

S A P I R

IDEAS FOR A THRIVING JEWISH FUTURE

THE ISSUE ON

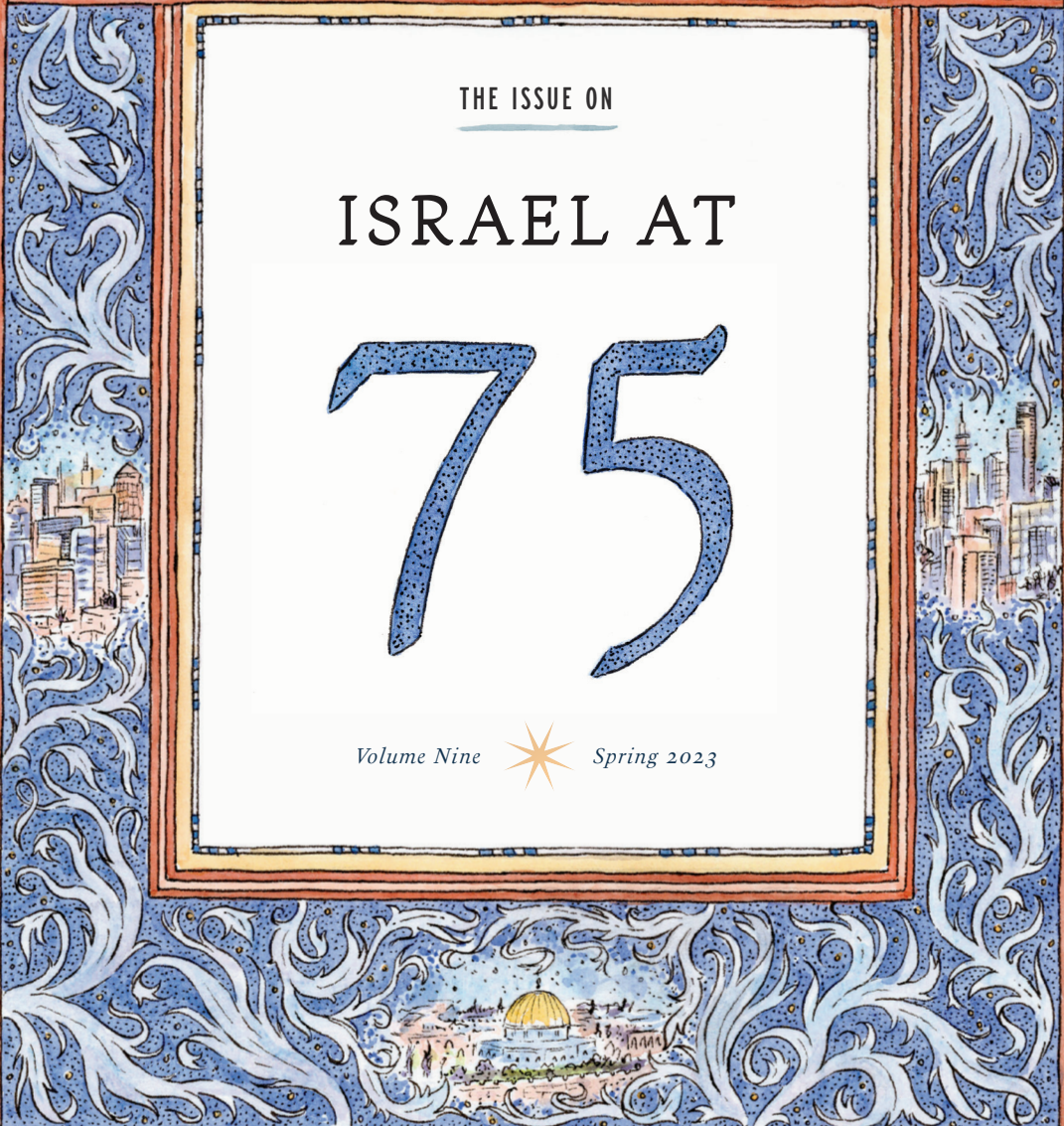
ISRAEL AT

75

Volume Nine

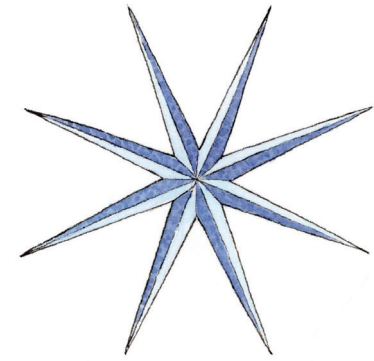


Spring 2023



*And they saw the God of Israel:
Under His feet there was the
likeness of a pavement of
sapphire, like the very sky
for purity.*

— Exodus 24:10



S A P I R

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Note on the cover: The flower weaving throughout the borders is the bright red calanit. This dramatic wildflower, a type of anemone, blooms profusely throughout the southern slopes of Israel in spring. In 2013, Israel chose it as its national flower.

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Editor's Note



WHEN the editors of SAPIR decided last summer to dedicate our ninth issue to Israel's 75th birthday, we wanted to look forward and back: forward, to how Israel could flourish in the decades ahead; back, to what it had already overcome and achieved against daunting odds. Our mission is to offer, as the front cover of this journal proclaims, "ideas for a thriving Jewish future," ideas that must go beyond a particular moment in time.

What we did not expect is how much we would have to face up to Israel's *present*. The national crisis triggered by the government's judicial-reform legislation may soon be resolved, hopefully through some sort of creative and durable compromise. But the political and social fissures the crisis has exposed cannot be sidestepped or downplayed. Necessarily, many of the essays here address the issue directly, albeit from different vantage points: legal, sociological, historical, political, geopolitical, and philosophical.

We also believe in a diversity of viewpoints. This issue showcases that commitment, with essays from across the ideological and religious spectrum. But viewpoint diversity is not simply a matter of

representing sides. It's also about listening to individual perspectives. So we've asked many of our contributors to fill in a blank: What, to them, is Israel? And we've asked others to address the question: What, to them, does it mean for Israel to be a light unto the nations?

The answers vary widely. To Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer, editor-in-chief of the Haredi journal *Tzarich Iyun*, Israel is a miracle. To *Haaretz*'s Amir Tibon, it is a country at risk of destroying itself. To former Labor MK Einat Wilf of Reichman University, it is a liberator. To the journalist Nazier Magally, it is a hope for its Arab citizens. As for Israel's light, it is, for Michael Bloomberg, like the Statue of Liberty—that mother of exiles and beacon of hope. For Mijal Bitton, the grandest act of Jewish resistance. For Michael Walzer, a nation struggling to meet the most crucial moral test, of living with others on equal terms.

These and other authors give us a sense of the Israel they know so well, worry about so much, love so deeply, argue over so passionately. Their Israel, in glory or folly, is never an abstraction—as it shouldn't be for anyone who wishes to see it thrive. *

I the LORD, in My grace, have summoned you,
And I have grasped you by the hand.
I created you, and appointed you
A covenant people, a light of nations—
Opening eyes deprived of light,
Rescuing prisoners from confinement,
From the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

—Isaiah 42: 6–7



אני יהוה קראתיך בצדק ואתחזק בנגדך
ואצרך ואתנהג לברית עם לאור גוים:
לפקח עינים ערות להוציא ממסגרת אסיר
מבית פלא ישבי חשך:
— ישעיהו מ"ב: ו-ז

LIGHT UNTO THE NATIONS

What does it mean for Israel to be a “light”? Early commentary on the famous line from Isaiah emphasized that Israel would do its work in the world by following the Torah — the ultimate source of light. Later, the Reform movement emphasized Israel’s exemplary, ethical role, subtly altering the original Hebrew from “L’Ohr Goyim” (as a light of nations) to “Ohr LaGoyim” (“a light unto the nations”). The idea found its greatest modern exponent in David Ben-Gurion, who often spoke of the Jewish state as a moral beacon.

Whether as a nation that dwells apart or a nation on a mission, Jews generally share the conviction that Israel should stand for certain ethical principles — and be judged according to them. For this issue of *SAPIR*, we asked 13 diverse thinkers and doers to offer a brief comment about what the phrase “a light unto the nations” means to them when it comes to Israel today. Their responses are to be found between the longer articles in this issue.

—The Editors

PART ONE

THE ACHIEVEMENT
OF ISRAEL



Israel Is More Than Enough



DAYENU,' the Passover song, lists the litany of miracles that led from captivity in Egypt to the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. Taken on its own, the song suggests, each divine intervention would have been cause enough for grateful wonder. But “Dayenu” is not just an inventory of blessings. In sequence, the miracles add up to a story—of progressive confidence and agency—as well as a journey from slavery to sovereignty.

As such, “Dayenu” is not just a song about the Exodus. It is a blueprint for the story of Israel.

The first *dayenu* moment of the modern era occurred 75 years ago, when David Ben-Gurion, standing in the old Tel Aviv Museum of Art, proclaimed the foundation of the first independent Jewish state since the days of the Maccabean kingdom. A mere three years separated that moment from the Nazi slave camps that had wiped out fully a third of the Jewish people. To many survivors, the

mere proclamation must have seemed fantastical. On that euphoric afternoon in May 1948, not long before the onset of Shabbat, Israel exceeded expectations almost in the moment it came into existence. Refugees now had a haven. Survivors had a cause for which to live and sometimes to die. That was enough.

As the British high commissioner departed before midnight on a warship from Haifa, he left the fledgling state in the care of a leader with authoritarian tendencies: Ben-Gurion already held an iron grip over the Yishuv's collectivized economy and social services. The Yishuv was riven by divisions among socialists, Revisionists, and diverse religious communities. It was already at war with the local Arab population. Soon, they would be joined by invading Arab armies.

Most histories of those first turbulent months focus on the hard-won War of Independence and the downfall and dispersal of Arab inhabitants. In doing so, they miss just how remarkable the emergence of democracy in Israel was. The first elections were held even before there were official cease-fires on all fronts. The participation of all communities, including the remaining Arab-Israelis and the non-Zionist ultra-Orthodox, was also notable.

It should be possible to recognize the miracle of Israeli democracy while noting flaws such as the decades-long dominance of Ben-Gurion's Mapai Party, the messy military rule over Arab citizens, which lasted until 1966, or the first Knesset's failure to draft a constitution. The new Israelis, who had either grown up under British rule or arrived from Eastern Europe and the Arab countries, had no democratic traditions to lean on, save the voluntary and often chaotic structures of the Zionist movement. The founding party could have easily imposed a socialist dictatorship and would have had plenty of justification in the country's precarious state. And the generals of the Israel Defense Forces, the most respected and powerful institution of the new state, had ample opportunities to

stage a takeover and replace the politicians in the name of a state of emergency. Menachem Begin and his fellow Revisionist leaders, rightly enraged at the heavy-handed and violent way in which their armed organizations had been demilitarized, could have remained underground and fought for primacy.

Instead, Begin accepted the rules, lost eight elections, and languished in opposition before coming to power in 1977. He put his trust in an electoral system that is often derided, even though it has provided Israel with that gift, rare not only in the Middle East but in many places around the world, of bloodless transitions of power.

Israeli political scientists give sober reasons for why the Jews instinctively established a democracy when they finally had their own state: Most obviously, they had lived as persecuted minorities. Yet things could so easily have gone the other way, as they did in nearly every other country that achieved independence in the postwar era. Amid the five elections of the five past years, it's easy to forget that that first election on January 25, 1949, was another *dayenu* moment.

And the *dayenus* kept coming.

Israel's legal system is certainly a *dayenu*. Despite failing to write a constitution, Israel has — at least as of this writing — a Supreme Court capable of holding the government to account and upholding freedom of speech and other civil rights. It has law-enforcement agencies capable of investigating and prosecuting prime ministers and presidents. It has courts and judges capable of preventing the security services from abusing their powers. It has the regulatory infrastructure and social climate without which a knowledge-based private sector could not have flourished.

Or immigration: How often do we stop to marvel at the absorption of millions of Jews from places as far afield as Yemen and Ethiopia, Iran and Iraq, the former Soviet Union and the United States, Italy and India, France and Romania, Argentina and Canada? Despite the terrible hardships many of the new arrivals suffered—involving injustices that fester to this day—our people's aliyah is a triumph of our national story.

Whether you ascribe these *dayenus* to the foresight and hard work of Israelis, to divine intervention, or to both, there is no guarantee they'll keep coming.

Or the IDF: Who would have predicted, on the eve of Israel's founding, that a tiny nation of scholars and shopkeepers would create a formidable defense force as well as stunningly resourceful intelligence services? Today, it's hard to picture Israel as anything but militarily dominant — a dominance that has left it with responsibility for millions of Palestinians and a share of the blame for the injustices they suffer. And yet for decades the specter of a weak and vulnerable country was real.

Or the economy: Even halfway through Israel's current life span, the idea of an export-driven tech sector eliminating the massive trade deficit and boosting living standards to Western European levels was a fantasy. In the 1980s, experts felt that the best Israel could hope for was a bailout to keep itself afloat through triple-figure annual inflation. Any "investment" in an Israeli company by Diaspora Jews was a form of *tzedakah* with zero returns. That was the state of the Israeli economy, well into its fifth decade. Now outsiders come to Israel seeking brainpower, entrepreneurship, and outsized returns — certainly a *dayenu*, even if it comes with levels of inequality that have only made it more difficult to bridge widening income gaps.

Whether you ascribe these *dayenus* to the foresight and hard work of Israelis, to divine intervention, or to both, there is no guarantee

they'll keep coming. You don't just get dealt royal flushes of *dayenus*. The anonymous author of the Passover song had another message for us: With each billion-dollar sale of an Israeli start-up, Arab sheikhdom opening an embassy in Tel Aviv, or Iranian nuclear scientist mysteriously dying in a suburb of Tehran, it's all too easy to get a bit too used to *dayenus*. So easy, in fact, that in its 75th year, Israel's government threatens to squander them.

In any fine piece of liturgy, structure is as important as the words. "Dayenu" isn't just a shopping list of luxuries. It's a progression of miracles, a stairway to Zion, a warning against the temptation of skipping any of the steps. Relinquish a *dayenu* at your peril. Lose one and you jeopardize them all. *



A PHOENIX PURSUED BY ARSONISTS

There is a rabbinic legend that when the Temple was being destroyed and flames engulfed the structure, the high priest took the key that opened the Holy of Holies and desperately flung it into the sky. Out of the clouds came a giant hand that closed over the key and drew it back into the sky to be returned when the Temple is rebuilt (Ta'anit 29a). Many years ago, my father told me to notice what the high priest did not throw into the sky — The Torah.

The Jewish people are a phoenix pursued by arsonists. Despite the recurrent flames, we continued to cherish the ideals of that Torah. Again and again we turned flames into a source of illumination like the biblical pillar of fire in the dark of the desert, forging meaning from loss and kindling sparks of holiness amid destruction.

Survival alone is not success. With its stunning accomplishments in almost every area of human endeavor, this tiny land renewed its millennial promise. The modern state proved yet again what the high priest knew in ancient Israel and the poet Heine said in 19th-century Germany: Freedom speaks with a Hebrew accent. The words and the message have lost none of their power. And the flames that have surrounded Israel are returned as light unto the nations of the world.

—RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Max Webb Senior Rabbi of Sinai Temple in Los Angeles

Israel Is Doing Fine; We're the Ones Who Need Help



FOR GENERATIONS, Diaspora Jews have seen Israel as a hardship case requiring the urgent mobilization of resources. Even today, we hear that Israel is “surrounded by enemies,” facing “existential threats unlike any other country.” Without our help, and especially our money, Israel will surely fail.

All this may once have been true. But it isn't anymore. Yes, there is terrorism, Iran, and the Palestinians. There is periodic political turmoil. But these do not amount to an existential crisis. They are no longer the stories that define the country. And until we recognize this change, we will forever be confused by the smoke and mirrors of a billion-dollar nonprofit industry telling us we need to “save” Israel.

Israel is no longer poor. In per capita GDP, its economy today compares with those of the United Kingdom, Germany, and Japan. With an annual government budget of over \$140 billion, it certainly isn't being “propped up” by American government support (around \$3.8 billion) or American Jewish philanthropy (\$1–2 billion). In

short, the era of Israel's economic dependence on America is over.

Israel is not weak, either. It has by far the most sophisticated military in the region. Its one major enemy, Iran, is much less powerful than it once was. Israel long ago made peace with Egypt and Jordan, the countries flanking its longest borders, and has more recently made peace with the UAE and Bahrain, resulting in billions of dollars in trade and tourism. Its hostile northern border with Lebanon hasn't seen a major conflict in a decade and a half.

