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THE VIEWS EXPRESSED BY CONTRIBUTORS ARE THEIR OWN AND NOT THE VIEW OF THE HILL

The 'Make Israel Great Again' movement will likely do the opposite

BY AMY NEUSTEIN, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR - 02/06/24 9:30 AM ET



BERLIN, GERMANY – OCTOBER 22: People gather under Israeli flags at a demonstration to show solidarity with Israel and against anti-semitism on October 22, 2023 in Berlin, Germany. (Photo by Sean Gallup/Getty Images)

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an interim ruling late last week, urging Israel to prevent genocide, increase humanitarian aid to Gaza and, perhaps most significantly, punish any verbal incitement to genocide. Yet, just 48 hours after that ruling, a major [conference](#) took place in Jerusalem that placed Israel's posture before the world court in jeopardy.

Twelve cabinet ministers and 15 Knesset members, along with rabbis and thousands of settlement activists, [packed the auditorium](#) at the Jerusalem International Congress Center, the largest convention hall in the Middle East. Titled, "Conference for the Victory of Israel — Settlement Brings Security: Returning to the Gaza Strip and Northern Samaria," the far-right ideologues were found slinging "MIGA," or Make Israel Great Again, mantras in complete oblivion to the ICJ's provisional ruling in their ongoing inquest into the alleged genocidal conduct of Israel's counteroffensive to the Oct. 7 massacre.

Rabbi Uzi Sharbag, a former leader of the terrorist Jewish Underground movement of the 1980s, gave the opening statement. Far-right ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir, who reportedly mocked the ICJ's ruling by tweeting, "Hague – Schmage," and far-right Israeli finance minister Bezalel Smotrich served as keynote speakers.

Ha'aretz reported that conference attendees were presented with maps of future Jewish settlements, the stages of preparation in the construction, building and renaming of towns in Gaza and other materials. The speakers called upon decision-makers to "acknowledge that a war victory can only be claimed through the Jewish resettling of the Gaza Strip."

Smotrich — himself a native of a settlement community — [declared](#) that the children whose families had been forced out of Gaza during the disengagement of the settlements in 2005 are compelled to return as settlers.

"We are rising, we have a nation of lions [and many children] are returning there as combat fighters. We must make sure they return there as settlers to protect the people of Israel." National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir echoed these sentiments, adding that "we need to find a legal way to voluntarily emigrate Palestinians."

Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi, went even further, "suggesting that the emigration need not be voluntary during wartime," [as reported](#) in The Times of Israel.

Juxtaposed to the glitz and grandeur of the far-right's event taking place at the largest coliseum in the Middle East, that same day, three United States servicemembers [lost their lives](#) at the U.S. military base in Jordan as the overt signs of a broader escalation would become increasingly difficult to ignore.

Also, on that day, rain came down heavily in Gaza, plunging temperatures to near freezing, while fuel, food, water and medicine [remained scarce](#). Yet, the news trickling back to the refugees, huddling in tents not knowing where they would find their next morsel of food, was the effort to [expel them from Gaza](#): Forever extinguishing their culture, history and lives on the strip.

Israeli opposition head Yair Lapid denounced the conference, declaring that the government of Israel "reaches a new low tonight."

Let's think for a moment, what does that mean? In the United States, we saw a country divided by MAGA rhetoric. We sat through lengthy [congressional hearings](#) that replayed the shameful events of Jan. 6 when a riot broke out at the nation's capital because a former president refused to yield to the newly elected leader. [Injury and death](#) ensued for police officers trying to maintain the unruly demonstrators that day.

For Israel, I'm afraid, MIGA will have worse consequences than MAGA had in the U.S.

This is because Talmudic dictates are premised on the sanctity of language. We are taught to guard our tongues against evil because words can harm as much as a bullet. In truth, Aharon Barak, Israel's ad hoc judge before the International Court of Justice knew the importance of holding one's tongue when he voted against the State of Israel in two provisional measures aimed at preventing the incitement of violence.

Barak [said](#) he voted in favor of the provisional measures to punish incitement to genocide "in the hope that the measures will help decrease tensions and discourage damaging rhetoric." What we see from his vote is that guarding one's language takes precedence over anything else. This is so because language is enduring while actions are transient.

MAGA rhetoric has seeded discord in American life. [Antisemitism](#), [Islamophobia](#), [racism](#), [misogyny](#) and [homophobia](#) are on the rise. We have widespread hostility where there should be love for one's neighbor.

Should the far-right in Israel, egged on by the Jewish extremists in the U.S., risk MIGA rhetoric that will turn Israel into a society of hateful citizens in need of censure by a world court?

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