A 2017 study by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) concluded prickly pears could be the answer to much of the world's food security woes and prevent soil erosion.

### 'Green gold'

In Sidi Fredj, once an impoverished town in the Souk Haras province bordering Tunisia, Gueldasmi, like his father and grandfather before him, farms prickly pears. The fruit must be handled carefully to avoid being pricked by the sharp spines. And until recently it was harvested for its tasty, sweet flesh, which only fetched a pittance of 10 dinars (US 0.08 cents) a piece at the local market. Since 2013 however all that has changed with the creation of a cooperative of farmers, scientists and traders in Souk Haras, with help from Mexico, to exploit and market

prickly pear by-products. A small factory was built in 2015 and oil was produced in small quantities before reaching 300 litres in 2017 and 1,000 litres in 2018. The cooperative is hoping to increase the output sevenfold by the end of this year thanks to a new and bigger factory which opened at the end of last year. One tonne of grains is needed to produce one litre of oil, which can fetch more than 2,000 euros (dollars) in Europe.

Algeria's "green gold" is exported to France, Germany

seen their revenues increase thanks to farming and selling prickly pears. Fathi said his family is now able to make home improvements and pay in cash for their groceries instead of signing IOUs. His mother has also been saving money to carry out the hajj, the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Makkah. It is one of the five pillars of Islam and Muslims must undertake the hajj at least once in their lifetime. "Now, my future and that of my (10-year-old) daughter is here. There is no need to travel abroad," he said.

Algeria is a country of 40 million where half the population is under 30, with one in three young people unemployed. Many dream of travelling to Europe to find a job and improve their standard of living. Now "hundreds of families are making a living" from prickly pears, said Mohamed Mohamedi, who heads a farmer's cooperative in the region. This includes women who take part in the harvest of prickly pears and young people.

### No 'humble' cactus

The FAO said in its report that beyond its immense benefits, the "humble cactus" can help fight food insecurity, improve soil quality, promote barley plantations and may even help limit emissions of greenhouse gases. A "cactus stores water in its pads, thus providing a botanical well that can provide up to 180 tonnes of water per hectare - enough to sustain five adult cows, a substantial increase over typical rangeland productivity," FAO said.

"Climate change and the increasing risks of droughts are strong reasons to upgrade the humble cactus to the status of an essential crop in many areas," said Hans Dreyer, director of FAO's Plant Production and Protection Division, in the 2017 report. In Algeria, the farming of prickly pears has helped crop diversification as well, according to Khodir Madani, head of a university research laboratory, with farmers growing cereals and other crops among them. Fethi's father, Youcef Gueldasmi, agreed pointing to a few pistachio trees he planted alongside the cactus. — AFP



### Farming has helped crop diversification

and Qatar and plans are being made to sell it in the United States as well, according to farmer Djamel Chaib. Although Algeria - where most of the fertile land is free of pesticides - has no organic certification body, oil from Sidi Fredj obtained an "organic" label from European agencies and is sold as such abroad.

### 'Crucial food supply'

"While most cacti are inedible, the *Opuntia* species has much to offer, especially if treated like a crop rather than a weed run wild," the FAO said in its 2017 report. It highlighted the 2015 Madagascar drought in which the "cactus proved a crucial supply of food, forage and water for local people and their animals". Around 80 percent of Algeria, Africa's largest country, is arid or semi-arid, providing an ideal terrain for farming prickly pears.

In Sidi Fredj, the Gueldasmi family and others have

### Walls of ice

Ice shelves act as a retaining wall that prevent Antarctic ice from spilling more quickly into the ocean. Icebergs have historically broken off over centuries but their break-up has accelerated in recent years. The loss of ice from the "white continent" rose to an annual net figure of 252,000 million tons between 2009 and 2017 from the average of 40,000 million tons from 1979 to 1990, according to a study released in January. "Large platforms have collapsed in the past. What is not known if the collapses were gradual or instantaneous, like the ones we are seeing today," MacDonell said.

The Antarctic Peninsula, the northernmost part of the continent and site of the Chilean base, is the focus as one of the areas most affected by melting ice - scientists believe because it had more exposure to the ocean. "We have a long-term trend that is pointing to this process of warming and collapse of these platforms," said Chilean glaciologist Francisco Fernandez, part of MacDonell's team.

The Netherlands and several island territories are eager for the results of the study. Were the ice caps of Greenland and Antarctic to melt entirely, a 10-meter rise in sea level expected to result would inundate them, according to INACH data.