If Israel is doing so well, isn't it fair to ask whether it really needs the Diaspora's financial support—and whether we haven't been using our donations as a way of avoiding our own, much deeper problems?

The fundamental issues plaguing non-Orthodox Jews, especially in North America—assimilation, disengagement from Jewish life, poor Jewish education—have not gone away. Synagogue attendance, already in long decline, took a beating during the pandemic and has not come close to recovering. And then there's the increasing pressure of antisemitism on campuses, city streets, and in public institutions. Taken together, these constitute a well-documented existential threat to Diaspora Jewry that is far more immediate and profound than anything Israel faces today.

Of course, many pro-Israel organizations, Israeli nonprofits, and the Israeli government itself benefit from the narrative of Israeli dependency and will do everything they can to perpetuate it. There's a great deal of money involved.

But the moment we dispense with the old narratives, that billion dollars a year in donations to Israel—covering everything from ambulances and bulletproof vests for IDF soldiers to universities and hospitals and national parks—begins to look a little strange. After all, these could all be paid for by Israeli donors or taxpayers, just as they are in any other prosperous country.

One of the most glaring examples is the trees that people continue to plant in Israel through the Jewish National Fund. Each year, Americans spend millions of dollars on those trees. It's a nice

tradition, a symbolic gesture, a way to connect with the Jewish state in one's own mind.

But as a form of philanthropy, it's completely disconnected from Israel's reality. If you ask any Israeli, "What are the most acute needs facing the Zionist enterprise in the Land of Israel?" you'll discover that trees are (and have possibly always been) very low on the list. Urgent defense needs, economic development, immigrant absorption, water resources, its constitutional crisis and political deadlock—the list goes on and on. But trees? Surely Israel no longer needs handouts to cover its landscaping bills.

All things considered, Israel is doing just fine. We non-Orthodox Diaspora Jews, on the other hand, are not. "Supporting Israel" has become a kind of narcotic, giving us a sense of self-worth and achievement that allows us to ignore the tempest that has put our own future in doubt.



Can we imagine a different relationship between the world's two largest Jewish communities? Such a shift is long overdue. To make it happen, we Diaspora Jews will need to stop focusing on what we think Israel needs from us and instead ask *what we need from Israel*.

The most obvious thing we need can be summed up in two words: Jewish pride.

The culture of Israel is profoundly different from that of non-Orthodox American Jewry. It is loud, messy, slapdash, confident, and proud. And it is incredibly innovative, a creative problem-solving culture of which the high-tech sector, the "start-up nation," is only the tip of the iceberg. It's also a culture that knows how to come together in times of crisis and work together, as we saw most recently during the pandemic. While America was tearing itself to shreds and politicizing everything, Israelis were busy mitigating, vaccinating, and getting their lives back to normal as soon as possible.

What I've learned from my many trips to Israel and my encounters

We Diaspora Jews will need to stop focusing on what we think Israel needs from us and instead ask *what we need from Israel*.

with Israelis over more than half a century is this: Whatever it is that we are lacking in the non-Orthodox Diaspora, Israel has it. A fundamental will to thrive and flourish, an inner spark, a collective determination, a gutsiness, a joy, a passion—all channeling centuries of Jewish excellence into building a proud, successful, secular Jewish reality. If Jewish pride is what we need, they've got it in spades.

We Diaspora Jews can learn a great deal from the Jews of Israel, but only if we find pathways to much greater exposure to Israeli culture. And that costs money.

Can we imagine an American Jewish community, say, 20 years from now, that has redirected that billion dollars a year to projects that build Jewish pride in the Diaspora through bilateral engagement with Israel, rather than trying to "support" Israel with our money?

The result, I have no doubt, would be a far stronger, more coherent, more engaged, and prouder Diaspora.



Where could all that money go? I can offer a few concrete ideas.

One is to invest heavily in Hebrew language education. For generations, North American Jews haven't learned much modern Hebrew—despite the obvious fact that modern Hebrew is the most important tool for connecting with Israelis and consuming Israeli culture. This is in part because there is a dearth of highly qualified, professional Hebrew teachers, which results in very few reliable paths to studying modern Hebrew at a serious level. We need a vast

Knowing that you are part of a people with a thriving homeland steeped in Hebrew culture and language, confident and proud, that cares about *your* fate is an invaluable path to courage, engagement, and character.

expansion of master's-degree programs in teaching Hebrew as a second language, as well as many more serious course offerings that can teach Hebrew effectively to students of all ages, including adults.

A second area for investment would be building on Birthright Israel's success by creating similar large-scale programs, whether free or subsidized, that bring Diaspora Jews to Israel at different stages in life. The landscape of Israel trips has changed dramatically since I helped to create Birthright in 1999; it's time to rethink and rationalize the Israel-trip sector and to scale up many of the trips that already exist. Bar and bat mitzvah trips, trips tailored for families with teenage children, honeymoon trips, trips for influencers, mid-career networking trips for a wide range of professions, even two-year programs offering placement for a first job after college in the high-tech sector—all of these can have a long-term impact on secular Jewish identity if done right and at scale.

A third arena for investment would be Israeli culture, with sizeable funds devoted to bringing music, film, art, literature, and more to the Diaspora. We all know about *Fauda* and Gal Gadot and writers such as Amos Oz. But for every artist you have heard of, there are ten more potential stars who, for lack of resources at a critical juncture, never break out: The cost of translating a book, commissioning a screenplay, traveling to make distribution deals, or hiring the right people to

market the product may be prohibitive. Artists also need to build relationships—with agents, producers, editors, directors, and so on. I can easily imagine a major, regular cultural showcase that brings together Israeli creators with American industry professionals covering everything from books to movies and more.

Each of these ideas leverages Israel's success for our benefit, imbuing Diaspora Jews with Jewish pride and inspiring them through Israel's unique spirit. Studies have shown that even a single trip to Israel can correlate with a rich, Jewishly engaged life many years later: One study of Birthright Israel alumni, conducted almost two decades after their trip, demonstrated that in contrast to their peers who had not taken the free, 10-day trip to Israel, alumni were “more likely to raise their oldest child Jewish, to have *brit milah* for their oldest son, to be connected to Israel, to be synagogue members, to volunteer for Jewish or Israeli causes, to participate in events sponsored by Jewish organizations, to have Jewish friends, to celebrate Shabbat, to attend Jewish religious services, and to celebrate Jewish holidays.”

In a world where just “being Jewish” feels increasingly precarious, knowing that you are part of a people with a thriving homeland steeped in Hebrew culture and language, confident and proud, that cares about *your* fate is an invaluable path to courage, engagement, and character.

Can you imagine 20 years from now, a Jewish world where 100,000 non-Israeli American Jews are fluent in modern Hebrew, where subsidized trips to Israel are a lifelong opportunity rather than just a rite of passage, and where access to new Israeli cultural products is much easier and broader than it is now? Can you imagine how much more *interesting* Jewish communal life would become?

You can do a lot with a billion dollars a year.

The burden, however, should not be just on American Jews. I, for one, am baffled that the Israeli government hasn't invested a much larger amount in supporting the Western Diaspora than they have.



THE PROMISED LAND OF ALL
PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE
GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES

The success of the Israeli government’s investment in Birthright should be all the proof they need: For a few tens of millions of Israeli taxpayer dollars a year, Birthright has brought more than half a million young Diaspora Jews to Israel and recouped the investment many times over. Participants spend money in Israel then and on subsequent trips, and also later through donations and investments in Israel that otherwise they may not have made. Birthright alone has laid the groundwork for a generation of increased global support for, investment in, and even immigration to Israel. It has redounded to Israel’s benefit in profound ways—and this should be only the beginning.

Israel could easily dedicate a billion dollars out of its annual budget to the programs I outline here, and to more we haven’t yet imagined. It may take some time for Israeli decision-makers to come around to the idea. But a powerful logic suggests that they should, and eventually will, invest in many of these projects.

This same logic has brought countries around the world to invest heavily in spreading their culture abroad. France, for example, runs hundreds of French Institutes and Alliance schools around the world, dedicated to promoting French language and culture. The Qataris spend millions of dollars a year to support the study of Arabic in American public schools and universities. Even the government of Thailand, a country much poorer than Israel, has been the quiet financial force behind the proliferation of Thai restaurants all over the world.

If Poland, France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Qatar, Japan, South Korea, and others think it wise to invest in the worldwide study of their language and the export of their culture, why shouldn’t Israel?

Once American Jews have flipped the paradigm concerning the role Israel plays in their lives and Israelis see the value of investing in the spread of their language and culture, we will suddenly be talking about billions of dollars a year potentially being put into important, pride-building projects for the Diaspora.

But for that to happen, both Israelis and Diaspora Jews need to recognize that we are in an entirely new phase of Jewish history. We no longer need to save Israel. We need Israel to help save us. *



When I think of Israel, I realize that it’s more than a nation-state or even a people. Israel is a promise. And while Israel was promised to the Jewish people, Israel is the promised land of all people — Jews and Gentiles alike — who believe that God keeps his promises.

When my great-grandmother Agnes, born a sharecropper in Georgia as the granddaughter of slaves, used to read the pages of our family Bible, she knew that God was real. That God was active. That God always wins.

Israel has served as the light of the world — proof positive that God keeps his promises. God made a promise to a person, to a people, and to a place. And he made another promise to the rest of us. He promised to bless those who bless Israel.

I hope we will make his promise our purpose. I hope that together we will recommit ourselves to not staying silent, to not looking away. After all, Israel is about us, too. I pray that we remember the promise and serve each of our purposes in supporting Israel and the Jewish people. If we walk away from Israel, if we fail to heed what the Almighty God decreed to his prophets and heroes more than 3,000 years ago, then we do so at our own peril, because God always keeps his promises.

—DANA W. WHITE

head of Global Strategic Advisory, Ankura Consulting, and former assistant to the secretary of defense for public affairs

Israel Is My Grandfather Kissing Asphalt



DON'T BE FOOLED or limited by the news from Israel. Some of the stories are amazing; some are disheartening. We know about the amazing: innovation nation, villa in the jungle, multicultural miracle, vibrant and resilient society. And God knows we know about the disheartening: divided nation, dysfunctional politics, intractable conflicts, UN piñata, unending terror. We're accustomed to the whiplash: Turn here for amazing, turn there for disheartening. But what about Yamine Bitton — where do we turn for him? Yamine is neither here nor there. He never comes up in our Twitter feed. He has no Facebook account. Reporters never call him.

Yamine Bitton was my grandfather, a successful tea merchant from Casablanca. Of his 11 children, all but one moved to Israel. (The exception, my mother, moved to Canada.) The two oldest

sons moved first in 1947 to fight in the War of Independence. Several years later, on a Saturday night in 1955, right after Yamine recited *Havdalah*, the sons were back to smuggle their parents and remaining siblings to Israel. When Yamine landed in Israel, as the family lore goes, he kissed the ground and said he'd never leave. He was home.

In one way, this unconditional devotion makes little sense. Yamine's family struggled in one of those development towns where Jews from Arab lands were placed. A tiny house is tiny enough without seven children still at home. For the tea pasha of Casablanca, aliyah meant a significant downgrade in both status and lifestyle. But my grandfather was a pious man. Three times a day, he would recite verses like this in his prayers:

And to Jerusalem your city may you return....Blessed are you, builder of Jerusalem....May our eyes behold your return to Zion....Blessed are you, who restores his presence to Zion....Bring us to Zion your city in glad song, and to Jerusalem, home of your sanctuary in eternal joy....For out of Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem....

My grandfather's devotion, then, made all the sense in the world. He kissed the ground of Israel because he had prayed all his life for that opportunity. It's not hard to see how this intense spiritual yearning alleviated the physical hardships and loss of status he encountered in Israel. Maybe that's why I never heard stories of my grandfather complaining. Feeling at home, after all, carries a status all its own.

My friend the writer Yossi Klein Halevi, disheartened by the turmoil in Israel, said something recently that stuck with me. No matter how bad things get, he told me, "we still need something to hold on to." We need something that will help us carry on. For me, that something is not the amazing side of Israel with its innovation and vibrancy and creativity, much as I admire it. What I hold

A NATION CAPABLE OF LIGHTING UP THE DARK

on to in times of distress is the image of my grandfather bending down to kiss the asphalt in Israel and saying he would never leave.

There is a deep humility in bending down to kiss the ground, a recognition of our frailty. The image of our ancestors holding hands in a long chain through the centuries, praying to return to their biblical homeland, is larger than any of us. In the face of the ugly fights in the Knesset, the acrimony on the streets, the dogma disguised as policy, the fraying of social bonds, this is what I cling to: the miracle my grandfather experienced as a member of the generation that made it over the Zionist finish line.

Yossi's call to find something to hold on to is poignant. For all too many Diaspora Jews, if they can't stand what's going on in Israel, there's a natural urge to give up and move on. Holding on to our Zionist connection during such stressful and upsetting times takes more than just activism or reminding ourselves about Start-Up Nation or how Israeli innovation helps repair the world. Activism is important, and it feeds our appetite for action; accomplishments are important, and they feed our minds and egos. But to maintain an unconditional attachment to the Zionist project requires something that feeds our souls. My grandfather bending down to kiss the ancient ground of Israel and saying he'll never leave touches my soul.

It feeds me the way my mother's love for me feeds my soul, or the way my love for my children feeds my soul, or the way Jews never abandoning a 1,900-year dream feeds my soul. It feeds me in a way that makes me want to emulate my ancestors and never give up on the Zionist miracle.

This feeling doesn't show up in our Twitter feed. It doesn't come and go, like a news story, amazing or disheartening. It's there on the good days and it's there on the dark days and, yes, even on Israel's birthday. And like the image of my grandfather bending down to kiss holy ground, it's with me everywhere I go. *

There is a famous teaching attributed to the 19th-century Hasidic master Rabbi Simcha Bunim that has stayed with me since I learned it as a kid. Bunim teaches that every person should keep two scraps of paper in her pockets. On one scrap, in one pocket, a line from Tractate Sanhedrin: The whole world was created just for me. On the other scrap, in another pocket, Abraham's words from Genesis 18:27: I am but dust and ashes.

In low moments, we need the Talmud to remind us that for our sake the world was made. At other times, we need Bereshit to bring us back down to Earth.

When it comes to Israel, I have two comparable scraps.

In one pocket, I have the line attributed to David Ben-Gurion (though perhaps it is apocryphal): "When Israel has prostitutes and thieves, we'll be a state just like any other."

And in the other, I have the Prophet Isaiah: "I will also make you a light of nations, that My salvation may reach the ends of the earth."

On the one hand, a nation like any other—screwing one another, screwing it all up. On the other, a Jewish state set apart—an ancient promise by God to the people of Israel. On the one hand, a reminder that we Jews are just people. On the other, an aspiration as high as the heavens—a vision of a nation capable of lighting up the dark.

These days, like so many Jews in Israel and around the world, I find myself reaching for the pocket with Isaiah's words, praying that Israel can make itself worthy of that vow.

—BARI WEISS
founder of The Free Press

Israel Is a Miracle



THE STATE OF ISRAEL is a miracle.

To appreciate this simple fact, one need only glance at the polemical texts rallying against Zionism in the early years of the 20th century. As part of a broader claim that Zionism intended to turn its followers against religion, one 1902 rabbinic manifesto included the observation that “the deceivers know full well that settling tens of thousands of Jews in the Land of Israel among the other nations dwelling therein, the more so establishing a state of the Jews and a safe haven with the permission of the nations, is entirely preposterous.”

After 1,900 years of harsh exile during which the Jews lacked any semblance of national sovereignty and self-determination, this rabbinic statement was a fair representation of the national Jewish mood. Yet by 1917, just 20 years after Zionism was founded, the most powerful government in the world had issued the Balfour Declaration, declaring its support for the establishment in Palestine of

a “national home for the Jewish people.” An entry in Herzl’s diary for September 1897 reads: “Were I to sum up the Basel Congress in a word . . . it would be this: At Basel I founded the Jewish State. If I said this out loud today I would be greeted by universal laughter. In five years perhaps, and certainly in 50 years, everyone will perceive it.” Fifty years almost to the month, Herzl’s prophecy was fulfilled in the UN vote to endorse the Partition Plan in November 1947.

