



Did you hear that the president of Israel said Israel is a “sick society”? Reuven Rivlin, a Likudnik, said this over the weekend. There’s been lots of coverage in Israel, but as Sullivan [points out, the declaration hasn’t gotten much attention](#) stateside. I should think it would be viral.

The [Jewish Telegraphic Agency’s report](#):

“It is time to honestly admit that Israeli society is ill – and it is our duty to treat this disease,” Rivlin told the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities on Sunday at a conference titled “From Xenophobia to Accepting the Other.”

“The tension between Jews and Arabs within the State of Israel has risen to record heights, and the relationship between all parties has reached a new low,” he said. “We have all witnessed the shocking sequence of incidents and violence taking place by both sides. The epidemic of violence is not limited to one sector or another, it permeates every area and doesn’t skip any arena. There is violence in soccer stadiums as well as in the academia. There is violence in the social media and in everyday discourse, in hospitals and in schools.”

From [the Jerusalem Post](#):

The time has come to admit that Israel is a sick society, with an illness that demands treatment, President Reuven Rivlin said at the opening session on Sunday of a conference on From Hatred of the Stranger to Acceptance of the Other.

Rivlin wondered aloud whether Jews and Arabs had abandoned the secret of dialogue.

With regard to Jews he said: “I’m not asking if they’ve forgotten how to be Jews, but if they’ve forgotten how to be decent human beings. Have they forgotten how to converse?” In Rivlin’s eyes, the academy has a vital task to reduce violence in Israeli society by encouraging dialogue and the study of different cultures and languages with the aim of promoting mutual understanding, so that there can be civilized meetings between the sectors of society.

JTA says that Rivlin spoke of abuse he’s received on his Facebook page. Presumably from the right, not the left. This is a country where a settler extremist assassinated a prime minister who was saying he wanted to compromise with Palestinians, 19 years ago.

Rivlin is obviously referencing the teen murders of the last summer and the chants of “Death to Arabs” that resound in the streets of Jerusalem. This is the hardline rightwing society that Max Blumenthal described in his book Goliath, that Shlomo Sand has [sought to resign from by stopping being a Jew](#), and that [Nathan Thrall cites in](#) his takedown of Ari Shavit’s usefulness to American Jews as a liberal voice when he’s anything but. And the president of the country is saying this? A Likudnik politician? As Sullivan says, any American who said this would be instantly marginalized and smeared as an anti-Semite. Witness Blumenthal’s blacklisting by the Times, and the fact that Sand and Thrall appear in English publications. While liberal American Jews hold on to their dreamcastle Israel, with the help of Shavit and his media posse; and the New York Times gives a platform to [wingnut Caroline Glick](#) to malign Palestinian leaders. This is a very dangerous situation. Though I imagine if there’s enough controversy over the comments, The New York Times will cover them. Chris Matthews has surely seen Rivlin’s comment but won’t touch it until safe media here have picked it up.

By the way, [in a radio discussion](#) on Open Source a month ago, I said that Zionism began in 1894 with Theodor Herzl hearing the chant, Death to the Jews, in Paris, and that it has now culminated 120 years later with nationalist Jews chanting Death to the Arabs in Jerusalem. That is the alpha and omega of political Zionism, which has failed Herzl's own test, that the stranger will be welcome in Jewish society. Bernard Avishai responded that I was offering a "caricature" of the movement. I don't think it's a caricature; it's a realistic interpretation of the failure of an ideology to create a better society. Rivlin must share something of my view, despairingly. Does he have the makings of a De Klerk, the ability to state to his fellow citizens that the project has failed and must be reimagined?



About Philip Weiss

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- See more at: <http://mondoweiss.net/2014/10/israeli-presidents-diagnosis#sthash.J8hinR2U.Z4eDFw10.dpuf>