

OPINION > INTERNATIONAL

THE VIEWS EXPRESSED BY CONTRIBUTORS ARE THEIR OWN AND NOT THE VIEW OF THE HILL

Iran and Israel find common purpose: The subjugation of women

BY SHAUL BAKHASH, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR - 08/27/23 3:00 PM ET

Share

Tweet

...

More



Getty Images

Activists stage a protest denouncing the discrimination of women using public transport services in Israel's ultra-Orthodox city of Bnei Brak, near Tel Aviv, on August 24, 2023. (Photo by JACK GUEZ / AFP) (Photo by JACK GUEZ/AFP via Getty Images)

Commentators in the media universally see Israel and Iran as two countries at daggers drawn, inveterate enemies, the fondest wish of each to see its adversary six feet underground.

But these commentators are wrong.

In one area, Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu's government in Israel and President Ebrahim Raisi's government in the Islamic Republic are fighting a common enemy and are joined by a common cause: protecting their stalwart men from the corrupting presence of the women in their midst.

According to reports in *The New York Times* and *The Times of Israel*, the ultraorthodox parties in Netanyahu's coalition are considering proposals to segregate audiences at public events and at lakes, parks and concerts. And at this very moment, Iran's Majlis, or parliament, is about to consider the draft of a new law, grandly titled "the Modesty and Hijab law," which is designed, in part, to segregate men and women in university classrooms, offices and public places. The hijab is mandatory Islamic head covering for women.

The law even provides for a special new security force, "Hijab Wardens," to enforce the new regulations — a measure Israel's ultraorthodox might wish to emulate.

where dress codes often religiously ban men, the new law will require shopkeepers to do so for women who do not observe the mandatory Islamic head covering. What's more, shopkeepers who fail to bar entry to improperly covered women will face heavy fines and even closure of their places of business. Women violating the hijab will face fines, and repeat offenders could face prison terms and even confiscation of passports and loss of civil rights.

In articles in the *Israel Times* and *The New York Times*, respectively, [Sarah Mann](#) and [Roni Caryn Rabin](#) cite worrisome incidents in which bus drivers berated a woman wearing a tank top, or refused to allow similarly dressed women to board their buses. Happily, these are, so far, scattered incidents. In Iran, the new law bars women (and men) from wearing “see-through” clothing — a sight never seen on Tehran’s streets — and bans women from dress that shows any skin below the neck and above the ankles.

Dress is not the only area where Iran’s clerics are far in advance of their Israeli counterparts; Israel’s Matan Kahana, a former religious affairs minister and a current member of parliament, [wishes to expand the jurisdiction of the rabbinical courts](#), which rule on matters of family law and have not been supportive of women’s rights. Kahana will be envious to learn that in Iran, clerical judges dominate in the entire court system.

If in Israel, as the *Times* reports, ultraorthodox men blocked the road to a public bus driven by a woman, in Iran no public buses are driven by women. Period. And while in Israel, the number of buses where women are [asked to sit in the back](#) to accommodate the sensibilities of orthodox men is increasing, Iran has long enforced the [“women-sit-in-the-back”](#) rule.

In both Israel and the Islamic Republic, women have not remained silent in the face of these restrictions. In Israel, women protesters have [taken to wearing long red robes](#) like the women in the television version of “*The Handmaid’s Tale*,” the novel about a society in which women are subordinate to men and exist to serve men’s wishes. In Iran, among other forms of resistance, women have [flung off their headscarves](#) as a form of defiance, often in direct confrontation with the morality police and at other times in large demonstrations.

As a result, the governments in both countries have faced mass protests: in Iran following the death in police custody of a young woman, [Mahsa Amini](#), after her arrest for a minor infraction of the Islamic dress code; in Israel over the government’s attempt to [weaken the Supreme Court](#) — a measure which for Israel’s women activists means a threat to women’s rights.

Netanyahu and Raisi seem to be in agreement about the best means of dealing with inconvenient defiance on the streets by women and others, with the gold cup for ruthlessness going to the Islamic Republic: In Israel, the police have [resorted to beating protesters](#), breaking noses, and using chokeholds; in Iran, security forces have used [mass arrests](#), imprisonment, and rape and torture in prison.

The two governments are at a critical crossroads. The time has come for Israel’s ultraorthodox parties and Iran’s clerics, facing a common peril and sharing a common purpose, to meet, perhaps in Tel-Aviv along the Mediterranean, or in Ramsar along Iran’s Caspian shore, and to confer on the best means of dealing with their troublesome women. Tel-Aviv and Ramsar are spacious places. Women activists from Iran and Israel can meet at the same time, to consider how best to deal with the troublesome men in their midst.

Shaul Bakhash is Clarence Robinson Professor of History Emeritus at George Mason University.

TAGS BENJAMIN NETANYAHU BIBI NETANYAHU EBRAHIM RAISI IRAN ISRAEL MODESTY AND HIJAB LAW PROTESTS ULTRAORTHODOX WOMEN'S RIGHTS

More International News



Don't allow domestic politics to undermine America's global role

INTERNATIONAL / 15 HOURS AGO



Increasingly authoritarian Central America just snubbed Taiwan in favor of China

INTERNATIONAL / 22 HOURS AGO



How should the Israel-Saudi normalization deal consider Palestinians?

INTERNATIONAL / 2 DAYS AGO



Prigozhin is dead. Who's next?

INTERNATIONAL / 4 DAYS AGO

[See All](#)

Video/Hill.TV