The State of Israel is justifiably perceived as a wonder of the modern world. Which other ancient people survived a millennia-long exile and ultimately returned as a sovereign state to its ancestral homeland? Derek Prince, an influential Christian Zionist who witnessed the event, described what he saw in near-eschatological terms: “On a single day—the fourteenth of May, 1948—Israel was born as a complete nation, with a government, an army, and a fully functional administration. . . . To the best of my knowledge, it was an unprecedented event in human history.” The story is of course more outstanding yet. The defeat of five Arab armies against all odds in Israel’s War of Independence, the continued military success in fending off sworn enemies, the economic and demographic flourishing of a fledgling state ostensibly preoccupied with mere survival—all of these make Israel exceptional and remarkable.

Even the Haredim, Israel’s large and growing ultra-Orthodox population whose relationship with the state is ambivalent, quickly overcame their initial suspicions and recognized the miracle unfolding before their eyes. Rabbi Shalom Noach Berezovsky, the Slonimer Rebbe, could not contain his amazement:

The wondrous phenomenon of our generation [is such that] our very eyes behold revelations that no dreamer or visionary could have entertained just a generation ago. Suddenly, a

remarkable generation arose. . . . Tents of Torah study bloom, Hasidic sanctuaries flourish in the fullness of their glory, alongside a Teshuva movement unheard of in any past generation. The question begs itself: Who bore us all of these?

Of course, the miracle of Jewish revival goes far beyond the world of Orthodoxy. The very fact that nonobservant Jews remain Jewish, coupled with birth rates that exceed any other OECD country, testifies to the wonder of Israel no less than its yeshiva institutions and Hasidic courts.

But miracles can dissipate as quickly as they occur. The miracles of the Egyptian redemption did not prevent the death of the entire generation in the wilderness on account of its sinfulness. The miracle wrought by Elijah at Carmel did not prevent the religious and political disintegration of the people. It is up to us to ensure that the miracle of modern-day Israel does not suffer the same fate.

The Hebrew word for miracle, *nes*, has three additional and closely related meanings. It means a standard or banner (Numbers 21:8); raising or elevating (Rashi on Exodus 20:17); and a trial (Genesis 22:1). Miracles raise a banner whose purpose is to teach us a lesson. They try us, and they elevate us. So does Israel.

The State of Israel is a tall Jewish standard. Coming against the horrific darkness of the Shoah, it is a brilliant ray of light that heralded the almost unthinkable return of the Jews to history. Born out of the ashes, it gives the lie both to traditional Christian claims of supersessionism (a point Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe often emphasized) and to the Nietzschean “death of God.”

Beyond a banner, however, it is a call and a trial. We did not return to our ancestral homeland for the purpose of mere survival. This dramatic return challenges us to take history into our hands, partnering with God as we mold it in our image. That is what the early Zionist leaders who established the State of Israel and wrought the miracle did — despite all their ideological differences.

While we are physically free of our exile among the nations, it seems that the process of releasing Jews from their exilic state of mind has a long way to run. It is a debt that the miracle of Israel is due.

Today, it is our turn — the turn of a population much changed over the course of 75 years — to move Israel into its next phase.

—

In advance of the giving of the Torah at Sinai, God sent Moshe to inform the Israelites of the purpose of the entire affair: “You shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5).

On the one hand, the high priest serves God alone in the holy Temple. The Jews also serve alone: “a nation that will dwell in solitude and not be reckoned among the nations” (Numbers 23:9). On the other hand, the priest also has an educational function: “They shall teach your statutes to Jacob and your Torah to Israel” (Deuteronomy 33:10). Likewise, the Jewish nation’s role is to spread to the rest of the world the *Derech Hashem*, the “way of God” first discovered by Abraham (Genesis 18:19).

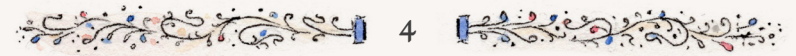
For many years, the Jewish nation was forced to focus on the first priestly function: an internal and private service of God. The need to endure barely allowed us to contemplate anything beyond survival. Seventy-five years into statehood (the *gematria*, or numerical value, of *kohen*, the word for priest), we need to consider how the Jewish state can realize its fuller mission. Jews are not used to

thinking this way. While we are physically free of our exile among the nations, it seems that the process of releasing Jews from their exilic state of mind has a long way to run. It is a debt that the miracle of Israel is due.

Over the past several years, Israeli society has internalized a “tribes” model, which espouses a multicultural vision emphasizing the differences among various groups that make up Israel’s citizenry. According to this thinking, the real necessity is to ensure economic prosperity for all groups. The Arab rioting of 2021 and the recent escalation of tensions among Israel’s “tribes”—to the point of our social fabric coming apart—indicate that this low-common-denominator approach isn’t good enough.

Perpetuating the miracle of Israel requires us to unify under the distinctive banner of a Jewish state, emblazoned with the moral monotheism that Israel must manifest—the “way of God” that includes kindness, righteousness, and justice (Jeremiah 9:23). There are strong differences of opinion concerning the character of a Jewish state and the specific arrangements it ought to espouse. Even so, a shared belief in the vision, coupled with the deep responsibility and brave leadership required to bridge the gaps between Left and Right, secular and religious, will ensure the achievement of an elusive unity.

In a sense, that would be Israel’s biggest miracle of all. *



THE TEST OF JEWISH SOVEREIGNTY IS THE TREATMENT OF STRANGERS

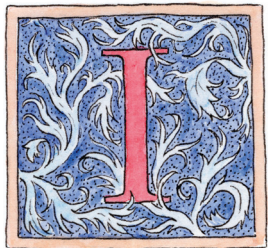
It is, after all, a modest ambition: not *the* light, just a light, one of the lights. And, yes, that was and is my hope for the still-new Jewish state. I thought, along with many of my Labor and liberal Zionist friends, that the experience of statelessness, of persecution, expulsion, and migration, would lead the Jews to create an exemplary state. But I also had a second Zionist hope, produced by the same historical experience: to have a state like all the other states—finally, to be normal. Normality has been achieved, and I don’t want to underestimate its importance. But Israel’s light is dim.

There are many reasons for that, mostly having to do with “the conflict.” I want to suggest a reason from our history. Statelessness did not mean the absence of politics or even of the key political experience of ruling and being ruled. Jews ruled, always precariously, in their own autonomous or semiautonomous communities—the *kehillot* of medieval and early-modern times. But they ruled only over fellow Jews; they were responsible only for one another. The achievement of statehood requires ruling over and along with strangers. Every normal nation has done that, well or badly, mostly badly. Israeli Jews are new to the concern for “others” that is required of those who rule a state. Many of them have not taken on, have refused to take on, that concern. Hence the dim light.

The test of Jewish sovereignty, as of any other sovereignty, is the treatment of strangers—the willingness to live with the “others” on terms of equality. Any nation-state that meets that test will be a light unto the nations. My friends in Israel today are struggling to meet the test. I pray for their success.

—MICHAEL WALZER
*professor emeritus at Princeton University
and editor emeritus of Dissent magazine*

Israel Is a Liberator



IN LIBERATING the Jews, Zionism blessed and cursed them. It blessed the Jews with responsibility. It cursed the Jews with responsibility. With Israel, the sovereign state that Zionism brought about, Jews were now free to make the choices that would shape their fate. Zionism had liberated sovereign Jews to make good and bad choices—to be the best, the worst, or the mediocre versions of themselves.

Zionism liberated Jews by burdening them with power while depriving them of the comforts of blame. Possessing the collective power and authority to make decisions, sovereign Jews had to accept that the consequences of their decisions, smart or stupid, would be laid squarely at their door. Sovereign Jews would no longer be able to blame the czar, the antisemitic ruler, or the goyim, for their plight. Most Zionists could no longer even blame God. What Israel is, what Israel has become, the good, the bad, and the ugly, is who Jews are as a free people.

This realization is deeply troubling to some Jews. Powerlessness has its temptations. Those who have forgotten what it is actually like to be powerless can easily imagine it as a morally pristine condition. There is comfort in that imagining. But there is no truth in it. Without power, morality is an atrophied muscle. Only when one is free to exercise power can one even begin to be a fully moral being.

To be moral is not to be “good” or “nice.” To be moral is to venture daily into life, straining to make the best choices under circumstances that rarely if ever present a simple, “good” path. Jewish morality is not a theory found in the Book, nor in its interpretative texts. Jewish morality is found daily in the manner by which Jews seek to live as fully sovereign people burdened with power and its associated responsibility.

By giving them the power to make choices, Zionism liberated Jews to be complete moral beings, fulfilling the true moral promise of Judaism. But Zionism had an even more ambitious goal: liberating the societies that had long latched on to the ready temptation of scapegoating Jews for their plight.

The sociologist René Girard, who studied scapegoating, observed that societies in crisis ask two questions: What to do? Whom to blame? Societies that emerge well from crises emphasize action over scapegoating. But action is by no means the most attractive path, given the considerable comfort so many take in blaming others for their misfortune, in shaking the yoke of agency, in forgoing responsibility.

The Jews, as the world’s oldest and most reliable scapegoats, are keenly aware of this appeal. But when Jews, through Zionism, chose action over blame for themselves, they sought to liberate those who had indulged in the comforts of blaming them, so that they might devote themselves to improving their societies instead.

The idea that Jews had anything to do with the world’s misfortunes was never true. But in giving Jews a sovereign home and thereby normalizing their political condition, Zionism sought to

Liberty is the product of discipline, dedication, duty, and devotion — all of which involve a voluntary subordination of the spirit to something greater than itself.

alleviate antisemitism if not eliminate it entirely. Unfortunately, rising anti-Zionism in the West, as well as in the Arab and Muslim world, presents itself to many as a respectable replacement for antisemitism. People will not readily let go of so useful a scapegoat.

Few individuals or societies live up to the ideal of a truly liberated life, accepting full responsibility for the choices they make. The pleasures of liberty are clear. But its burdens are easily forgotten. The paradox of liberty is that the responsibility it requires does not feel liberating at all in any obvious way. Liberty is the product of discipline, dedication, duty, and devotion — all of which involve a voluntary subordination of the spirit to something greater than itself. It is like the improvisation of a jazz pianist, who is only “free” to follow her musical inspiration because of the thousands of hours of practice that preceded her performance. The duties of liberty require deliberate, consistent, continuous uphill effort. Such effort is all too easily neglected in the pursuit of immediate pleasures, and on the not-so-rare occasions when such a pursuit yields misery, the temptations of retreating into powerlessness are always there.

On its 75th anniversary, Israel is contending with the price of liberty. The grand actions necessary to secure that liberty are mostly over — building the state, securing the state, ingathering the exiles. Jews in Israel must now contend with all the issues that they set aside during the long struggle for liberation. Long-neglected tensions

between Arabs and Jews, between religion and state, between different immigrant groups, all are bubbling to the surface, demanding now to be addressed. In the process of facing these issues, sovereign Jews will make good and bad choices, smart and stupid decisions, and many mediocre ones.

Jews can take pride in the idea that even our bad choices and stupid decisions are very much our own, even if we're not always proud of the choices and decisions themselves. But a nagging concern remains. How many bad decisions can the Jewish people afford? How many stupid choices can we make before we risk the State of Israel and the entire Zionist enterprise? And if we do end up making too many bad decisions and stupid choices, will Judaism ever recover from the fall of the third Jewish commonwealth? Would the dream of reconstituting ourselves in the Land of Israel hold us together as one people once again, if the fulfilled promise were devastated once more? It took less than a century to rebuild the second commonwealth after the loss of the first one. It took 20 centuries to rebuild the third commonwealth after the loss of the second one. If we forfeit the third commonwealth, 20 centuries will not be enough. Perhaps no number of centuries would be enough.



Benjamin Franklin is credited with saying that the people of a newly independent America had a republic, “if you can keep it.” To Thomas Jefferson is attributed the caution that “the price of liberty is eternal vigilance.” David Ben-Gurion is thought to have said that the success of the Jewish state could be assessed only after seven decades. Their knowledge of history and human nature instructed all three men in the tenuous nature of liberty and the heavy burden it places on the liberated to maintain it. And so, on Israel's 75th anniversary, we can imagine a Benjamin Ben-Gurion telling the people of Israel and the Jewish people around the world, “A Jewish state, if you can keep it.” *

PART TWO

OUR CURRENT
MOMENT



Israel Is a Hope for Its Arab Citizens, Too



IT IS NOT EASY to be happy these days in our Middle East. If it's not Covid, then it's civil wars, oppressive regimes, an earthquake. Not a day goes by without bloodshed. Sometimes it is Palestinians. Sometimes it is Jews. Not to mention Syria and Turkey, burying their loved ones by the tens of thousands. In recent years, we have known no rest from the plague of murderous death, from Libya to Yemen, from Sudan to Iran.

Still, we have an obligation to create joy — Arabs and Jews alike.

So on that beautiful night, when I was surrounded by my wife, three children, six grandchildren, and other relatives and friends, my tears flowed with laughter and joy. Our eldest granddaughter had passed all of her university exams with honors. Our second granddaughter, who graduated from high school last summer and decided to take a break from her studies, had finished her third month working in

tourism. She earns a higher salary than her grandmother, who has a master's degree and works as a senior official in the municipality. Our third granddaughter had completed a course at the Technion for seventh graders, where students got to know the medical profession up close. Our grandson was one of a team of six sixth-grade students who received First Prize in the Ministry of Education's competition for a scientific invention; he began to explain to us how it is possible to fight air pollution with a new device the team created together with their physics teacher. Our fourth granddaughter shines in everything she does: academics, music, ballet, and acting. She is a talker; she knows how to express herself well in Hebrew and English, not only in Arabic. And the youngest granddaughter, only 16 months old, manages to drive the family crazy with her incredible intelligence.

Everyone is becoming a success story. Everyone, *baruch Hashem*, is healthy. Being together with them, each and every one of them, and all of them together, is always special. Warmth and pride. Even when we are watching the news — and we are not those who run away from watching difficult events — we try to look for a positive way out. The glass is half-empty, but we focus on the full part. For us, news is knowledge, not just pain and anxiety. We carry the heavy burden of difficult and frustrating events, but we lean into surviving with a hope that does not know despair. We know from history that it could have been worse.

So that night passed peacefully, until midnight. The children and grandchildren dispersed, each family to its own home. My wife, to her online English class. And I, to my office in our cramped library, reading and writing.

Then a horrifying sound of gunshots broke the silence. This is not a rare occurrence in our area — like all of Arab society, we are plagued by a terrible crime wave — but I refuse to get used to it. It wasn't directed at me or my house, God forbid, but it was close by, in the neighborhood. Criminal organizations. Fighting one another, fighting within

This article has been translated from the Hebrew.

themselves. The whole neighborhood woke up, but no one went near a window. People are scared of stray bullets; this puts them in a state of anxiety and fear. In the quiet that followed the shooting, you hear a plea to God—help these organizations destroy one another, deliver us from their evil. Someone else calls out the hope that Itamar Ben-Gvir, now the minister of national security, will be able to stop the criminal violence from taking over Arab society. But in this battle, we can't survive on emotional aspirations. Far too many innocent bystanders fall victim to this gang warfare, receiving a bullet in the head while in a store, or at a gas station, or coming from prayer in the mosque.

This issue has become more worrisome than any other issue among Israeli Arabs. As usual, we point the finger of blame at the police. It's hard for us to acknowledge our own responsibility, the wrongdoings of our own communities that have led to this situation, which threatens all the achievements we have earned through our hard work over the 75 years of the existence of the State of Israel. And there are many achievements.

I stood at the window overlooking the street, in the beautiful neighborhood established in the 1990s according to the plan of the minister of housing, Binyamin Ben-Eliezer. There is no trace of the gunfire. I moved to the other side of the house, overlooking the Jezreel Valley and Beit Shean, the city where my father lived before the Nakba. It was incredibly quiet there, too. The bullets seemed to have swallowed up the vibrancy of life. The next day, and even after many days, there was no mention of the event in the media, and I, as a journalist of our day, knew why. No one had died.

So the police registered another incident without solving it. The municipality expressed relief that there were no casualties. Our politicians protested the lawlessness and lack of governance. And we, the public, whispered that we must take responsibility and oppose the criminal organizations openly. We fear, however, that the current government is closing the door in our faces.

