



Egypt's World Cup elimination and the Ceuta crisis have one thing in common: Israel is to blame

Within a single month this summer, two very different events were attributed to the same cause: a World Cup round of 16 match in Atlanta and a mass influx at Spain's external border. Israel is said to be behind both. These two examples show that anti-Semitic conspiracy theories are still thriving today.

From Mohamed Diwan

Atlanta, on the night of July 8, just a few hours after the final whistle of the World Cup match between Egypt and Argentina—which the South Americans won 3–2—an additional sentence appeared on the Wikipedia page for French referee François Letexier: He was reportedly born in the Breton town of Bédée to an Orthodox Jewish family.

None of that was true. Letexier is not Jewish. The sentence had been posted by a user from Bangladesh, who removed it himself shortly afterward due to a lack of evidence. Screenshots of the doctored version had already been circulating for some time and were subsequently passed around as evidence.

This was preceded by a dramatic soccer match. Egypt led 2–0 in the World Cup round of 16 after goalkeeper Mostafa Shobeir saved a penalty kick by Lionel Messi; however, another goal by the North Africans, scored by Mostafa Zico, was disallowed following a VAR review due to a foul during the build-up. In the final fourteen minutes, Argentina turned the game around to win 3–2. Pierluigi Collina, head of FIFA's Referees Committee, later confirmed both controversial decisions; he stated that unfounded accusations have no place in soccer.

The Coach, the Flag, and the Spit

Egypt had already made the tournament politically charged. After the victory over Australia, national team coach Hossam Hassan carried the Palestinian flag across the field, dedicated the victory to the Palestinian people, and declared that anyone who did not sympathize with the Palestinians was “not human.”

After the defeat, video footage shows Hassan noticing Argentine spectators waving an Israeli flag as he made his way to the locker room. He gestured in their direction, pointed to the Egyptian crest on his chest, and spat at the fans; he then confronts the photographer documenting the scene and has to be escorted away. Palestinian journalist Basem Alhabel hailed the incident as “the greatest spit in history.”



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“Egypt Lost to Zionism”

The Egyptian YouTube channel “Al Wa'i Nour” posted a video titled “Egypt Loses to Zionism.” It claimed that Egypt was not playing against a team, but against “the system.”

The key connection was made in the same article: Egypt's success was deemed undesirable because Hassan had raised the Palestinian flag in front of a global audience. An Egyptian quarterfinal featuring renewed solidarity with Palestine had not been part of the plan. This makes a sporting defeat appear to be a punitive measure imposed by an invisible Jewish power.

The same commentator called Argentina an “Israeli team par excellence,” citing President Javier Milei's close ties to the Israeli government and footage showing Messi wearing a kippah at the Western Wall. Hashtags about a “Zionist World Cup” circulated; the Israeli flag in the stands became a piece of evidence.

This was not an isolated incident in Egypt. After Argentina's 3-0 victory over Algeria, Algerian journalist Mustafa Al-Muizzawi stated on television that Messi was protected by the “Jewish lobby,” which controls the world and runs it like the Mafia. The American Blue Square Alliance Command Center recorded a 330 percent increase in conversations about Jewish and Israel-related topics during the time surrounding the game.

The invasion of Ceuta as an act of Israeli retaliation

On July 30, between 50,000 and 60,000 people from Morocco crossed the border into the Spanish exclave of Ceuta, a city with a population of about 85,000. Most of them arrived by swimming or on foot.

Within hours, an explanation emerged here as well: Israel had staged the crisis to punish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez for his stance on the Gaza War. Ali al-Qaradaghi, president of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, wrote that he could not rule out “Zionist involvement.” Hollywood star Javier Bardem, himself a Spaniard, shared a post on Instagram by author Miranda Vidak, according to which Israel would benefit most from a destabilized Spain. The conspiracy theorist Alex



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Jones claimed that Israel had triggered an Islamic invasion of Spain.

The posts by these representatives of Islamist groups, the far right, the far left, and the celebrity scene were all written in similar language. The Antisemitism Research Center of the Combat Antisemitism Movement counted 173 high-reach posts from 119 accounts with 57.5 million views over a 72-hour period.

There were also fact-based explanations in the Ceuta case—they were simply less sensational than anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. For example, on July 8, the Spanish Supreme Court ruled that asylum seekers arriving by sea may not be summarily turned away. On social media, this was spun into the claim that the border to Ceuta was open. What followed is well known.

This had all happened before: In May 2021, around 9,000 people reached Ceuta after Moroccan police had eased their controls for two days amid the dispute over Polisario leader Brahim Ghali, who was receiving medical treatment in Spain. The European Parliament addressed the issue in a separate resolution. Rabat had thus demonstrably used migration as a means of pressure against Madrid—without Israeli involvement and in its own interest.

The “Proof” arises only after the verdict

What the two cases—Atlanta and Ceuta—have in common lies less in the claims themselves than, above all, in the way they were substantiated. In Atlanta, an encyclopedia was tampered with. In Ceuta, an influencer fabricated a threat by Benjamin Netanyahu that Spain would pay the highest price; this quote does not exist anywhere outside of his own post, yet it was viewed 2.7 million times. [An AI-generated image](#) depicted Netanyahu as the figurehead of a boat full of migrants. The “evidence” for the alleged Israeli involvement thus emerged only after the verdict on the Jewish state’s guilt had already been rendered. Yet it subsequently circulated as if it had substantiated that verdict. This is too calculated to be an accidental error.

A Pattern with a History

The idea that Jews secretly control institutions and markets—and now, too, referees and video evidence—is not new. It is enshrined in the forgery known as the



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“Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” which continues to circulate in the Arab world to this day. For decades, Egyptian media have spread various versions of this narrative, ranging from ritual murder legends to the claim that Israel uses sharks and migratory birds for espionage. It’s not a big leap from the Mossad shark to the Zionist referee.

Historically, pogroms rarely began with violence. They almost always started with a narrative in which Jews were blamed for some misfortune. Egypt serves as a case in point. On Balfour Day in November 1945, incited mobs marched through Cairo, looted the Jewish quarter, and ransacked synagogues; in 1948, bomb attacks on the Jewish quarter followed, leaving dozens dead. At that time, between 75,000 and 80,000 Jews lived in Egypt, a community older than Islam itself in the country. After 1948—and even more so after 1956 and 1967—the community was eradicated through expropriations and expulsions. Today, only a handful of Jews remain in Egypt. The country did not lose its Jewish population; it drove them out.

If there had still been Jews in Egypt—it would have been a bloodbath

Just imagine what would have happened on the night of the World Cup loss to Argentina if there were still a Jewish community in Cairo or Alexandria. Millions would have heard that the Jews had stolen the victory. Given all of history’s lessons, that would have been a night of fear for the Jews living there. The fact that nothing happened has nothing to do with a change of attitude in Egyptian society, but rather with the fact that the potential victims are no longer there. Most of them and their descendants live in Israel.

In Ceuta, things are different; 280 Sephardim still live there, many with roots in Tetouan, Morocco. They experienced the July days just like their neighbors, with crowded beaches and a military presence in the city. Meanwhile, outside, over a hundred million people were told that people like them—that is, Jews—had orchestrated the whole thing.

Neither the Jews nor their state, Israel, had even the slightest connection to Egypt’s defeat in the World Cup round of 16 in Atlanta or to the influx of refugees into Ceuta. Yet the blame was placed on them. Anti-Semitism research uses the term “anti-Semitism without Jews” to describe this phenomenon: the mere notion that it



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must have been the Jews is enough. Atlanta and Ceuta are current examples of how this plays out. And this is not a Jewish conspiracy theory.

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