IPS/INS/097/2026-97

Institute of Policy Studies
Islamabad

November 27, 2026

IPS INSIGHTS
Perspectives On the Issues Shaping Policy

Walls of Hate or Bridges of Understanding? Israel's Moment of Truth

Masood Abdali[1]

Political differences and conflicts have long been a feature of Middle Eastern affairs. Yet when political disagreement is framed in terms of racial, religious, or cultural superiority, its consequences extend far beyond parliamentary debates. Such rhetoric can deepen social divisions, undermine mutual trust and intensify tensions in an already volatile region. The recent derogatory and inflammatory remarks by Israel's Minister Amichai Eliyahu offer a case in point.

When Political Disagreement Turns into Prejudice

During a discussion in the Israeli Knesset on crime and violence in Arab society, Eliyahu used offensive expressions, describing Arab members of parliament as "savages" and "ignorant camel drivers". He also attributed the destruction of the Twin Towers in the United States to the Arabs and alleged that they were now ruining Europe. To support his argument, he cited Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, whose biological father was Syrian Arab, suggesting that Jobs had achieved success through education and ability. His underlying point appeared to be that the problem lay not in ethnicity but in education. However, disparaging an entire community and its elected representatives undermines the very argument being advanced. Education, knowledge, and social development are important determinants of individual and collective progress, but their significance cannot be established by humiliating others. A political discourse that claims to promote learning while resorting to sweeping generalizations risks reinforcing the prejudice it ostensibly seeks to challenge.

Arab and Muslim Identities: A Necessary Distinction

A fundamental distinction also needs to be made between Arab and Muslim identities. The two are not interchangeable. Arab societies are religiously diverse, comprising Muslims, Christians and other communities. Similarly, Arab citizens of Israel include Muslims, Christians and Druze. Conflating ethnic, linguistic and religious identities leads to inaccurate assumptions and obscures the diversity within these societies.

Collective Blame Cannot Address Social Problems

The same principle applies to discussions of crime and violence. Such issues require examining their social, economic, legal, and

[1] Senior IPS Research Associate.

institutional causes. While individual or organized criminal activity must be addressed through effective law enforcement, attributing it to an entire ethnic or religious community does little to advance understanding or develop workable solutions. Collective blame may generate political attention, but it rarely produces meaningful policy outcomes.

Religious Knowledge and the Need for Mutual Respect

Yet, in his address, Eliyahu called Arab parliamentarians ignorant and illiterate camel herders and advised them to read the Torah, which only exposed his own lack of knowledge. Studying religious texts can indeed serve as a means of improving understanding among different communities. Islam recognizes the original revelation of the Torah, the Gospel, and the Psalms, and the Qur'an refers to the Torah and its teachings in several passages. Religious knowledge, therefore, can provide a shared point of reference for interfaith engagement. It is most constructive when approached with intellectual humility and mutual respect, rather than used to question the worth or knowledge of another community.

Lessons from History: Jews in Muslim Andalusia

History offers further lessons in this regard. Certain periods of Muslim rule in Andalusia are widely associated with significant Jewish intellectual and cultural contributions. Jewish scholars, philosophers, physicians, and writers participated in the broader intellectual life of the region, contributing to fields that shaped its cultural and scholarly legacy. These experiences demonstrate the possibilities of coexistence and intellectual exchange across religious and cultural boundaries, even though relations between communities were not uniformly harmonious. A serious reading of history requires an appreciation of its complexities, rather than selective interpretations designed to reinforce contemporary divisions.

The Middle East's Need for Dialogue and Diplomacy

The Middle East today needs political narratives that acknowledge differences while creating space for their peaceful resolution. The situation in Gaza, the rights and aspirations of Palestinians, and the prospects for regional stability cannot be addressed through inflammatory language or military power alone. They require political commitment, credible diplomacy, respect for international law and human rights, and sustained engagement among the relevant parties.

Israel's International Standing at a Crossroads

In this context, remarks attributed to Jared Kushner, US President Donald Trump's son-in-law and a key figure in his Middle East diplomacy, are also worth considering. In an interview with New York Magazine, Kushner cautioned that following the October 7 attacks, Israel faced a choice between becoming better integrated into the world or "go on the current trajectory, which is to trend toward global-pariah status."[2] His warning highlights an important consideration: a state's long-term security depends not only on its military capabilities but also on its international standing, diplomatic relationships, and the credibility of its policies.

Rather than attacking Muslims and Arabs and hurling insults at them, Israel's extremist leadership should reflect on how the world views its policies and conduct. It is important that they should assess how political rhetoric and policy choices affect the country's regional and international position. The language of hostility may offer short-term political advantages, but its longer-term costs are borne by social cohesion, diplomatic trust and the prospects for peace.

[1] Andrew Rice, "Jared Kushner's Wars," New York Magazine, November 23, 2026, https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/jared-kushner-profile-diplomacy-trump.html

From Hostility to Understanding

The future of the Middle East will depend, in part, on whether Israel's political leaders choose to turn differences into opportunities for dialogue and cooperation rather than deepening them into permanent antagonisms. Building walls of hatred will make existing challenges more difficult to resolve. Constructing bridges of understanding, by contrast, can help establish the foundations for a more stable, peaceful, and respectful regional order.