In recent years, we have gone through two welcome experiments that inspired great hope, which we fear will not return soon. After

We carry the heavy burden of difficult and frustrating events, but we lean into surviving with a hope that does not know despair.

many years of Arab citizens being pushed to the margins of society, we suddenly became a respected group in civic and political life. We have been a fundamental workforce since the founding of Israel. We were engaged in building the country. We broke new ground, worked, studied, sang, danced, and over time became a presence that could no longer be ignored in civil society. By 2020, when we made up about 20 percent of the population, nearly half of the recipients of Israeli medical licenses were Arabs; half of all new nurses, more than half the dentists, and 57 percent of pharmacists were Arabs. The academic research institutes are full of Arab creators and inventors. Businessmen, artists, sports stars, writers and poets, journalists in the Hebrew media—excellence has become a national flag. These achievements would not have been possible without help. The road was indeed difficult. Every Arab needed to make twice the effort in order to succeed. But there is no Arab who succeeded without the support of a good Jew who lent a shoulder.

Then two things happened: Covid and Arab partnership in the last government coalition. Covid is a virus that does not distinguish between Jew and Arab, between religious and secular, between Ashkenazi and Sephardi. It forced us to join together to fight it. The medical teams, the education systems, various officials, and IDF personnel all fought valiantly together to protect the health of everyone.

Arab partnership in the coalition was another step, a historic one. Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid established a government that was different from anything that politics in the world had known. Naftali Bennett's Yemina, to the right of Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud, was a

A FAIR AND SECURE RESOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT

member, together with the centrist parties of Benny Gantz and Yair Lapid, Labor and Meretz from the Left, and the United Arab List under the leadership of MK Mansour Abbas. For the Arab population, this was a new era. For the first time, they had representatives in the ruling coalition of the government.

Unfortunately, the government was not given the time it needed to succeed. It made many mistakes, but it was nevertheless a remarkable achievement. Yes, the experiment was interrupted in its infancy. But it managed to breathe new life into the country. Nearly 34 percent of the Jews and 64 percent of the Arabs supported the partnership. And in the elections that followed, voting for Abbas's party increased by 25 percent.

As someone who follows the politics of the Arab world, I have seen the effects of this experiment ripple across borders. Many in the region viewed it hopefully, and not only in countries that joined the Abraham Accords. This leads me to believe that the last government was not merely a singular event, a moment in time. I expect it to seep deep into the Israeli being. I allow myself to see hope in it, despite the setbacks and failures.

Anyone who understands what hope is and where the song “Hatikvah” comes from knows that this hope continues. All that is needed is to look at our children and our grandchildren with open eyes and tell them: In the celebrations of the 75th anniversary of the State of Israel, we were part of the public that believed from the bottom of our hearts that there was room for partnership. Not only between Jews and Arab citizens of Israel—the partnership here will be a model that can be imitated across the region, including among the Palestinians. A partnership that will bring a true and just peace.

So, to my Jewish friends, I say: You will continue to sing “Hatikvah,” and I will stand respectfully, and together we will bring hope to the land and all its inhabitants. *

For Israel to become a light unto the nations, it must first be a light unto itself. It must have an exemplary form of governance and provide justice and opportunity to all. It should show compassion toward its neighbors and the world and be a committed partner in the protection of our planet, as well as its own territories and heritage.

Israel has cohabited with the Palestinians for many years. So its first test will be to negotiate a government that provides justice, security, and autonomy to both peoples. Today's situation was inflicted upon Israel; but given the asymmetry of power, Israel should take the initiative in seeking a fair and secure resolution of the conflict.

Neither one nor two states will work. We need a federation of two states with self-government for each, bonded together by a negotiated constitution that provides for joint security and fair resource allocation to address the needs of each people. The constitution cannot fall short of the American model in protecting individual rights and providing equality for all under the law. If Israel can cross this milestone in the remaining 25 years of its first century, it will indeed become a light to the nations—a model of justice as preached by the prophets.

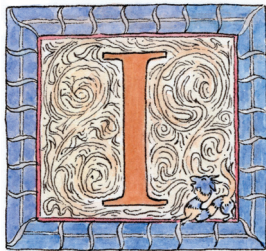
Israel has made enormous contributions in agriculture, science, technology, medicine, and the arts. The new Israel/Palestine would extend these achievements to the entire population, with opportunities for citizens of any religious persuasion and practice or none, through a social contract emphasizing equality and compassion for all.

Such an entity will, in time, draw in its regional neighbors and thereby contribute to a Middle Eastern renaissance. But Israel will never be a light to the nations if either people is deprived of its Promised Land.

—MOSHE SAFDIE

architect whose works include Habitat 67 in Montreal and the Yad Vashem Holocaust History Museum in Jerusalem

Israel Is at Risk of Destroying Itself



IN SEPTEMBER 2014, immediately after that summer's war between Israel and Hamas, my wife and I moved from Tel Aviv to Kibbutz Nahal Oz, a small community situated on Israel's border with Gaza. Nahal Oz, home to approximately 400 people, was at the time officially the most bombarded locality in Israel. Our friends in Tel Aviv couldn't understand why we'd want to move there.

Eight years later, Nahal Oz is growing very quickly. Two dozen new families have moved here in recent years, many of them, like us, coming from the Tel Aviv area. The kibbutz has just finished constructing a new neighborhood, where we live alongside a wonderful group of friends and neighbors. On most days, when there aren't rockets flying, it's the best place in the world to raise a family: a tight-knit community surrounded by open fields, where neighbors become real friends and educating one's children is

the highest priority. When our friends from the big city come to visit on Saturdays, they no longer ask why we moved here. They ask how they can join.

During our years here, we have experienced some difficult moments. There were several rounds of fighting between Israel and Palestinian terror groups that forced us out of our home for entire days; there were sirens indicating an imminent threat that caught us with our two young daughters at the playground; there were fires started by Hamas that burned our fields and threatened our home. We love this place, but like thousands of Israelis living on the Gaza border, we sometimes pay a price for being here.

Politically, Nahal Oz tilts to the left: If our community had determined the results of Israel's election, Yair Lapid would still be prime minister. People here know the price of war, and we hope that one day, Israel will find a way to make peace.

After Israel's last election, in November 2022, something changed. Not just in my kibbutz, but in places like it all over the country—enclaves of liberal, secular Israel. Friends and neighbors who never had any doubt about calling this place home suddenly started discussing things that were once unthinkable: obtaining foreign passports for their children; moving money out of their Israeli bank accounts; preparing in different ways for the possibility of emigrating.

What thousands of Hamas rockets and mortars failed to do, Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right, ultra-religious government managed just weeks after it was sworn into power. The level of despair I now encounter in everyday conversations with friends who love this country, served in the military, and contribute significantly to its economy is unprecedented.

It's not about the general political loss: Liberal Israelis have gotten used to living under right-wing governments, and I never

encountered the fear and bitterness now on display after previous election losses. It's about the extremist nature of this specific Netanyahu-led coalition. In the past, Netanyahu, whether out of choice or necessity, always found himself leading coalitions that included, alongside his natural allies from the religious parties, at least one party from the center-Left. Ehud Barak, Tzipi Livni, Yair Lapid, Benny Gantz—the people leading the recent protests in the streets against Netanyahu—were all, at one point, partners in his different coalitions. This gave Israelis who didn't vote for him a sense that while they might not like the prime minister, they could live with him. No one ever talked about converting their savings to U.S. dollars and sending money out of the country.

Now, people aren't just talking about it—they're doing it. Perhaps not here, in my kibbutz, but certainly in Tel Aviv, Israel's liberal bastion and the city all liberal Israelis consider a second home. Just six weeks into Netanyahu's sixth term in office, several high-tech companies moved billions of dollars out of the country in response to his government's controversial judicial reform. The CEOs of Israel's largest banks privately warned the prime minister that this was part of a larger phenomenon, not restricted only to rich entrepreneurs but slowly spreading to upper-middle-class customers.

The extreme character of this government and the radical changes it seeks in the judicial system are just one part of the story. There is also a demographic issue. The growth of Israel's ultra-Orthodox population, which is largely dependent on government support, is becoming an existential challenge for Israel. Many ultra-Orthodox women and about half of the men are in the workforce, but few have more than the most basic secular education; almost all are in low-paying, low-tax jobs, and very few work in high tech, the engine of Israel's modern economy. Many of the men continue to devote themselves to Talmud study, for better or worse preserving a model developed in Eastern Europe 200 years ago. A prosperous, modern economy cannot survive a demographic trend of this kind. Unfortunately, solving this challenge requires a government without

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the ultra-Orthodox parties, who wish to keep their constituents poor, uneducated in secular subjects, and disconnected from the modern world.

The previous government led by Yair Lapid and Naftali Bennett—Israel's short-lived “government of change”—took some steps in the right direction. It wasn't a left-wing government: The most powerful people in it came from the center-Right. Nor was it a secular government: Bennett was Israel's first-ever religious prime minister. But it was a government without the ultra-Orthodox parties, and that was enough to create an opening for some badly needed reforms. Now, with Netanyahu relying on the ultra-Orthodox to hold on to power, Israel is moving in the opposite direction.



I'm not ready to give up on Israel yet, and neither are most of my friends and neighbors. Now is a time to fight back, not to retreat in despair. You will find us week after week in the streets, protesting this government's irresponsible actions. Not just in Tel Aviv, where the largest demonstrations are taking place, but in the Negev and in communities along the Gaza border as well.

People want their voices to be heard, and in this specific

protest wave, we also need the voices of our brothers and sisters in the Jewish Diaspora. Netanyahu and his allies count on world Jewry to support them in various ways, from philanthropic initiatives that replace governmental spending, to political advocacy and *hasbara* that maintain public support for Israel. Historically, world Jewry has obliged, and rightly so. Today's situation is different. If you want Israel to remain a strong, prosperous, and liberal country, don't hesitate and don't play by the old rules, because this government has thrown the rulebook out the window.

For now, we are still here. I wake up every morning in a community located less than a mile from Gaza and drop off my daughters at a bombproof kindergarten. At the same time, supporters of this government call me a traitor for writing critically of Netanyahu and highlighting his failures as prime minister. I can live with all that, and I don't even want to complain about it too much. But I fear for the future of this country under this leadership. It's not Hamas that will eventually destroy liberal Israel and force liberal Israelis to raise their children elsewhere. Only our own elected government can do that. *

Israel Is in Need of Judicial Reform



AS I WRITE, in March 2023, Israel is in the throes of an intense debate about judicial reform. While the intensity is new, the debate itself has been going on for decades. Proponents of reform have demanded actions for nearly 30 years, since then-Justice Aharon Barak and his colleagues on the Supreme Court carried out a self-styled “revolution” to remake Israel’s law and governing principles.

To grasp the dynamics of judicial reform requires an understanding of two subjects, one arcane, and the second seemingly popular but rarely remarked upon. The arcane subject is the mid-1990s “constitutional revolution” that divides Israel’s history between the parliamentary democracy it was in its first decades and the juristocracy (the tutelary democracy subject to judicial aristocracy) that it has become. The seemingly popular subject is the dynamics of Israeli public debate, hyperbolic and alarmist, tribally conformist,

and conducted in a private language that is almost always misunderstood by non-Israelis.

Let’s begin with the legal and constitutional. One can neatly divide Israel’s legal history in two. From the founding of the country in 1948 until the ascension and presidency of Aharon Barak over Israel’s Supreme Court from the 1980s to the early 2000s, Israel was a fairly typical Westminster parliamentary democracy. Israel’s elected Knesset was supreme. Like Great Britain, Israel did not adopt a written constitution. Governments were approved by the Knesset and could last only for as long as they enjoyed the Knesset’s approval. Courts were strong and independent.

Barak’s Supreme Court upended the system. The justice was an unabashed revolutionary who changed every aspect of the law. He made substantive law vaguer, increasing the discretionary power of judges. He rewrote procedural rules, giving the court authority over even nonlegal matters. And he revamped the relationship between the courts and elected officials, making courts the last word on everything from appointments and policy to budgets. Although Barak has not served on the Court for nearly two decades, his successors, many handpicked by him, have continued in his path.



The Barak-era revolution vastly expanded the power of the Supreme Court at the expense of the democratic branches of government and of individual liberty. The Court shuttered radio stations, ordered television and radio programs off the air, denied political parties and individual politicians the right to run for office, blocked senior appointments, and fired elected officials, including the Speaker of the Knesset and government ministers. It canceled some kinds of welfare payments and created others; blocked some military operations and ordered others; canceled some kinds of taxes and created others; canceled some government contracts and ordered others. It rewrote the authority of government lawyers,

especially the attorney general, who was transformed into a legal commissar who could dictate policy to every elected official.

While the post-Barak Court is sometimes liberal, its ideological agenda has often led it to compromise human rights. The Court systematically eroded the rights of the criminally accused by authorizing the use of illegally obtained evidence, functionally approving unlawful surveillance, and eviscerating the presumption of innocence. It is singularly unimpressed with political rights such as the right to elect and to be elected. And its understanding of the freedom of political speech has an undeniable partisan tinge to it.

The result of the Barak revolution has been a Court (together with subordinate government lawyers) that is uniquely powerful in the democratic world. Israel is the only country in the democratic world in which a Supreme Court can cancel legislation without any legal or constitutional authority and, consequently, without any limitation on its power. Barak's revolution, which was never put before or approved by the voters, subordinated Israel's democratic governance to a judicial aristocracy.

There have been numerous efforts over the years to bring the Barak-era revolution to a vote, but none so serious as the judicial-reform package of Israel's newly elected government. The proposals made by Justice Minister Yariv Levin and Knesset Law and Constitution Committee Chairman Simcha Rothman differ in details—and both have changed as they have worked through the legislative process. But their essentials can be easily described.

With one exception, every piece of the proposals reverses or limits a controversial innovation of the Barak-era Court. One of the proposals would limit the power that the Court invented for itself to nullify any Knesset legislation, by creating strict procedural guidelines and by restoring to the Knesset the last word. Another would terminate the commissar status of legal advisers, restoring them to the status of legal advisers elsewhere in the democratic world.

Alongside the cancellation or limitation of specific pieces of the Barak-era revolution, the proposals include a change in the

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system of appointing judges. Since 1953, Israeli judges have been appointed by a professional committee consisting of Supreme Court justices, lawyers, members of Parliament, and government ministers. During the Barak era, the Supreme Court president seized functional control of the judicial-appointments committee, ensuring ideological uniformity and loyalty. The judicial-reform proposals include a rebalancing of the committee to eliminate the judicial veto over appointments and give elected leaders the ability to appoint more ideologically diverse justices who are committed to democracy rather than judicial aristocracy.

Naturally, the justices and their deputized government lawyers have screamed bloody murder. It's not easy to come by unlimited power, and the judicial aristocracy is not ready to return to its former role as judges and lawyers in a parliamentary democracy. The current Supreme Court president called a prime-time press conference to join the parliamentary opposition's campaign against judicial reform and to lobby against the proposed legislation. Allies of the Court have threatened that the Court will discard any laws adopting any part of the judicial reform, restoring the Court's absolute authority notwithstanding the law. Former judges and government lawyers, including retired attorneys general, have warned that any return to the pre-Barak-era

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A broader mass of opponents to judicial reform resist the proposals because of their hostility toward and fears of democracy. They would much prefer to see a left-leaning judicial aristocracy manage the affairs of state than to have the Great Unwashed hold the reins. These opponents have gathered a host of ad hominem claims, arguing that the politicians who support judicial reform have partly political motives and that too much democracy will allow the “bad people” favored by the majority to exercise the powers of office. Yair Lapid, head of the opposition in Knesset, unsubtly calls the majority of Israelis the “forces of darkness.”

And, of course, many oppose judicial reform for basic partisan reasons. Lapid, for instance, strongly criticized judicial excesses as a journalist before he entered politics, and then as a member of Knesset before he took charge of the opposition to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Many of those now

leading demonstrations once called for the very same reforms they now denounce.

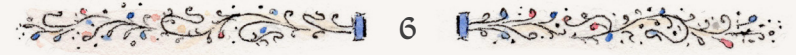
This brings us to the dynamics of Israeli political debate. Opponents to judicial reform have pulled no punches. Newspaper editors, journalistic opponents of Netanyahu, economists, fashion models, and schoolchildren and most of the academy, whether lawyers or chemists, have joined the fight to preserve judicial aristocracy, all in the name of “democracy.” Opponents have denounced the reform as fascistic, Nazi, and the end of civil rights in Israel, while warning that it will kill cancer patients, destroy the economy, put innocent Israeli soldiers on trial, and destroy nature itself.