### Reading the ice

MacDonell and her team have embarked on a lengthy journey by plane, boat, helicopter and on skis to reach a camp on the Muller ice shelf, which itself lost a 1.6-km long iceberg at the end of last year. They will have to brave blizzards and the sub-zero temperatures of the Antarctic summer to conduct two weeks of sampling before winter descends in the coming month. The team will use radar waves to take measurements of the icebergs and extract ice cores, columns that allow researchers to effectively look back in time.

The cores will be transported to specialist labs in central Chile for analysis in chilled chambers that keep the temperature at -20 degrees Celsius. The scientists hope the models for future melts they will be able to build will serve as a basis for agreements among nations to tackle climate change.

"We cannot make these political decisions but we can say what the scenarios are: if the temperature increases, stays the same or drops, this or that will happen," glaciologist Fernandez said. "That's what we can contribute. The decisions themselves are in another sphere." — Reuters

## Antarctic ice shelves: Searching for clues on climate change

In a remote island outpost on the edge of the Antarctic, hundreds of miles from the southern tip of Chile, scientists at a research base are scouring the ice for clues about everything from climate change to cures for cancer. Chile's Escudero base on King George Island acts as a research hub for a frozen expanse that extends to the South Pole, with more than 300 international scientists taking turns to brave the bitter Antarctic temperatures.

The Chilean Antarctic Institute (INACH) has supported research into a biomolecule called "Antartina", derived from a plant native to the region, which has shown positive early results in diminishing colorectal, liver and gastric cancers in mice. Scientists there also look at lichens that could treat Alzheimer's disease, enzymes to remove lactose from milk and others to improve lettuce crops.

This month a multinational team embarked on a research trip to investigate what causes the break-up of ice shelves, a phenomenon associated with climate change. In 2017, an iceberg the size of Trinidad and Tobago broke off a shelf in Antarctica, sparking widespread alarm, fears of shipping accidents and a further rise in sea levels. "There are different theories related to changes in sea temperatures eating the platforms, and another that has to do with the behavior of water and its drainage," New Zealand glaciologist Shelley MacDonell, the team leader, as she prepared to travel to one of the icebergs affected.

MacDonell's team wants to be able to predict where and when ice shelves might rupture in future. The scientists hope their research will help the mapping of the shape of world's southernmost continent in the decades to come, and allow island and coastal nations to plan for rising sea levels. "There is a whole dynamic (of the Antarctic ecosystem) that needs to be studied quickly, like the upcoming scenarios of climate change," said INACH's director, Marcelo Leppe.

## Pushing packaging out of the US delivery process

New Yorker Tamara Lim loves packaging, but in a less-is-more kind of way. As a former manager at online retail giant Amazon.com Inc, known for sometimes shipping goods in outside disposable cartons, the 26-year-old says she regularly heard clients asking why they received "this tiny, little thing in a huge box." "Can you do something about that?" she recalls them asking.

Some five months ago, Lim did. She launched the Wally Shop, the first grocery delivery service in the United States promising only reusable packaging. Several hundred customers order their groceries from The Wally Shop online, she said. Currently, the service only covers the Brooklyn section of New York City, though it hopes to grow to Manhattan by the spring, said Wally Shop communications director Sabrina Katz.

The service delivers local products ranging from vegetables to pasta to bread via bike courier in re-usable glass jars or cloth bags, Lim said. The bike couriers return to pick up the shipping material after the goods have been consumed, ensuring a zero-waste formula. "We're sort of like the milkman" of groceries, said Katz, referring to local milk delivery services that once were commonplace but are now nearly extinct.

That comparison was also made by Susan Selke, who heads the School of Packaging at Michigan State University. "One ... thing that's being talked about recently is a return to the milkman," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. The profession's disappearance speaks to the modern food industry trend of selling products far from where they are produced. The result is packaging that is largely inconvenient to reuse, Selke said.

Plastic production has surged over the last 50 years, leading to widespread use of inexpensive, disposable bottles, cups, takeaway containers and other products. Last March, US campaigners called on the nation's largest supermarket chain, Kroger Co, to introduce a plastics-free aisle, giving shoppers the option of buying products without pollution-making packaging. The petition came less than a month after Dutch organic chain Ekoplaza set up what it said was the world's first such supermarket aisle, a move hailed by environmentalists. — Reuters