

What Britain Can Learn from Israel



REAT BRITAIN loves nothing more than to lecture Israel on her supposed failings, adopting an unfailingly patronizing *de haut en bas* attitude. Whether the Foreign Office is constantly calling into question Israel's commitment to a two-state solution because of West Bank settlements; or Sir Alan Duncan, the former Foreign Office minister, is accusing pro-Israel lobbyists of "the most disgusting interference" in British politics, negatively influencing foreign policy in the Middle East; or Britain is providing official Covid travel guidance that depicts Jerusalem as politically separate from Israel—few opportunities are missed to criticize and belittle Israel. Of course, the attitude of the BBC is worse even than that of the Foreign Office.

Behind this stance lie many things. Among them is the conviction that the "Great" in Britain's name is more than just a device introduced when, in 1603, James VI of Scotland succeeded Elizabeth I of England to become sovereign of the new combination. Many influential people, especially in the United States, continue to see

Britain as a serious and substantial player on the world scene, if no longer a great power. In an "International Influence" ranking drawn from a *U.S. News & World Report* survey of "more than 10,000 informed elites," Britain came in second only to the United States.

Fair enough. But Israel came in at number 11 in the same survey—a truly remarkable number, given that Israel only just makes the top hundred by population, and sits at only 31 by GDP. And there are several areas in which Israel can teach Britain important lessons. Britain, instead of lecturing Israel, ought to be taking notes from her about how to become a better country.

The first and most obvious concerns independence. From the foundation of the nation-state in May 1948, Israel has been a proudly independent country, looking to her own wherewithal and her Diaspora to defend her rights as much as any country can. She had strong alliances, primarily with the United States, but it is remarkable historically how little she has ceded to the Americans in terms of her foreign policy and national destiny over the decades. If ever a country has punched above her demographic and territorial weight, it has been Israel, and she has recognized that in the last analysis, self-reliance is the only way to approach international relations during crises. Partly as a result of the lessons learned during the Holocaust, Israel has a clear-eyed answer to the question of Hillel the Elder: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?"

By stark contrast, only a quarter of a century after Israel grasped her independence, Britain gave away hers when, in January 1973, she joined the European Economic Community, then called the Common Market. Her prime minister, Edward Heath, deliberately misled the public about the sovereignty issues involved in joining what originally looked like only a customs union; as papers released decades later revealed, he knew perfectly well that there were profound sovereignty challenges involved. It took 43 years for the British people to finally demand their independence back, in the Brexit referendum of 2016, and then nearly four years to force the British establishment to allow the U.K. to leave what by then was well on the way to realizing its

founders' dream of becoming a European superstate. For nearly that entire half-century, Britain ought to have cleaved to Israel's example, which proved that self-government is best.

The first duty of an independent state is to defend its borders. Here, too, Israel has proved superb, while Britain has been woefully lacking and ought to learn lessons, despite Britain starting with the huge advantage over Israel of being an island. While Israel has been brilliantly detecting and destroying Palestinian tunnels from Gaza, patrolling "smart" walls around its territory, and intercepting incursions by small boats along its coasts, Britain has become the prime magnet for illegal immigration from Europe. No fewer than 28,400 illegal aliens entered over the past year, and a total of 40,000 since 2018.

Many of these people are allowed into Britain after having knowingly destroyed their identity documents, so the British state has no way of knowing who they are. Large gaps in border security combined with massive asylum fraud have led to a situation that Israel would not have countenanced for long. Furthermore, 45 foreign nationals who served prison sentences for terror offenses have been allowed to remain in the U.K. after completing their jail terms. Britain would do well to learn from Israel about policing its borders effectively.

As well as individual terrorists such as the 45 just mentioned, terrorist states face far too weak a stance from Britain, unlike the robust attitude adopted by Israel. Even though the bomb for which the Iranians are presently enriching uranium will encompass Britain in its radius, the U.K. government has been bent on appeasing Iran rather than standing up to it. After Donald Trump rightly denounced the JCPOA as too weak, the U.K. in January 2019 joined Germany and France in creating a payment system to facilitate European trade with Iran in products such as pharmaceuticals, medical devices, and agri-food goods. Jeremy Hunt, then the foreign secretary, boasted that it was "a significant step forward in delivering our commitment under the Iran nuclear deal to preserve sanctions relief for the people of Iran."