These hyperbolic claims are obviously little more than political demagoguery. Yet all too many non-experts and non-Israelis have convinced themselves that they have heard honest descriptions of a dangerous reform. The distress of the opponents of reform is real, of course: Many genuinely fear losing power to the *demos*, especially when they fear that most of the *demos* hold different political and ideological views. Some of the opponents have convinced themselves that they are the only liberals in Israel, and they refuse to see that the majority of Israel's Right, like the majority of Israel's Left, has always been liberal. Many of the opponents have wiped from their memory the fact that Israel was a democratic and liberal state for many decades before the Barak-era revolution, and that Israel does not need judicial aristocracy to be liberal.

But there are social dynamics to the opposition as well. As with, for instance, “resistance” to Donald Trump in America, some of opponents' political positions are dictated by the need to signal social class and values, rather than the particulars of the policy debate. The claim that parliamentary democracy is undemocratic, while judicial aristocracy is the true democracy, may be laughable on its face. But to say so out loud in Israel is to signal that one has lined up with “them” rather than us. All too

many non-Israelis hear the passion and fail to understand that they are seeing signals of virtue rather than explications of truth.

None of this changes the bottom line. Opponents to judicial reform may continue to argue that Israel's judiciary must continue to enjoy unlimited power. But the reality is that it is judicial aristocracy, rather than judicial reform, that poses the greatest threat to Israel and its liberal democracy. *



THE POWER OF BELIEF

If you will it, it is no dream. Theodor Herzl's wise words echo down the ages, reminding us of man's agency in the achievement of individual and collective dreams. We are purpose-driven beings, and the greatest power within us is activated when we endeavor to bring the desires of our heart into manifest reality. That power is magnified exponentially when like minds join in the effort. Everything becomes possible.

As an African American, when I traveled to Israel for the first time in 2009, I was thunderstruck. I saw in the Jewish state the power of belief, a sublime embodiment of all the metaphysical ideals I hold dear. Inspired by Herzl and many other Zionist thinkers, a grand vision of peoplehood, self-determination, and democratic values literally made the desert bloom. In the face of all the obstacles of the natural world and the opposition of bitter enemies, the Jewish people established their long-prophesied homeland. Their success serves as a powerful example to all marginalized peoples of what can be achieved through bold imagination, determined effort, and an unfettered will. Herzl himself would be awed by the miracle of modern-day Israel.

—DARIUS JONES
*founder and president of the
National Black Empowerment Council*

Israel Is Dangerously Polarized



ONE DAY in March 2022, I was on my way to a meeting in Jerusalem when a convoy of armored SUVs sped by, sirens blaring, bearing Naftali Bennett, then Israel's prime minister. As my taxi pulled back into the stream of traffic, I asked the driver what he thought of Bennett's coalition.

The coalition represented everyone in Israeli society, even including the United Arab List and excepting only the ultra-Orthodox. My driver clearly was not ultra-Orthodox.

So I was not prepared for what followed: Calm and level-headed just moments before, the driver was seized with fury. He proceeded to deliver a lengthy stream of expletives punctuated by allegations of treachery and threats of the firing squad. As it happened, by the end of the ride, he had regained his composure to the degree that he jotted down the name of my upcoming book so he could order it. It was, in some ways, a quintessential Israeli conversation.

Perhaps I should not have been surprised. After five elections in four years, the last decided by a mere 30,000 votes, one does not need a degree in political science to conclude that Israel is divided. Whether the split into pro- and anti-Bibi camps is a healthy manifestation of exuberant pluralism or the symptom of a dangerous and potentially unbridgeable polarization is the million-dollar question.

It might seem that Israel has been here before. The Altalena. German reparations. The Lebanon War. The Oslo Accords. Rabin's assassination. The disengagement from Gaza. All of these were painful episodes of internal strife that belie the fiction of a people ever-united in solidarity against their external foes. And yet something seems different this time. Previous divisions were, for the most part, over policy. The present rift is over who we are.

The unprecedented war of words between Israel's new justice minister, Yariv Levin, and Supreme Court President Justice Esther Hayut reveals more than a rupture between two branches of government. It exposes near-opposite conceptions of democracy itself. At a press conference on January 4, announcing a series of sweeping reforms to the Israeli judiciary, the justice minister lamented that "we go to the polls, we vote, we choose, but time and again, people we did not choose decide for us...this is not democracy!"

In her response one week later, the chief justice, quoting Ze'ev Jabotinsky, reminded her listeners, "Democracy means freedom. A government supported by a majority can also negate freedom. And in a place in which guarantees for individual freedom do not exist—democracy does not exist."

Democracy as majority rule. Democracy as limited government. According to the first view, judicial independence is a hindrance to the will of the people. According to the second, it is the last defense of liberty. This debate is not unique to Israel. But it has serious

implications for a nation that still relies on a mobilized citizenry in order to survive in a nasty neighborhood.

More worrying still is that Israel's vociferous debate over judicial reform—in theory a welcome sign of civic engagement—is a red herring. If that's right, the danger of the present moment lies less in the vehemence with which ideologues argue over optimal constitutional arrangements and more in the high-stakes struggle for power that lurks behind. A principled debate over the separation of powers can be settled by compromise. A competition for power may need to be decided by force.

The specifics of the judicial-reform plan are not what animates the protest movement in Israel today. It is the total import of the plan. From former Prime Minister Ehud Barak to former Defense Minister Moshe (Bogie) Ya'alon, the more influential leaders of the protest movement contend that the government plan amounts to a coup from above, designed to cement Benjamin Netanyahu's hold on power. Meanwhile, the plan's architects accuse the opposition of fomenting chaos and inciting rebellion in a bid to obtain by force what they failed to achieve at the ballot box.

Ya'alon, a sober ex-general and former leader of Likud, has repeatedly accused Netanyahu of plotting to establish a dictatorship. So, too, has former Minister of Justice Gidon Saar, once thought of as Netanyahu's anointed successor. In a recent TV interview, the former attorney general, Avichai Mandelblit, a conservative Netanyahu appointee who subsequently signed his indictment, predicted bloodshed. Knesset member Simcha Rothman, chairman of the Law, Constitution, and Justice Committee of the Knesset, responded that Mandelblit should be jailed for inciting violence. When the Movement for Quality of Government petitioned the Supreme Court to declare the prime minister "incapacitated"—unfit to serve owing to violations of his conflict-of-interest arrangement—seven coalition leaders issued a statement arguing that the very act of deliberating on this question amounted to an "illegal putsch that was no different than a

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military coup." Responding to all of this, President Herzog, usually restrained and statesmanlike, warned on February 12 that Israel is on the verge of "societal and constitutional collapse."

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Several weeks after that eventful conversation about the previous government, on Memorial Day, Bennett took the stage at a monument to fallen soldiers in Jerusalem and delivered an extraordinary speech before a gathering of bereaved families. He used the solemn occasion to ask how long a Jewish house divided against itself could stand.

"Unfortunately, our people are scarred by the gene of factionalism," he said. "This is the third time that a sovereign Jewish state exists here in the Land of Israel. The previous two times we failed to make it past the eighth decade. ... What a terrible price we paid: 2,000 years in miserable exile, under pogroms and humiliation and catastrophes—all because we succumbed ... to fraternal hate. Now, praise God, we have been granted a third opportunity. ... My brothers and sisters, there will not be another."

We prepare to celebrate Israel's 75th birthday under darkening

clouds. Over the last seven and a half decades, Israel, against all odds, has developed a remarkable formula for survival and prosperity in a dangerous region. That formula is complex, but at its core sits national solidarity around the idea of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. We have proved that we can defeat any external enemy or combination of enemies. If we are to beat the historical odds, and make it to 100 and beyond, we must now prove that we can vanquish the demon within. *



THE UNCEASING EMPHASIS ON QUESTIONING

Of all the miracles known to Jews — the burning bush, the parting of the waters, the rain of manna from the sky — the greatest of all was made not by God but by the mortals who envisioned a country out of only despair. A people who had hardly ever lived as equal citizens, or known a democracy, somehow created one. Centuries of separation from their homeland, and from one another, did not give rise to insuperable divisions among them. From Jerusalem to Babylon, opinions did diverge yet never caused a rift that led to a permanent rupture. The cure to sectarianism, it turns out, is a collective commitment to, and belief in, the importance of debate. It is in the unceasing emphasis on questioning, even quibbling over, ideas, if only to master the arts of tolerance and temperance.

Like the self, a nation contains multitudes, which it must harness in order to thrive. That is what the unbeliever Herzl did to persuade even the believers to answer his call and return to their Promised Land. Now, Israel stands at the threshold where America stood in 1838, when Lincoln reassured his Lyceum audience that America was no longer an undecided experiment. Israel, too, is a successful state whose gravest threat comes not from without, but from within. It comes from the “men of ambition” who, in pursuit of distinction or driven by zeal, may wish to tear down the glorious legacy of its founders and their principles. By reason and temperance, by unimpeachable morals, by keeping in sharp focus the memory of the suffering upon which the nation stands, and by committing to reduce the suffering of other nations, Israel can continue to be a lighthouse in a world that is increasingly imperiled by the tempest of extremism.

—ROYA HAKAKIAN

*author, among other books, of Journey from the Land of No:
A Girlhood Caught in Revolutionary Iran*

Israel Is a Democracy on the Brink



BY THE TIME this essay is published, it is entirely possible that the furious debate over Israel's judicial reform will have been resolved. Optimists take the view that there are good grounds for a compromise that maintains the independence of the judiciary but limits some of its current powers. And those who take the long view of Israeli history know that there have been other moments when Israel was thought to be threatened, teetering, nearing collapse, impossibly divided. What is happening today, they argue, is not altogether different from the intense divisions that Israel experienced in the wake of the first Lebanon War in the 1980s or after the signing of the Oslo Accords in the 1990s. Israel came through, and reports of Israeli democracy's imminent death proved much exaggerated.

This time is different. The current effort represents a confluence of interests among three forces in Israeli politics that are indifferent

to Israeli democracy, including one that is existentially hostile to it: corruption, fundamentalism, and settlement. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Shas leader Aryeh Deri, and their associates need a weakened judiciary because of their own legal troubles. The Haredi parties need a weakened judiciary to maintain the social distortion of their long-term draft evasion, labor nonparticipation, and welfare dependence. As to the third force: The settler movement is assaulting Israeli democracy not because of a narrow or temporary self-interest, but rather because it itself constitutes a complete reformulation of Jewish statehood in fundamentally non-democratic terms. It is now able to leverage the needs of a populist Right, an indicted prime minister, and a burgeoning but alienated Haredi minority for a much larger political project.



Historically, Israeli coalition governments, citing religious grounds, have exempted the Haredi minority from basic civic duties such as military service, core education, and paying their “fair share” of taxes. Haredi Jews' way of life, driven by their understanding of the requirements placed upon them by the Torah, was supportable when the entire Haredi community was barely 5 percent of the Israeli public. But to ask everyone else to continue to shoulder the burden is not sustainable with a Haredi minority that long surpassed 10 percent of the population and may be closing in on 20 percent.

This problem, serious though it is, doesn't compare with the one created by the powerful efforts of the settler movement to redefine Israeli public life—and Zionism itself—as a fundamentally undemocratic endeavor. For no democratic polity, even a “bare-boned” one, is compatible with the lifestyle the settlers have constructed for themselves on lands Israel conquered in a just war 56 years ago.

Today, a minority population of Jewish settlers—roughly 15 percent of the total population of the West Bank, although the exact number depends on whom and how one counts—enjoys a

first-world standard of living and all the privileges of Israeli citizenship amid a population that is overwhelmingly Arab, generally poorer, and almost universally hostile to its Jewish neighbors. The only way to maintain the status quo is to organize the public affairs of the territory in a manifestly nondemocratic way. The governance of the West Bank cannot be both Jewish and democratic.

The fundamentally undemocratic setting emerged from the “temporary” nature of an occupation at the end of a short war in a long conflict that has yet to be settled. Among the many ironies of five decades of Israeli settlement in the West Bank, one is that the formalization of separate regimes for the Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank emerged from the Oslo Accords in the 1990s, the most serious effort that the belligerent parties and the international community ever made to end the conflict and settle the final status of the territory. The complicated, variable juridical geometry of Areas A, B, and C was part of an interim agreement reached in 1995 under Oslo II, which was supposed to be superseded within five years by a final-status agreement that was never reached. As a result, a temporary five-year arrangement — a temporariness located inside an even greater temporariness of Israel’s occupation-not-annexation of 1967 — remains the law of the land.

The idea that animated the settlement enterprise in its early days was that Israel could somehow be exported to the newly conquered territories. Placing civilians there would allow Israel to adjust the 1949 armistice lines in a later negotiation and make some additional land — to which it had a genuine claim and that it had conquered in a war it hadn’t sought — part of Israel itself. But this “export” fantasy stopped seeming realistic to Israeli policymakers by the 1980s. What replaced it is a more sinister “import” fantasy. The settlement enterprise, particularly since the interim accords of 1995, has its own rules, its own unwritten constitution. And its goal today is not to export Israel to the conquered territories: It is to import the Jewish Ascendancy regime of the West Bank into Israel generally.

For many of Israel’s critics, Israel’s self-definition as a Jewish and

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democratic state is a hopeless contradiction. But a Jewish state can be a democracy and have a Star of David on its flag, just as Britain’s Union Jack invokes the crosses of St. George, St. Andrew, and St. Patrick, the Christian patron saints of England, Scotland, and Ireland, respectively. It can have Hebrew as its official language, Jewish festivals as national holidays, and a Law of Return, just as other nation-states established on the lands of collapsing empires have religious festivals incorporated into their national calendars and immigration laws for diaspora communities.

The settlements’ present arrangements, however, cannot survive in a democratic polity. Nor, ultimately, can the present arrangements that govern the relationship between the Haredim, now that they are more than a small minority and growing quickly, and the State of Israel.



This is what weakening Israel’s liberal-democratic institutions and practices is really about. I think everyone knows this, even if it’s easier to rile up passions about the prime minister’s corruption trial. You don’t get tens of thousands of mostly comfortable middle-class

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people out on the street week after week protesting a change in the procedure for appointing judges. You don't get people out protesting any policy change at all if they believe they can reverse it in the next election. What has brought out the thousands and the hundreds of thousands is the fear that they won't get this chance.

If the reforms go through as proposed at the time of this writing, the current government will be able to make it difficult for Arabs to vote and for left-wing parties to organize. They will be able to gut the public broadcaster and otherwise rig the system in their favor. The governing coalition has already made unsuccessful attempts to subvert previously independent bodies such as the Central Bureau of Statistics and the National Library. A cabinet minister tweeted against the independence of the Bank of Israel, and coalition lawmakers have made proposals to place the Central Election Commission under the control of the governing coalition and even to delay the next scheduled election by one year — as well as severely limiting the right of organized labor to strike.

With a politically dominated High Court, such initiatives will succeed, and the electoral path to defeating the right-wing coalition will be sealed off. Once that has happened, the situation of Israel's Arab citizens will surely get worse, together with that of every other vulnerable group. What will follow is what always follows in such a situation: growing terrorism, a counterinsurgency, a steady downgrade in Israeli standards of living as the middle-class backbone that has made Israel rich steadily departs — and, of course, the erosion of American support.

It's a vicious circle. Preventing it requires defeating the judicial reforms. The way to do that is to pass a Basic Law on Legislation that lays out a clear hierarchy of constitutional statutes in relation to ordinary law and creates a reasonable procedure for the amendment of existing Basic Laws and the creation of new ones.

What does reasonable mean? Referendums encourage populist enthusiasm. Supermajorities put veto power into the hands of powerful minorities. Better would be a rule that any Basic Law legislation must pass two consecutive parliaments. This is sometimes referred to as a "fourth reading," as we have three readings of legislation today. Something similar exists in Sweden. Allowing the general public to register its input in the general election by intervening between the third and fourth readings would ensure the defeat of any constitutional change that lacks broad support, because its presence on the legislative horizon would alter the result of the election.

That said, no one should think this is the end of the matter. Today, the alleged or actual crimes of Benjamin Netanyahu and Aryeh Deri and the desire of the growing Haredi population to gut the powers of the Court have created a marriage of convenience between these two parties and the settler movement.

Netanyahu's trial will end in a verdict at some point, and he will, in one way or another, eventually depart from the political scene. The status quo between Haredim and the rest of society reflects a massive social-bargaining failure, but a new social bargain will eventually be struck: some kind of national service, with moderate steps to break the socially enforced poverty trap.

