



קבוצת ראות  
Reut Group

DECEMBER 20, 2020 - JANUARY 15, 2021

TRACKING DEVELOPMENTS IN  
THE 'PROGRESSIVE FIELD'

# SMART MONITOR, NO.9



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### **In Brief: Dec. 20, 2020 through January 15, 2021**

**This turbulent period included the lead-ups to the Georgia races and Congress’s electoral vote certification, and their aftermath. The broad impact of both is far-ranging and still developing.**

As far as the positioning of Jewish and pro-Israel communities on the progressive left, Democratic control of the Senate [could](#) increase pressure on President-elect Biden from progressive leaders and activists to amass accomplishments on the legislative front before the 2022 midterm (notable in this context, the [enlargement](#) of ‘The Squad’). The fall-out of pro-Trump attacks on the Capitol continues to reverberate. Coverage has prominently highlighted the exposed threat of right-wing anti-Semitism, which is being [included](#) as a rallying cry uniting progressives on the front lines of the battle against Trump and Trumpism. At the same time, anti-Semitism from the left in this period also surfaced prominently, including as a focal issue in the Warnock-Loeffler race and in [controversy](#) surrounding the Biden-nominated Assistant District Attorney Kristen Clarke. In addition, several developments over the past three-week period signal **forms that progressive-based challenges to pro-Israel and Jewish positions may take in the upcoming period, and expose related vulnerabilities.**

Taken together, the effects are compounded: **as challenges mount to pro-Israel agendas, the Jewish voice as the frontline of defense faces threats of its silencing.** Campaigns promoting the adoption of the [IHRA](#) constitute a main response approach advanced by Jewish and pro-Israel organizations – they are, in fact, [included](#) as introductory grounds for Jewish and pro-Israel engagement with the Biden administration. Notably, progressive Jewish groups [released](#) a statement against using the definition, urging the Biden administration and Congress to reject it.

### **Vulnerable ground on pro-Israel positioning**

A number of discourse points related to Israel in recent weeks expose areas in which progressive agendas on Israel may affect the broader Democratic discourse and create ground for clashes with pro-Israel and Jewish communities.

- **Conditioning aid agenda**, see, for example, Jamaal Bowman [referring](#) to conditioning aid as something he has “heard and even shared that I may potentially support.”
- **Domestic spending vs. aid to Israel** – As economic setbacks persist, resentment of U.S.-granted financial support could gain traction: The passage of the Covid-19 Relief Bill, both by design and by misunderstanding, was castigated prominently in social media over foreign aid funding (actually included as part of the larger government spending package), and specifically framing spending on Israel in terms of what that money could have bought for the American people (see, for example, [here](#) and [here](#); and in [this](#) LA Progressive piece tying the agenda of conditioning aid to Israel to the COVID-19 Relief Package).
- **Vigorous Democratic support for Biden’s Iran agenda**, such as exhibited by a letter [signed](#) by 150 House Democrats – including some moderate foreign policy hawks, such as Brad Sherman and Abigail Spanberger, alongside “The Squad” – urging Biden to rejoin the 2015 nuclear deal without preconditions, withdraw some sanctions, and pursue further negotiations on other issues. Recent reports [highlight](#) Netanyahu’s concerns that Biden is filling his administration with veterans of the Obama administration, some of whom they’ve had difficult relations in the past, particularly over Iran. Meanwhile, Iran is seeming to [exploit](#) discourse undertones that imply Israel responsibility for inflaming U.S.-Iran tension (see, in this context, Mondaire Jones [expressing](#) dismay at the assassination of Iran’s leading nuclear scientist on the grounds the act may have

“destroyed the conditions that will allow for us to seamlessly re-enter that [JCPOA] agreement).

- **Mainstreaming ‘one-state’ campaigns** on the progressive left: See for example this [Jewish Currents](#) piece featuring a group of leading Palestinian intellectuals, analysts, and activists, all in their 30s, discussing strategic imperatives during the current moment of political transition and reinforcing that the point of departure for analysis must be the ‘one-state reality.’

### **Undermining Jewish voices in progressive movements**

In recent weeks, discourse in Jewish media and social media highlighted some aspects of how Jews are viewed and represented on the radical progressive left, which hold implications for Jewish inclusion in progressive movements.

- **Themes of Jewish power and the iron yoke of the Israel Lobby** – the Georgia Senate race case study: Illegitimate Jewish influence on political figures. Progressive discourse framed a vocal shift in Warnock’s stance on Israel as an outcome of influence from ideological adversaries: see, for example, here in [The Intercept](#) on the Democratic Majority for Israel endorsement of Warnock as “an otherwise unabashed proponent of social justice kowtowing to a special interest group that has sought to minimize human rights abuses abroad.” Jewish Democratic constituencies, following processes of dialogue and clarification with Warnock, significantly supported him, with a number of organizations actively [campaigning](#) and vouching for his pro-Israel credentials and positive relationships with Jewish communities.
- **Stifling-speech charges:** Accusations, insinuations, and implications of Jewish power deployed to silence truth on its agendas, notably by buying influence or by ‘weaponizing’ anti-Semitism, serve to discredit Jewish pushback against hostility, prejudice, or discrimination. In recent weeks, a speech-stifling charge received a mainstream platform in the form of a New York Times [opinion](#) piece showcasing the claim that, “The only Americans — many of Palestinian descent — getting canceled by being fired, denied tenure or threatened with lawsuits are the ones who denounce Israeli settler colonialism and speak out for the Palestinian people.”
- **White supremacy charges:** By virtue of Jews being perceived as populating the same societal category as white people of European descent, Jews are commonly

categorized within progressive conceptual frameworks as white privileged. This conflation is increasingly being closely scrutinized within Jewish communities (see [here](#), for example), with significant resistance to the binary nature of such privilege categories and their failure to capture vulnerabilities unique to Jewish lived experiences.

Beyond a 'privileged' designation – and surrendering the right to address one's own experience of hostility, discrimination, or prejudice that comes with it – recent controversy erupted over the issue of Jewish complicity in reinforcing white supremacy. The Brandeis University Press [objected](#) to a preface historian Marc Dollinger wrote for a new printing of his book, describing recent generations of upwardly mobile suburban American Jews having “reinforced white supremacy in their own lived experience” (see in Jewish Currents [here](#)).

- **Tokenizing 'fringe Jews':** Jewish groups on the radical progressive left gain [increased](#) visibility, serving as 'kosher stamps' in support of its agendas. The Jewish Press [reported](#) that Representative Rashida Tlaib appeared on an IfNotNow fundraising campaign, under the header: “IfNotNow has my back.” In a recent [interview](#), Jamaal Bowman emphasized the diversity in the Jewish community, describing positively his encounter with a Jewish woman who told him that she had voted for him without knowing his position on BDS. A piece in [The Intercept](#) has a Jewish Voice for Peace official attacking pro-Israel groups for intimidating Warnock to fall in line with their agendas.
- **Linking Israel and the U.S. as oppressors:** When conceptual categories on the progressive left are dominantly framed in language that pits 'oppressed' against 'oppressor,' Jews tend to fall squarely within the oppressor category. In parallel, campaigns, exemplified by the BDS-associated Deadly Exchange campaign to end U.S.-Israel police partnerships, link between systemic oppression in the U.S. and Israel to reinforce and help to mainstream the framing of Israel as a state oppressor. Significantly in this context, in this period the student body at Tufts University [voted](#) in favor of a referendum calling for the university to apologize for having its former police chief participate in a security training program in Israel sponsored by the ADL.