

Analysis | For Israelis, 'From the River to the Sea' Is a Reality. For Palestinians, It's a Crime

Saturday 15 February 2025, by [SCHEINDLIN Dahlia](#) (Date first published: 13 February 2025).

It is nonsensical, and hypocritical, to arrest or accuse Palestinians of promoting the ideology of 'From the river to the sea,' while in Israel, school maps don't show the Green Line and the government is advancing full annexation

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stands before a map, as seen in a screenshot taken from a video posted by the official X account of the Office of the Prime Minister of Israel. Credit: X

The great existential threat of Palestinians against Israel is back. A children's coloring book with the title "From the River to the Sea" leaves no doubt: Palestinians want all of the land, and they want to destroy Israel. The book is incontrovertible evidence that they incite their children to this aim of destruction and therefore they must never, ever have a state of their own.

So goes widespread sentiment in Israel, [following the arrest of booksellers Mahmoud and Ahmed Muna](#) of the Educational Bookshop in Jerusalem earlier this week.

The police first accused them of selling material involving incitement to terror. But having failed to produce evidence, they later reduced their claims to "public disturbance." But lack of evidence even for that led to the brothers' release after two nights in jail rather than the eight the police had requested. Disclosure: Mahmoud is a colleague and a friend - a thoughtful, sharp, warm, sensitive and welcoming bookstore owner. Images of him and Ahmed in handcuffs are shocking.

Booksellers Mahmoud Muna, left, and his brother Ahmed in a Jerusalem court on Monday. Credit: Mahmoud Illean/AP

Apparently this needs to be said again: Israeli Jews are the last people on Earth who can complain about Palestinian longing for the land from the river to the sea. The State of Israel is the mother of "river to the sea" - using graphic rather than geographic language. It is nearly impossible to find a map in any public space in Israel today, from official maps to public art and iconography, showing [the Green Line](#) that would delineate a hypothetical Palestinian state. Maps in Israel show the whole land, undivided - in effect, erasing Palestinian political and national identity.

A private collection of snapshots I've taken around the country or captured from the internet tells a story as clearly as a coloring book: a Judaica shop down the block in Tel Aviv has a blue-glass standing object for your coffee table shaped like the map of Eretz Israel - no Green Line blemish. A charging stand for electric cars in Haifa displays a map of its stations spread generously throughout the Land of Israel - a single unit from the river to the sea (thanks to my partners in this project who snapped the shot).

A person holding a sign in support of Mahmoud and Ahmed Muna at one of their Educational Bookshop stores, after Israeli police arrested the brothers on Sunday. Credit: Ammar Awad/Reuters

Every day, the newspapers print weather maps of the whole land, absent any Palestine ([Haaretz is a lone exception](#)). In Hostage Square in central Tel Aviv, citizens have filled the place with art, including a triptych of visual images in which the middle pillar bears drawings of families hugging children in the shape of the whole territory of British Mandatory Palestine. The list and the photos go on.

As for inciting children about river to sea: This is the time to recall that Israeli public schools are [practically barred](#) from using maps showing the Green Line - no Palestine there either. Israel's river-to-sea is not just the lucky kid who gets the coloring book, but every kid in an Israeli school.

It is nonsensical to arrest or even accuse Palestinians of using the term without mentioning that Israelis live out their own river to sea, every day. Outsiders: If you didn't realize that Israelis view the world through Mandate Palestine-shaped glasses - check your basic understanding of the society you claim to be fighting for. It's better than exposing yourself as a hypocrite or a liar.

But bumper stickers or paperweights aren't really the problem. The problem is that Israel implements its river-to-sea vision on the only map that matters: the ground itself. River-to-sea Israel is hard at work expanding settlements and the supporting infrastructure, transferring military powers over the West Bank to civilian arms of the Israeli state, thrusting the Israeli army into Palestinian cities like Tul Karm and Jenin after helping to collapse the rule of the Palestinian Authority. Support or oppose these policies - but tell the truth.

Artwork by Sivan Hurwitz, showing a teacher pointing to a map of "Eretz Israel," with all neighboring countries labeled "Enemies." Credit: Sivan Hurwitz

And in case anyone missed all this physical action, or was unable to see Israeli maps, the country's lawmakers are screaming "from the river to the sea" - in Israeli speak - from the rooftops. Parroting their patrons in [the U.S. Senate](#), Israel's politicians are advancing [a bill this week](#) that would require Israeli legislation to use the term "Judea and Samaria" rather than "West Bank"; it already passed a Knesset legislative committee.

How urgent is this law? It's true that the Israeli army proclamations issued on June 7, 1967 establishing military rule use the term "West Bank." Beyond that, laws from 1968 already refer to "areas," which they define as "the territories being held by the Israel Defense Forces." I haven't checked every single document, but having read a great many Israeli laws, it's hard to recall one since that time that uses the term "West Bank" rather than "Judea and Samaria."

Useless performative legislative debates are surely a good way for [lawmakers to spend their time](#), paid by taxpayers, while Israeli hostages in Gaza are being starved, hung upside down, beaten or sitting in chains.

But other legislation is less performative, quieter and more consequential. While you weren't watching, the Knesset is advancing a law to facilitate settlers purchasing West Bank land directly from Palestinians. In right-wing arguments, this law is intended to rectify - wait for it - "[Jordanian apartheid](#)."

An old map showing the Jewish and Arab areas in the 1947 UN Partition Plan. Credit: Doron Golan/Jini

Piecemeal annexation is popular: Yisrael Beiteinu, a right-wing opposition party, [submitted a bill](#)

recently to “extend sovereignty” ([annex](#)) the Jordan Valley. In 2020, a Likud lawmaker [submitted a bill](#) to extend Israeli sovereignty over all Jewish settlements in the West Bank, calling on the authority of – wait for it – the 1947 UN Partition Plan. That lawmaker is now Israel’s education minister: Yoav Kisch. On Wednesday, Religious Zionism advanced a bill to [annex the whole West Bank](#) (the bill doesn’t use that term).

Long-term annexation policies to wipe a future Palestinian state off the map were announced for all to see in the published guidelines of the 37th government of Israel established in December 2022. U.S. President Donald Trump might back the idea.

Hosting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu last week, Trump [coily said](#) he’ll be making an announcement on the question of West Bank annexation in a few weeks – but “people like the idea.” And in the presence of Jordan’s King Abdullah II this week, when asked if he supports Israeli annexation of the West Bank, Trump answered [with all sorts of happy noises](#): “It will work out well,” he said, even “automatically.”

The time has come to drop the entire “river to sea” debate for good. Anyone who accuses Palestinians of a “river to sea” ideology is a fraud – a master of whataboutism for the river to sea reality of the State of Israel today. And such a person thinks you are very, very stupid.

Dahlia Scheindlin

P.S.

- HAARETZ. Feb 13, 2025:
<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-02-13/ty-article/.premium/for-israelis-from-the-river-to-the-sea-is-a-reality-for-palestinians-its-a-crime/00000194-ff23-d1d7-a9d5-ff677aae0000>

- Dahlia Scheindlin’s articles in Haaretz:
<https://www.haaretz.com/ty-WRITER/0000017f-da25-d494-a17f-de27a1400000>