It's the settler movement, which cannot survive over the long term in a Jewish democracy, but that surely will not survive at all without one next to it, that we need to worry about.

Israelis can see the kind of society that the reforms are really just the first step in trying to create. We can see it already, just a few miles from where we make our homes. And in Hawara a few weeks ago, we saw it even nearer, in all its horror. For all our

justifiable fears about our enemies in the conflict, and for all our anger at the world's dishonest descriptions of our country, it's a vision the overwhelming majority of Israelis do not want to see become a reality. *



SHINING A LIGHT ON A DARKENING WORLD

Israel should not claim to be a “light unto the nations,” any more than Jews should claim to be the “chosen people.” These claims of exceptionalism invite the application of a double standard, which has long been weaponized against Israel and the Jewish people. The central goal of Zionism, after all, was to *normalize* the Jewish people.

At the same time, the Jewish state has, through its behavior, earned the right to be deemed a light unto the nations. But that is an encomium that others should apply to it.

Consider the challenges faced in the creation of the state after two millennia of dispersion and wandering. Jews lacked a common culture, ethnicity, and language. They shared only a religion, a language of prayer, and an ancient history.

In Israel, the Jewish people developed a new culture, modernized the language, and adapted to their different ethnicities. Having barely survived genocide, they beat back invaders and developed a powerful military. Beginning as an agrarian economy, they developed into a world-class, start-up nation.

Israel is still a work in progress. But no nation—including the United States, which was a slaveholding republic for its first 89 years—has contributed more to the world in its first 75 years than Israel. And despite facing threats to its survival, it has maintained a high, if imperfect, standard of civil liberties, human rights, and adherence to the rule of law.

Israel deserves to be commended, not condemned, by the nations for shining a light on a darkening world.

—ALAN DERSHOWITZ,
author, most recently, of Get Trump: The Threat to Civil Liberties, Due Process, and Our Constitutional Rule of Law

Israel Is Missing a Strong Left



As I write, protesters fill the streets. Hundreds of thousands of people, from young children to 90-year-old veterans of Israel's War of Independence, are rallying to stop what the government describes as judicial "reform," although it's a revolution that, if successful, would shred Israel's democracy.

The protests have continued for months now, creating scenes Israel has never seen before. Combat pilots violently arrested merely for participation. Police using stun grenades against peaceful protesters in the center of Tel Aviv. So many sectors participating in protests for the first time, after being silent for so many years: businesspeople, tech entrepreneurs, medical doctors, teachers, and many others.

More and more citizens understand that this is a defining moment for our country. The changes Netanyahu and his government desire look similar to what we have recently seen in Hungary and Poland. They are a ruthless and astonishingly swift attempt to bring our independent Supreme Court under political control and,

in parallel, to pass legislation that would bend Israeli democracy to religious rule, threatening the rights of Israeli Arabs, women, and the LGBT community. Only two months from the creation of this government, Israel is in complete chaos.

How did this happen? Just a year ago, politicians of almost every conviction collaborated to create a government that would distance Netanyahu from power and stabilize democracy. To be sure, it was a painful compromise for all. The Left had to put up with Naftali Bennett—once a right-wing extremist who opposed the two-state solution—as prime minister, despite his heading a party that won just six seats. For Bennett's supporters, collaboration with the Left and with the Arab parties he opposed so strongly was all but unthinkable. But we all saw the growing divisions and the apparent impossibility of political agreement. So it was a moment of hope: Politicians can sometimes do the right thing.

It ended like the slow-motion trainwreck of one's nightmares. Bennett's party members dropped out one after the other, following protests and threats to their families. The Left could not resolve its internal rivalries. The Arab parties declined to save the government from collapse (to be fair, they were hardly courted), risking the possibility that Itamar Ben-Gvir, an outspoken racist, would become minister of national security. The government's achievements were forgotten as Israel went to its fifth election round in three years.

Democracies don't generally fall apart loudly or at once. It's a long process, in which people get used to small changes, each of which hardly affects their day-to-day lives—until they suddenly find themselves shorn of basic freedoms, strangers in their own homeland. Here, the process took over a decade. Some would say its roots were always present. After all, when has balancing democracy for all with the obvious need for a Jewish homeland not been a central tension of Israeli life and a prominent subject of discussion? Now add in conflict with Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, living at different times under different degrees of Israeli control. Is it surprising that, eventually, the "discussion" would arrive at the brink of war?

As in most threatened democracies, one of our main problems is that only one side follows the rules of the democratic game, while the other side is willing to crush it for its own benefit. The settlers, seeking to make a two-state solution impossible, use both legal and illegal strategies. They build illegal outposts and force the government to provide supporting infrastructure in return for political support. They divert money secretly from the state budget to develop the settlements, and they fund NGOs that support their mission. Their religious leadership openly expresses its loathing of democratic institutions: “If you are violent, inconsiderate, and just bring the government to its knees, you will succeed,” said Itzhak Shadmi, head of one of Jerusalem’s municipal committees, insisting on the primacy of their idea of religious values over the human rights of Palestinians. Appalled by Ariel Sharon’s 2005 “disengagement” from the Gaza Strip, the settlement leadership changed strategy: Territorial expansion would now be accompanied by becoming a political power that no government could live without.

Netanyahu did little to oppose disengagement. But much has changed since. Most important, his personal freedom is threatened by the corruption allegations. At various times a supporter or an opponent of a two-state solution, Netanyahu has only one “ideology” now: survival. A year ago, he wouldn’t be photographed with Ben-Gvir. Today, Ben-Gvir’s interest in weakening the justice system dovetails perfectly with his own interests.

Four rounds of voting did not grant Netanyahu a majority. The day following the fifth round in November, he moved quickly to ensure the narrative would be about a clear-cut win: “The majority” of Israelis supported him, and, in the name of that “majority,” he would push for reform—the reform he needed.

Actually, Netanyahu’s Likud Party won only 23 percent of the vote. His coalition was utterly dependent on the ultra-Orthodox

Democracies don’t generally fall apart loudly or at once. It’s a long process, in which people get used to small changes.

parties and the ultra-extreme Ben-Gvir, a dedicated follower of Meir Kahane, who was banned from parliament by both Right and Left 40 years ago for inciting racism. Ben-Gvir himself has been convicted of eight charges, including supporting terrorist organizations. This time, in a campaign that targeted young voters and focused on security, he blurred his controversial past and gained unprecedented support. He could demand of Netanyahu whatever he wanted, including control of the police.

The gap between a Netanyahu coalition and an anti-Netanyahu coalition was 30,000 votes. The results would have been entirely different had it not been for the Left’s failure to come together. In a situation in which Israel’s four-seat threshold determines the result, elections are won by coalition-building beforehand. Netanyahu dedicated his efforts to making sure his coalition wouldn’t lose a seat. On the center-Left, the opposite happened: Labor and Meretz stubbornly refused to unite.

In all the other rounds, whether they would unite was a source of drama and anxiety. Every time, however, something saved them at the last minute—at one point, I gave up my own seat in parliament to guarantee the union under a new name (“The Democratic Union”). In the fifth round, competing separately, Meretz failed to pass the threshold. Labor just made it, with the lowest-ever result of what used to be the founding party of Israel.

About a quarter of a million votes that would have denied Netanyahu a majority were lost. All of this was predictable and preventable, making the failure genuinely traumatic. So

concludes the tragedy of the Left: 20 years of drifting away from its public, holding on to a famous history instead of focusing on the future.



A union, many of us thought, would be a fresh start: the construction of a democratic camp fighting for peace, equality, and liberal values. Such a fresh start was urgently needed. Netanyahu's presentation of a distorted image of the Left—unpatriotic, anti-Jewish—succeeded because, as his victim, the Left offered an apology that, with repetition, came to seem like an admission of guilt. Steadily, the Left abandoned its values as new leaders sought to get closer to the Right, to become “legitimate.” Instead of fighting, the Left folded its ideological tents, giving up on a two-state solution, trading its social values for neoliberal rhetoric, barely challenging the status quo. Nature abhors a political vacuum, so centrist parties emerged—parties that positioned themselves as almost nonpolitical, a bridge between the radicalized (they claimed) of both Left and Right. They offered liberal-democratic values but avoided clear ideological commitments, targeting an old-Left constituency that despaired of its leadership's failures. They succeeded. As a result, the Right did indeed radicalize—but the Left simply disappeared.

Today, Netanyahu, for the first time, has almost everything he has sought since his loss to Ehud Barak in 1999. He controls parliament and most of the media; his third target, the justice system, is on the verge of a takeover. But the price he paid was not part of the plan. Trapped in the hands of Ben-Gvir and his like, he knows he needs to comply with their every caprice, including the dimming of the jewel in Israel's democratic crown: the military. This trap will only deepen, risking Netanyahu's government and legacy.

It is time for the opposition to do what it has been avoiding: restart. The protesters have no defined leadership, but everyone

sees that they are Israel's real leaders today. The courage of Israel's civil society, a hundred steps ahead of its political leadership, is inspiring. There are good, decent politicians in the leadership of the Left, but the lack of a shared strategy and political infrastructure makes them impotent. For years, they have been invested in responding to the Right's narrative rather than in building their own ideological outposts. Most damningly, they have lacked pride in their values and the courage that goes with it—the ideological spark that would prove to their potential supporters that they are willing to fight for them.

The Left must build a new ideological structure that is fully democratic and entirely transparent. It must reach out to younger Israelis—Arabs as well as Jews—to rebuild the trust it has squandered. It must develop the courage to talk about the issues the media now mock—subjects as old as peace and as new as climate. Leaders do not follow the crowd. They convince it of the power and potential of their ideas. This simple fact has been forgotten, and it must be revived.



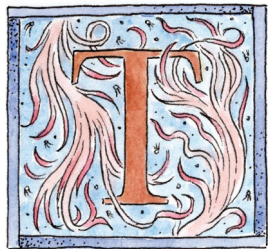
I'm not delusional: This crisis might mean the end of everything we believed in for so long. Many Israelis may decide they can no longer live here. But I'm also an optimist. And for the very many who believe this is our only home, there's no other option. The courage of Israeli society pouring into the streets—its will to fight and its obvious willingness to sacrifice for the future—convinces me that we can create a Jewish and democratic future of which we may once again be proud. *

PART THREE

ISRAEL,
PAST & FUTURE



Israel Is a World Power



THE most striking geopolitical fact about Israel on its 75th birthday is its power.

For most of its modern history, the Jewish state was a place where symbolism was almost always much larger than reality. Outsiders thought the country was more powerful than it really was,

and that it took up more space on the map than it actually did. Admirers, such as the philosopher Eric Hoffer, maintained that the fate of the free world depended upon its fortunes. Bigots blamed Israel for global terrorism, oil shortages, and the absence of peace in the Middle East. I once heard a European politician say that if only the Israeli–Arab conflict could be resolved, it might also be possible to tackle climate change. He wasn’t joking.

Things have changed. Israel is no longer a plucky little country using its wits to punch above its weight. Now, it’s a country with weight.

In 1950, Israel had just 1.2 million people. Today, the population is just shy of 10 million, demographically in the mid-tier of nations. It has the highest fertility rate of any developed nation—roughly three live births per woman, compared with 1.6 in the United States and 0.8 in South Korea. Israel’s gross domestic product has grown by more than 200 percent since the turn of the century and approaches a half-trillion dollars. It receives more foreign-direct investment than the U.K. and has a higher GDP per capita than Japan. Until recently, Israel was wholly dependent on energy imports. Now, it’s a significant natural-gas exporter. This year, it also began exporting oil.

In 1967, Israel went to war against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria using British Centurion tanks and American Hawk anti-aircraft missiles. Now, Britain equips its Challenger tanks with Israel’s Trophy protective systems while the U.S. defends its air base in Guam with Israel’s Iron Dome. Unit 8200 is second only to America’s National Security Agency in signals intelligence; the Mossad is second to none in intelligence itself. Formerly hostile states, such as Greece, have come to see the economic and diplomatic benefits of good relations with Israel; other states, such as Turkey and Sudan, have accepted their strategic necessity.

In 2015, Benjamin Netanyahu openly challenged a sitting U.S. president over his foreign-policy agenda—and wound up getting his way. Five years later, much of the Arab–Israeli conflict came to an end with the signing of the Abraham Accords. Jordan depends on Israel for fresh water. Egypt depends on Israel for reconnaissance of the Sinai. Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Arab world depend on Israel for fighting and sabotaging Iran.

Palestinians may have won the battle for hearts and minds on college campuses and some editorial pages. They are losing the battle of priorities and attention spans in the world’s foreign ministries, including those of the Arab League.

None of this is to say that Israel’s challenges—foreign, domestic, and in-between—aren’t grave. Other contributors to this issue

of SAPIR address them at length. But what Israel's newfound power means is that it has strategic options it could hardly have contemplated a decade ago. What are they, and how should Israel make the best use of them? That's our subject here.

One possibility: Israel could squander its power.

As of this writing, in March 2023, it's a prospect on many minds, thanks to the most unnecessary crisis in Israeli history. Whatever the merits of judicial reform, it was not a top priority for most Israeli voters when they narrowly returned Netanyahu to office — hoping, instead, for administrative competence, domestic security, foreign-policy gravitas, sound economic management, a focus on Iran. No matter how the crisis is resolved, it is a painful reminder that the fratricidal political tendencies that undid ancient Israel are not entirely a thing of the past. And even if the resolution to the crisis comes swiftly and peacefully, it is also a necessary reminder that power can beget not just confidence but overconfidence, leading to political, diplomatic, economic, and military stumbles and long-term decline.

The point should be clear: Israel's power derives, above all, from deep internal cohesion. A boisterous but ultimately brotherly nation, in which argument leads to fresh thinking, fruitful compromise, and a unified front in the face of common dangers, will enhance that power. A suspicious and vindictive nation, in which political competition becomes a zero-sum game, will destroy it.

But will Israel really tear itself to pieces, lose its freedoms, turn into something unrecognizable to its friends?

Maybe, but I doubt it. Israelis have gone through similar periods of crisis and seemingly unbridgeable division before, particularly after the Oslo Accords. "There's a great deal of ruin in a nation," said Adam Smith, sometime after British forces were routed at the Battle of Saratoga. His point was that, even in the face of

What if democratic values cease to be adequately defended by the powerful nations of the West? How should Israel survive and thrive in a post-Pax Americana world?

foreign or domestic debacles, countries have a way of bouncing back. Britain recovered from the catastrophic loss of its most important colonies and went on to dominate the 19th century. Israel, I expect, will survive this.

What are the other possibilities? I see two. The first is what might be called enhanced incrementalism. The second is radical reorientation. The wisdom of the first approach rests on the premise that Israel has time on its side. The wisdom of the second rests on the premise that it doesn't.

Regarding the first option: Ever since Israel prevailed in the second intifada (while failing to defeat Hezbollah in the Second Lebanon War), its de facto strategy has been to achieve decisive ends by gradual means, to shift the balance of power without provoking a crisis. In many ways, the approach has been astonishingly successful.

Against Tehran's nuclear programs, Israel has forgone an Osirak-style attack in favor of a policy of continual sabotage. Against Tehran's regional ambitions, it has adopted an attritional approach of attacking Iranian targets without triggering all-out war. Against Hamas, it has sought to degrade the group's capabilities without seeking outright victory. Against Hezbollah, it has adopted a policy of deterrence for the sake of a quiet northern border.

In other areas, Israel has given up on trying to solve the Palestinian issue and instead managed to cauterize it as it pursues

diplomatic openings in the wider Arab world. Its growing economic clout has helped improve ties from Japan to India to Greece to Turkey. Relations with the United States have had their ups and downs in the last decade (as they did in previous decades), but American secretaries of state are clearly more reluctant now to wag a finger at Jerusalem and tell it what it must do, as they used to when Henry Kissinger or James Baker or John Kerry was in charge.

