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WHOSE “ETHNIC CLEANSING?”: ISRAEL’S APPROPRIATION OF THE PALESTINIAN NARRATIVE

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently claimed in a video posted to his Facebook page that the Palestinian demand to dismantle illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory constitutes an act of “ethnic cleansing” against Israeli Jewish settlers. Netanyahu’s application of the term to settlers shocked many analysts and created a tense debate in the international media. Yet such rhetoric is but the latest instance of an Israeli strategy of appropriating a narrative of victimhood to shore up public support.

- Netanyahu’s use of the term ethnic cleansing to refer to Jewish Israelis was intended to act as a reminder of the long history of Jewish persecution. While it is important not to lose sight of this very real history, we must scrutinize the mobilization of this narrative to understand how one group – Israeli Jews – have been granted victimhood, while another – Palestinians – have not.
- Since the creation of Israel, historical narratives that value Jewish victimhood over Palestinian lives and rights have been used time and again by Israeli politicians. Former Prime Minister Menachem Begin, for example, drew parallels between Palestinians and Nazis.
- Netanyahu’s ethnic cleansing video is the latest in a series of pro-Israel marketing campaign pieces on social media. All have proved popular with Netanyahu supporters within Israel and the United States.

Policy recommendations:

1. This Israeli rhetorical strategy demands more effective engagement by Palestinians to expose Israel’s actions and elicit international support. This does not mean battling over who the real victim is in the conflict, but building a coordinated campaign.
2. The campaign should use images and language of international human rights that appeal to Western publics and leaders. It must always be based on evidence, facts, and context to counter attempts to misinform. Twitter and other social media outlets should be used to target mainstream media with the real-life situation in the territory.



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3. The Palestinian political elite and diplomatic staff should also ensure that the discourse does not legitimize Zionist critiques by, for example, inadvertently using anti-Semitic tropes.

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