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stated, "We welcome and support President Biden's commitment to not just return to the deal, but to strengthen and extend it," and with added pathos boasted, at the UN Security Council, that it regularly raised Iran's destabilizing role in the region, as though that mattered a fig. The U.K. much prefers criticizing Israel in the United Nations, although she has recently moved from opposing Israel outright on pro-Palestinian motions to abstaining on them. The British attitude toward Iran—which is essentially one of appeasement—underlines yet again how Israel should heed the wisdom of Hillel the Elder.

Similarly, the 2.0 percent of GDP that Britain spends on her defense is a pathetic figure at a time of massively increasing geopolitical tensions, with Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine, China saber-rattling against Taiwan and establishing naval ports on the west coast of Africa, and the Royal Navy reduced to six destroyers and 12 frigates on active service. Even that figure of 2.0 percent is arrived at only by the accounting legerdemain of adding widows' pensions and the Intelligence budget into the defense-spending figures, which most nations do not do. By contrast, Israel spends a healthy 5.6 percent of GDP on defense and, as a result, is a regional superpower worthy of her neighbors' respect.

Although Britain has done extremely well in the global race to vaccinate as much of its population as possible against Covid, Israel has done better, and there are lessons the U.K. could learn from Israel there, too. Israel did not simply have a higher proportion of her population receive the first two inoculations earlier than almost any other

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country in the world: Israeli epidemiology has been at the forefront of the global struggle against Covid throughout the pandemic.

At the end of July 2021, Israel began offering boosters to everyone over the age of 60, and from late August of that year, boosters were available to anyone over the age of 16, five months after their second dose of the vaccine.

Britain was fortunate that because of Brexit she was not in the European Medical Agency. She therefore could act nimbly and early in ordering millions of jabs from whichever companies she wanted, getting vaccines into people's arms long before France, Germany, Italy, and the other countries that were encumbered by membership of the lumbering EMA, which wished to act for all 27 EU member states. Israel did better than the EU and U.K. on any possible metric. Covid data from different sources are difficult to compare. But the most reliable metric is deaths per capita—in which Israel has done better and usually far better than the U.K. and any European country of its size or larger.

As more countries—including, tragically, the United States—now seem to be embracing various forms of socialism, Israel is increasingly becoming a beacon for entrepreneurship in the world, and she certainly has a great deal to teach the United Kingdom, which is increasingly turning her back on the eternal truths about the free market and individual enterprise that Margaret Thatcher taught in the 1980s. The bonfire of red tape and regulation that many of us Thatcherites

hoped might take place post-Brexit has yet to occur, and we have so far failed to take advantage of the opportunities for what was over-optimistically and too early nicknamed a “Singapore-on-Thames.”

By contrast, entrepreneurs are admired in Israel—Singapore-on-the-Mediterranean?—where the Netanyahu governments did much in their power to encourage economic activity, especially in the high-tech industries. Israel has the highest number of start-ups per capita in the world and occupies third place globally in venture-capital investments. In 2019, Israeli high-tech companies raised a record amount in capital, an estimated \$9 billion, which was an impressive 15 percent increase over 2018. In the past decade—during which Netanyahu was in power the entire time—“exit value” grew eightfold, from £2.6 billion in 2010 to £21.7 billion in 2019. This is a staggering achievement, and one that Her Majesty's Treasury would do well to study but probably won't. (Whether this entrepreneurial golden age continues in Israel's post-Netanyahu world is another matter.)

In Chapter 7 of the Gospel of Matthew, that wise and holy rabbi Jesus of Nazareth asked, in his Sermon on the Mount, “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” Britain would do well to take heed of his question. When the United Kingdom has a beam in her eye in the form of so many problems that she could better address by being more like Israel, why do her Foreign Office, the BBC, and other entities nonetheless love to concentrate on criticizing the mote in Israel's eye instead? Is it a form of displacement therapy? Is it the superiority complex of a thousand-year-old larger country toward a three-quarters-of-a-century-old smaller one (which would betray a serious historical ignorance in itself)? Or is it just the ancient bacillus of antisemitism, appearing in a new mutation?

Whatever it is, it is a profoundly unattractive feature of my country, and it is diametrically opposed to both rationality and Britain's best interests. Instead of criticizing Israel, Britain should be trying to do more to emulate her. Instead of being a constant punching bag, Israel should be a role model. *