What could “enhanced incrementalism” look like going forward? A brief list of possibilities:

- A respectful partnership between Jerusalem and Washington, marked by deep military and economic ties rather than the patron-client relationship of old. The next 10-year U.S. military assistance package to Israel would be its last.
- A combination of continued sanctions on, and sabotage of, the Iranian regime, until it collapses in the face of a major popular revolt.
- A Saudi-Israeli peace agreement, cemented by a security-cooperation pact in which Jerusalem supplies Riyadh with UAVs and other advanced capabilities, and an oil pipeline runs from Abqaiq to Ashdod. The agreement could be accompanied by an end to the Arab League boycott.
- A long-term interim agreement with the Palestinians, based on renunciation of the right of return and the end of Hamas rule in Gaza, with conditions-based steps toward a demilitarized Palestinian state.
- A \$1 trillion GDP by 2035—hardly inconceivable, since GDP today is approximately double what it was 12 years ago.
- At least one Israeli university ranked among the top 30 universities worldwide. The goal could be met sooner if the Israeli government permitted some private funding for its public universities, and philanthropists agreed to endow

500 new professorships in Israel, with salaries large enough to attract the cream of global academia.

The specifics here are less important than the way in which the goals would be achieved: by staying on trend, doing more of the same, pushing slightly harder toward a plausible and desirable result. If, in fact, time is on Israel’s side, its approach should be to kick the cans of crises—whether Iranian nuclearization or demands for a Palestinian state—down the road while steadily bolstering its economic, military, demographic, and diplomatic strength.

What it chiefly depends upon, beyond a return to relative political stability in Israel, is a relatively stable and predictable global order, in which events such as the war in Ukraine don’t escalate and the United States remains fully engaged in the world’s affairs as the preeminent liberal-democratic power.

Unfortunately, that assumption is no longer safe. The Jewish state, born in the same year as the Truman Doctrine, has mostly lived in the protective shadow of the Pax Americana. But what if democratic values cease to be adequately defended by the powerful nations of the West? How should Israel survive and thrive in a post-Pax Americana world?

It won’t be simple. After Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Israel attempted to maintain a posture of rough neutrality in an effort not to alienate Moscow, which controls parts of Syrian airspace. But Jerusalem’s conspicuous caution didn’t stop the Kremlin from seeking to dissolve the Jewish Agency in Russia or establishing a dangerous military alliance with Tehran. Nor did it do much to impress Ukrainians, whose battlefield successes are crucial to the broader effort to diminish, defeat, and ultimately dismantle the Moscow-Tehran-Beijing axis.

Similarly, Israel’s courtship of Saudi Arabia did not stop the kingdom from reestablishing diplomatic ties with Iran, with

What matters most is the motto — which should be an emblem for not only Israel’s most elite special forces but also the country as a whole — ‘Who dares, wins.’

China serving as midwife. It’s too soon to tell whether the deal constitutes a limited attempt at de-escalation or, more ominously, a major geopolitical realignment, with Beijing replacing Washington as the region’s foreign hegemon. But — as with Russia — it’s a stark reminder that Israel will never find trustworthy partnerships with capricious autocrats, even those professing to want better relations.

Worse may yet be to come. Riyadh wants “civilian” nuclear reactors, which is the usual route to nuclear weapons. If Saudi Arabia goes nuclear, will Turkey be far behind? In Egypt, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has now been in power for nearly a decade and shows no signs of paving the way for a successor. But his Israel-friendly country is increasingly repressive and in dismal economic shape, raising doubts about his regime’s longevity. Palestinians appear to be close to another intifada, the future of the Palestinian Authority is in doubt, and Mahmoud Abbas is 87. Who picks up the pieces, and how, when the first erupts, the second collapses, and the third dies?

Then there is Iran, where the regime appears to have survived months of protest while crossing the red line of uranium enrichment that Netanyahu famously drew at the UN General Assembly in 2012. The prospect of American military action against Tehran appears distant, and effective Israeli action increasingly difficult. Will Jerusalem simply accept the logic

of M.A.D. — mutual assured destruction — with a regime that often shows signs of being, quite simply, mad?

What, then, should Israel do to prepare for this kind of world? Let me first say a word about what it should *not* do if it wishes to succeed.

Israel will fail if it cannot harness its various “tribes” for the benefit of the whole country. The current crisis has animated, and profoundly alienated, the secular tribe — the tribe that is largely the reason for Israel’s economic success, technological prowess, and cultural vibrancy. The historian Walter Russell Mead put the matter well this spring when he noted that, just as David Ben-Gurion “found a way for religious Jews to flourish even as the secular majority dominated” Israel in its early years, Netanyahu must ensure that “liberal Jews feel confident that the state of Israel will remain a country they live in and love.”

Israel must also eschew a policy of degraded realism: one that says that in a world in which Israel will be condemned no matter what, it should pursue its interests without regard for moral considerations. Israel’s self-respect — expressed by doctrines such as the IDF’s “purity of arms” — is not an expensive vanity. It’s a strategic asset, particularly now, when the most successful Israelis have viable exit options and can take their families, capital, enterprise, and ideas elsewhere. It’s yet another reason for the Jewish state not to become too cozy with illiberal regimes with which its realpolitik interests overlap.

What Israel *can* do is prepare, impress, and surprise. This is “radical reorientation.”

Prepare: As recently as the mid-1990s, Israel spent more than 10 percent of its GDP on the military. (In the 1970s, the figure was north of 30 percent.) It now hovers around 5 percent — high by Western standards, and more than it used to spend in absolute terms, thanks to economic growth. But that still means a relatively small military budget of about \$24 billion, less than Iran’s

and half that of South Korea's. The war in Ukraine has shown that future wars may be protracted affairs that do not play to Israel's high-tech strengths and low tolerance for casualties. Will Israel be ready for a long war against Iran and its proxies in which Tehran — prepared as it is to sacrifice vastly more people — might be able to count on greater support from Beijing than Jerusalem can count on from Washington? The time to start thinking about the scenario, which may be 10 years off, is right now.

Impress: Israel did not achieve its recent diplomatic inroads because it made territorial concessions to Palestinians, or because its former adversaries became philosemitic. On the contrary, it did so because it proved itself a winner — the “strong horse” in the parlance of Mideast politics. It showed that it could produce results obtainable nowhere else: effective military and intelligence operations against Iran; one-of-a-kind technologies, particularly in the realms of defense and espionage; a willingness not to bend to outside pressure, including from the United States. In a world in which Israel may not be able to rely on external help in moments of grave crisis (as it did during the Yom Kippur War or the hyperinflation of the 1980s), Israeli governments will need to demonstrate that the country rarely stumbles and routinely outperforms. If the judicial-review crisis of 2023 proves to be a foretaste of Israeli politics over the next several years, the strategic ramifications will be severe. Nobody respects a loser.

Surprise: Israel has repeatedly shown that it is able fundamentally to shift expectations about what is possible. It did so 75 years ago by prevailing in the War of Independence. It did it again with the capture of Eichmann; the swift triumph of the Six-Day War; the raid on Entebbe; the Camp David Accords; the elimination of nuclear threats from Iraq in 1981 and Syria in 2007; Netanyahu's 2015 speech to Congress about the Iran nuclear deal; the heist of Iran's nuclear secrets and the assassination of its top

Israel will get through this season of political crisis: When nations find themselves staring into the abyss, they tend to recoil.

nuclear scientist. These against-the-odds successes aren't simply a part of Israeli lore and pride. They are a demonstration that a resourceful democracy can take the initiative against hard odds; that political life needn't be governed solely by inertia, bureaucracy, political haggling, and crisis. That sense of bold surprise will be even more necessary in a world of diffident democracies, assertive autocracies, and global disorder.

Some of the surprises Israel could spring are easily guessed. The manner of them isn't. What matters most is the motto — which should be an emblem for not only Israel's most elite special forces but also the country as a whole — “Who dares, wins.”



I wrote earlier that I think it likely that Israel will get through this season of political crisis: When nations find themselves staring into the abyss, they tend to recoil. It's entirely possible, too, that Israel will manage to avoid the parade of horrors I've listed above. Maybe the brave demonstrators in Iran will succeed in toppling the regime. Maybe Russia will be defeated in Ukraine, boosting the moral confidence of the West and causing other dictatorships to rethink their aggressive designs. Maybe a fruitful peace between Israel and its new Mideast partners will cause Palestinians to choose moderation and pragmatism for themselves as well. If they do, I'm confident that Israel will be secure enough — and wise enough — to meet the moment.

But the world may be headed in a very different direction, forcing younger Israelis to learn, as generations of Jews have learned before them, what it truly means to confront existential risk at a national level. The good news for this generation is that they face the challenge with powers their forebears could only dream of. *

March 14, 2023



TO RECOGNIZE AND REALIZE INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

Israel sits today at the intersection of three challenges. There is the challenge to her internal resiliency, to her relations as a nation-state with global Jewry, and to her standing as an equal member in the family of nations. It's a moment that asks her citizens to recognize and realize individual and collective responsibility within a Jewish national framework; to determine a vibrant Jewish national character without curtailing the freedom of any of her citizens; to connect with and reflect universal principles from a clear place of a particular identity.

We live at a time when virtual clamor fuels and is fueled by real-world events. It is critical to diagnose root causes rather than react to symptoms. Israel's Declaration of Independence provides a compass for our nation-building journey. After millennia of exile and persecution, we are at a miraculous moment of return for the Jews, an archetypal indigenous people, to our ancestral homeland. We are also committed to equality for all our citizens. We must continue our generation's role in this historic effort, recognizing Israel's imperfections as we celebrate her accomplishments.

We face these triple challenges with a triple commitment. First, anchored in the values and principles of our founding document, we bind ourselves to the responsibility to diagnose and heal internal difficulties. Second, we aim to strengthen our relationship with global Jewry. And third, we aspire to stand proudly among other nations in a fractured world. Our principles are our light unto our own nation and to others, as we continue our journey to fulfill our mission and renew our hope — our Hatikvah — actively and courageously.

—MICHAL COTLER-WUNSH

former member of the Knesset for the Blue and White Party

Israel Is Antiracist, Anti-Colonialist, Anti-Fascist (and Was from the Start)



WHO CONTROLS the present controls the past. Who controls the past controls the future.”

The famous line, from George Orwell’s *1984*, could equally apply to the study of Middle Eastern history—and much other history—in academia today. Ideologically motivated professors have sought to impose a version of events on 1948, the year in which Israel was founded (and *1984* was mostly written), that doesn’t square with the facts. And they have done so with the purpose of trying to take control of the future by shaping a public understanding of Israel as a product of neocolonialist, American imperialism.

As I detail in my book *Israel’s Moment*, nothing could be further from the truth. If we are serious about challenging the current

anti-Israel narrative on college campuses, and in think tanks, newspaper editorial pages, and other agenda-setting institutions, we need to recall the modern, secular nature of the founding Zionist generation and correct the record.

What is the real truth of Israel’s founding, particularly when it comes to the foreign actors who supported it?

Fundamentally, it is this: The Jewish state was the project of the anti-fascist, antiracist, anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist *Left*, including the Soviet Union. Decision-makers in the American and British foreign-policy establishment were almost overwhelmingly hostile to Israel’s creation, with the important but qualified exception of President Harry Truman and second-rank advisers such as Clark Clifford. Had it been up to the British Foreign Office or the U.S. State and Defense Departments and the CIA—the usual malefactors of Western imperialism—the Jewish state would have been stillborn.

These facts now lie largely forgotten or concealed, not just by Israel’s usual critics on the far-Left but also by many of its champions on the center-Left and center-Right, who overstate the extent of Truman’s support and minimize the Soviet contribution. In fact, while the American foreign-policy bureaucracy was unable to persuade Truman to withhold support for the establishment of Israel, they were able to maintain his support for a “neutral” UN arms embargo from November 1947 through May 1948, which they expected would either prevent Israel from coming into being or destroy it in its infancy. Their neutral embargo wasn’t neutral at all: The Jews had neither a state nor arms to defend it; the Arab states surrounding it had both. As David Ben-Gurion told the first U.S. ambassador to Israel: The Jews would have been exterminated had they depended on the United States for their survival.

Why was the American bureaucracy so adamantly against the Zionist project in 1947? Contrary to current myth, opposition was

never merely the view of the State Department's "Arabists." It was adopted by both Secretary of State George Marshall and George Kennan, both of whom viewed a Jewish state in Palestine as a threat to American and Western access to Arab oil and a boost to prospects for Soviet expansion in the Middle East. This was the year in which the United States, in close cooperation with Great Britain, was promoting a policy of containment of Communism in Europe and the Middle East. Soviet-bloc support for the Zionists deepened British and American suspicions that a Jewish state would serve the interests of Soviet expansion in the Middle East. As the State Department's "Palestine Files" of 1945 to 1949 demonstrate, U.S. and U.K. intelligence officials worried that a good number of European Jewish refugees who got to Palestine would become Communist agents.

Marshall appointed Kennan as the first director of the Policy Planning Staff in January 1947. Kennan is well-known as the author of important memos arguing for containment of Soviet expansionism. His role in forming the American position on a Jewish state is less well-known. In his "Report by the Policy Planning Staff on Position of the United States with Respect to Palestine" in January 1948, Kennan wrote that support for the UN Partition Plan would damage American interests in the region and constitute "a serious threat to the success of the Marshall Plan," because of threats to the flow of oil to Europe.

Furthermore, Kennan added, "the USSR stands to gain by the Partition Plan if it should be implemented by force," because of the opportunity thus afforded to the Russians to assist in "maintaining order" in Palestine. Soviet forces in Palestine would provide Communist agents with an excellent base from which to extend their subversive activities and attempt to replace the Arab governments with "democratic peoples' governments." It was a defining text of the anti-Zionist consensus at the top of the U.S. national-security establishment.

What did the U.S. want instead? In March 1948, Warren Austin, the U.S. ambassador to the UN, urged the United Nations to replace

The Jewish state was the project of the anti-fascist, antiracist, anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist Left, including the Soviet Union. Decision-makers in the American and British foreign-policy establishment were almost overwhelmingly hostile to Israel's creation.

the Partition Plan with a trusteeship proposal that would preclude a Jewish state in Palestine. An angry, undermined President Truman brought Palestine policy into the White House. But Truman was the exception in his own administration — an anti-Communist who believed that supporting the new State of Israel was compatible with containing the Soviet Union.

Marshall's State Department could see that containing the Soviet Union required support from the non- and anti-Communist Left: the British Labour Party, French and Italian Socialists, West German Social Democrats. But what he and the British Foreign Office could or would not see was that the Zionists of Ben-Gurion's generation overwhelmingly shared the political convictions of these Left-of-center leaders. They were not at all sympathetic to Soviet Communism. Clifford made this case: Israel would be an asset and an ally, not a liability or an opponent. But his argument went unheeded outside the White House.

On May 29, 1949, after the UN General Assembly voted to offer membership to Israel, Truman agreed to send a letter to Ben-Gurion drafted by the State Department. "Given [America's] generous support to the creation of Israel," it asserted, Israel should consider American criticisms of its policies on territorial issues and refugees,

criticisms that could foster a reassessment of the U.S. policy toward Israel.” Ben-Gurion explained to James McDonald, Truman’s ambassador to Israel, that the only thing that made it possible for the Jews to fight and win the War of Independence was circumventing extensive British, American, and ultimately UN efforts to prevent military assistance from arriving in Palestine and later in Israel. McDonald summarized Ben-Gurion’s objections to the American pressure thus:

Prime Minister unable recall any strong action by U.S. or UN enforce November 29 or prevent aggression by Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, and Iraq. Instead, embargo encouraged aggressors against Israel whose very existence was in danger. Had Jews waited on U.S. or UN they would have been exterminated. Israel was established not on basis November 29 but on that of successful war of defense. Hence note’s suggestion is today unjust and unrealistic for it ignores war and continued Arab threats which make November 29 boundaries impossible.

Fortunately for the Zionists, Moscow and its allies were their enthusiastic supporters.

They provided support for Jewish immigration to Palestine before the 1947 vote. Andrei Gromyko, then the Soviet ambassador to the UN, stunned his listeners by speaking vigorously in May 1947 in support of the Partition Resolution. Soviet support continued through the Resolution’s passage in November. It persisted in the teeth of American and British efforts to reverse the Resolution in 1948, most significantly by encouraging delivery of military supplies to Israel via Czechoslovakia in 1948. Moscow also strongly opposed the plan of Swedish diplomat Folke Bernadotte to establish a federal union between an Arab and Jewish state, internationalize Jerusalem, repatriate the Palestinians who had fled the fighting, give the Negev Desert to Transjordan, and turn Haifa into a free port—all of which

would have rewarded Arab rejectionism, reduced the new “union” in size, and denied the Jewish people a state of their own.

Nor did support for Israel come only from the Soviet bloc. Liberals and leftists in London, Paris, New York, and Washington heard Jamal Husseini, the representative of the Arab Higher Committee to the United Nations, reject a Jewish state in Palestine, because, he said, it would undermine the “racial homogeneity” of the Arab world. Such remarks resonated in a profoundly negative fashion with Americans who had followed the appalling news out of Germany during and after the war. In the Senate, Robert Wagner, a major author of New Deal legislation, extolled the Jewish contribution to the Allied cause. He had already denounced appeasement of the Arabs during the war. With the Allied victory, continuing to appease Arab rejectionism surely made no sense. In the House, Democratic Congressman Emanuel Celler of Brooklyn led efforts to focus attention on Jamal Husseini’s cousin, Haj Amin al-Husseini, the grand mufti of Jerusalem, who had entered into a written understanding with Germany and Italy to “solve the question of the Jewish elements, which exist in Palestine and in the other Arab countries... as the Jewish question was solved in Germany and Italy.”

The liberal media also took note. Husseini’s collaboration with the Nazis was thoroughly documented in the *New York Post* as well as in the left-wing publications *PM* and *The Nation*, by I.F. Stone, Freda Kirchwey, and the Pulitzer Prize-winning Edgar Mowrer, who urged Husseini’s indictment at Nuremberg. Nevertheless, despite extensive State Department files on Husseini’s collaboration with the Nazis, the American bureaucracy succeeded in resisting efforts to put him on trial and publish its evidence of his Nazi-era activities.

The brief confluence of Soviet and liberal Western sympathies for the nascent Jewish state was brilliantly exploited by Ben-Gurion. He understood better than anyone that it presented a unique moment to bring Israel into existence, with the assent of the world’s two great powers—and that it was an opportunity that would soon close, as indeed it did. During the “anti-cosmopolitan” purges of the early

1950s, Stalin reversed course, spread the lie that Israel was a product of American imperialism, repressed the memory of Soviet support for the Zionist project, and launched a four-decade campaign of vilification against Zionism and Israel. It was one of the most successful propaganda campaigns of the Cold War.

Stalin succeeded in rewriting American history, too. His insistence that it was the Americans and not the Soviets who had wholeheartedly supported the establishment of the State of Israel carried the day. And yet the records of the Departments of State and Defense and the CIA clearly document their emphatic and consequential opposition to the Zionist project.

The differences between the international political landscape of the late 1940s and the one that emerged first in Soviet and then world politics in the 1950s and 1960s need to be reflected in American-Jewish discussions about the establishment of Israel. Contrary to what we've heard at the United Nations for decades, in international BDS efforts, and in academic descriptions of Israel, the Zionist project was *never* a colonialist one.

Just the reverse. The generation that created the state, and its supporters abroad, viewed it as part of the era of liberal and leftist opposition to colonialism, racism, and, of course, antisemitism. The evidence is clear: Whatever faults Israel may have, its origins had nothing to do with American or British imperialism. The argument to the contrary is a conventional un wisdom that has found a home in too much scholarship and journalism of recent decades. Israel's establishment was not a miracle that eludes historical explanation. It was an episode of enormous moral and military courage for which space was created by canny and hard-headed political leaders in the cause of historical justice—in particular David Ben-Gurion, who seized a fleeting moment, Israel's moment, to create an enduring achievement. *



FIVE PERCENT BETTER THAN OTHER COUNTRIES

It was shortly after the first Lebanon War when I attended a class led by Rabbi Yitz Greenberg in Toronto. He asked whether we thought Israel was still a light unto the nations. I found the question shocking. I had never imagined the war as an indicator that Israel had lost the moral high ground.

But Rav Yitz was correct that it was the first time that Israel had felt more the Goliath than the David. He went on to say that a moral army is not one that doesn't kill civilians during wartime. All armies kill civilians. That is one of the reasons we need to avoid wars unless they are defensive. A moral army is one that minimizes the number of civilians it kills. If the Israeli army is 5 percent more moral than its peers (and Rav Yitz emphatically believed it was), it will be a light unto the nations. If it is 25 percent better, it will bring the Messiah.

But if it's 50 percent more moral? It will be destroyed. Too many expect a perfect Israel, aghast at every shortfall, ready to pounce at any stumble. But a perfect Israel cannot survive among the nations. How about an Israel that is 5 percent better than other countries?

Israel has spent 75 years proving that 5 percent is achievable. It has more museums per capita than any other country. It had a woman as its prime minister in 1969. It took in Vietnamese boat people when much of the world was indifferent to their fate. It airlifted 14,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel in 36 hours. In the pandemic, it made vaccines available to the entire population in a way that was a model for the world. It was one of the first countries to have trained volunteers on the ground in Turkey after a devastating earthquake earlier this year.

Can Israel do better? She can and she will. While I'm a tough grader, this 5 percent is an easy call.

—MARK CHARENDOFF
publisher of SAPIR

Israel Is in Danger of Losing American Jewry



ISRAEL is the place where I, as a non-Orthodox religious Jew who is immersed in multiple communities in the United States, can experience Judaism's annual cycle of holidays in consonance with the land rather than, as often happens, in contrast with it (think *Tu B'Shvat* in the dead of a Pennsylvania winter). It is where I can encounter Jews from across the Diaspora as well as those who have lived in Israel for generations. Israel is the place where, as a Jew, I can be at the center rather than on the margins, where political and cultural references draw on my history, animate my present, and point to my future. Israel is the place where Jewish concerns, both ancient and contemporary, are the major conversation. To draw on Mordecai Kaplan (1881–1983), the founding thinker of Reconstructionist Judaism, who taught that Jews in the Diaspora live in two civilizations, Israel is the place where I am immersed in Judaism as the primary civilization.

On a visit to the Israel Museum in the late 1990s, I walked through an exhibit of contemporary Israeli art and encountered an abstract painting full of wildly intersecting lines, titled *Lo Zu Had-erekh* (This Is Not the Way). It was thrilling to connect the stirring and unsettling painting to Ahad Ha'am's equally provocative 1889 essay of the same name that made the case for cultural over political Zionism. Later that week, I saw Batsheva Dance Company's premiere of *Echad Mi Yodea* (Who Knows One, from a traditional Passover song)—a brilliant and staggering marriage of ancient religious custom and contemporary culture that explores (and explodes) oppressiveness in Orthodox Judaism.

Both of these cultural pieces are gorgeous, deeply Israeli examples of everything I love about being Jewish in Israel—the weaving of secular and religious, of past and present, into deep substance and outstanding quality, drawing on and pointing back to Jewish references. And although they were created by Israelis, both pieces also reflect a pain and an ambivalence similar to that which many non-Orthodox American Jews feel about Jewishness and Israel.

Ninety percent of American Jews identify as non-Orthodox, either culturally or religiously. Many of us are, after Ahad Ha'am, cultural Zionists who are variously oriented toward Israel, but with no plans to make aliyah, in spite of the ways that Israeli leaders stretching back to David Ben-Gurion have tried to narrow the concept of Zionism into a political commitment to *Medinat Yisrael* (the State of Israel). We are equally influenced by Kaplan, one of Ahad Ha'am's foremost disciples, who reinserted non-Orthodox religious sources and motivations into his mentor's adamantly secular Zionism. Kaplan's genuine joy at the establishment of Israel as a center for Jewish life and a haven for Jews was equally tempered by his deep concerns about both the ongoing negation of the Diaspora that's endemic to political Zionism and the potential oppression that could arise when religious authority is married to state power. The concerns he articulated in the 1940s were prescient: He worried about ethnocentrism and Jewish supremacism and the risks

these posed to non-Jews in Israel, especially Arabs. He worried about religious freedom for non-Orthodox Jews. And he worried that traditional halakhic standards would marginalize anyone who didn't meet them, not least women.

All of these concerns remain relevant today — indeed, they have only grown sharper. They constitute real pain points for many non-Orthodox Jews in our relationship to Israel. This pain sometimes registers as a one or two on the pain scale, balanced by true enthusiasm and engagement. Sometimes it approaches a nine or 10, as when Israeli political and religious leaders turn a scathing eye toward us.

Denigration of our seriousness, our commitments, and our choices; repeated efforts to pass legislation negating the legitimacy of our approaches to Judaism and questioning our very identities as Jews; barely nominal recognition and funding for non-Orthodox expressions of Judaism by Israeli authorities — these ongoing factors can be deeply alienating to many American Jews. Equally concerning is any rhetoric, action, inaction, or legislation that strips away the rights or delegitimizes the status of anyone who is not a “normative” halakhic male, especially women and queer people. These dynamics make Israel, the place where Jews are supposed to feel safe and free to fully express ourselves, seem deeply unwelcoming. It is also painful that our natural allies — secular Israelis who chafe at the rabbinate's stranglehold on Israeli marriage, divorce, and death rituals — do not rally more forcefully to a defense of religious pluralism that aligns with our vision, including arguing for an egalitarian prayer space at the *Kotel* (Western Wall). American Jews understand religious freedom to be equally about the freedom to embrace religion and to reject it, while secular Israelis largely seek freedom from religious authority that they legitimately experience as oppressive.

Moreover, many American Jews, informed by our commitment to democratic norms, our awareness of history, and by our own experiences as a minority, are deeply concerned about the rights

If ethno-nationalism is bad for Jews as a minority in the Diaspora, then ethno-nationalism practiced by Jews as the majority, holding state power, is also bad.

and well-being of non-Jews, most especially Israeli Arabs and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. We recognize that Israel faces acute security concerns — and also that Israel's military, technological, and economic superiority place it in a radically different position than in the early years of statehood. Along with many Israelis, we have long felt distressed about how the Israeli government's apparent undermining of the two-state solution and the perpetuation of a 55-year occupation are eroding Israel's commitment to democracy. We feel this distress in principle and because it is a critical component of the synthesis between Judaism and democracy articulated by Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis that led him and so many other American Jews to become Zionists in the first place.

The November 2022 election that brought Israel's most right-wing government ever to power dialed our pain up to an 11 — or beyond. Many American Jews see in this government the same kind of ethno-nationalism that has narrowed public spaces for Jews in America, and that has accommodated and even fomented anti-semitism in the U.S. If ethno-nationalism is bad for Jews as a minority in the Diaspora, then ethno-nationalism practiced by Jews as the majority, holding state power, is also bad. This syllogism is about more than logical consistency: It is about affirming a deeply held commitment to human rights as a Jewish value, regardless of location. In response to traditional or nationalist Jews who insist

WHAT OBSTACLE CAN'T BE OVERCOME?

that human rights are not inherently Jewish, many non-Orthodox Jews point to the opening verses of Genesis, which assert that every individual is created *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the image of God. We believe this particular Jewish teaching applies to the universal goals of freedom and autonomy, both individual and collective, in all places.

Liberal Jewish communities in North America are succeeding in many ways in creating a diverse, intentionally inclusive, and joyful new chapter of Jewish life, one that is increasingly post-ethnic but not—as predicted by many—dying out. Rather, non-Orthodox Judaism is gaining layers and weaving in new strands as our participants become more diverse—more multiracial, more welcoming of queer people. We are expanding our reach and our appeal, in sharp contrast to Israel, which seems to be increasingly narrowing the kinds of Judaism and the kinds of Jews it is willing to validate.

A great many non-Orthodox American Jews remain deeply connected to Israel. Nonetheless, too often, we live the confusion depicted in the painting I described earlier. In the hardest moments, we feel like the dancer at the end of the chain in Batsheva's *Echad Mi Yodea*—showing up again and again, yet repeatedly being whiplashed and thrown to the floor.

As a Reconstructionist rabbi, I fervently pray that we find generative ways to center relationships among *Am Yisrael* (the Jewish people) in the strengthening of *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel), to the benefit of *kol yoshvei ha'aretz* (all Israel's residents). *

Before Israel was a country, it was a dream. My sister Marjorie and I learned that from our parents, whose generation knew the horrors of World War II. The creation of Israel was proof that with enough determination and faith in our convictions, we could create the world we want for our children, centered on the values that we cherish here at home: freedom, democracy, and equality.

Israel has been a light unto the world because, like the Lady in the New York Harbor, it has been a Mother of Exiles to one of history's most persecuted peoples and a beacon of hope that peace and prosperity can triumph over bloodshed and bigotry.

Maybe the Jewish history we learned growing up led me to internalize a lesson that has always guided my life: Tomorrow can be better than today, and we have a special obligation to make it so. That includes sharing the dream of Israel with new generations. Rising antisemitism in both American political parties makes that responsibility even more urgent.

The spirit of optimism and obligation that has shaped Jewish history also helps to make Israel a force for progress and an engine of invention, commerce, and civic innovation. Bloomberg Philanthropies is glad to be supporting that progress in a variety of ways, including through the Bloomberg-Sagol Center for City Leadership at Tel Aviv University.

For so many of us in the U.S. and around the world, it has been difficult to watch Israel suffer through unprecedented domestic political upheaval. A nation that faces so many threats on its borders can ill afford deep divisions within them, and the world can ill afford a weakened Israel. But I remain optimistic about its future. After all, if the dream of Israel can be realized, what obstacle can't be overcome?

—MICHAEL R. BLOOMBERG
founder of Bloomberg LP and Bloomberg Philanthropies
and former mayor of New York City

Israel Is a Climate Leader



ISRAEL HAS COME a long way since Jaffa oranges were the pride of the nation. Today it is known for “deep tech” such as computer chips and cybersecurity. Some 600 research and development centers of global companies and over 7,000 startups dot the urban landscapes. What is less well known is that Israel is punching way above its weight in a field that is particularly urgent today: climate technology.

In today’s world, fraught with extreme weather conditions and plagued by drought and fire alike, the ingenuity needed to meet the climate crisis is less about solar panels and more about a range of broad-scale solutions that Israel is churning out at a steady clip. Climate tech refers to technologies explicitly focused on reducing greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions. It has emerged as an especially hot space, mainly due to the net-zero carbon goals that governments and companies have committed to reach by 2030.

The roots of Israeli climate tech were evident in the early years of statehood, when its agricultural innovation was born of necessity. Israel was a poor country. The early pioneers were draining swamps and battling malaria outbreaks while facing large waves of immigration, food-security challenges, even rationing. Its gross domestic product per capita was \$1,000, similar to that of developing countries today. One would hardly expect that this tiny country, with terrible soil and severe water scarcity, would become a hotbed of agricultural innovation. The brutal necessities of the ’50s, along with wise investment in R & D, gave rise to drip irrigation and precision agriculture. (This part of Israel’s story is well documented in a publication by the Tony Blair Institute and Volcani International Partnerships, “How Israel Became a World Leader in Agriculture and Water.”)

Today, Israel’s entrepreneurs, many of whom graduate from the IDF’s elite tech units, use the same core skills to innovate in sectors such as food tech, agriculture tech, and climate tech. There are currently some 880 innovative companies tackling one angle or another in the climate space. C-level execs from large multinationals are showing up in Israel looking for climate solutions to meet their own sustainability goals, ranging from alternative proteins to weather monitoring and electric transportation.

Since 2019, Israeli climate-tech companies have attracted \$8 billion in investment, of which \$2.9 billion was invested in 2022, according to data from Start-Up Nation Central, an NGO I helped found and lead from 2013 to 2022. Israel’s total share of global investment in climate tech is 2 percent—which may not sound like much, until you realize it’s 20 times the country’s share of global population.

There is a highly interconnected ecosystem to support this climate-tech sector. This includes globally ranked academic institutions that connect with industry: The Technion launched a

center for the study of alternative proteins, while The Hebrew University's Asper-HUJI Innovate hosts the OPEN Accelerator, helping to found climate-tech start-ups. Then there is a highly focused government role: The Israel Innovation Authority is allocating 3 billion shekels (\$820 million), over four years, to climate-tech innovation. Large corporations, ranging from Schneider Electric to Nestlé to Uber, play an additional important role, sending top executives to Israel to engage with food-tech and climate-tech start-ups. Finally, there is a tight-knit community of gritty, problem-solving entrepreneurs. Community events and start-up competitions to bring tech solutions to climate challenges have become routine.

Having watched this story unfold in recent years, I am struck by the ingenuity that the climate-tech sector brings to some of the toughest climate-related areas. Food systems are a prime example, with a highly robust alternative-protein sector that is second only to that of the United States in securing global investments. These Israeli start-ups attracted \$454 million in investments last year, which is 15 percent of the capital that was raised for the sector worldwide. "It is clear — we can't reach net-zero emissions and create resilient food systems without shifting away from industrial animal farming," says Nir Goldstein, head of Global Food Institute Israel. "Alternative proteins are the only scalable solution, and the Israeli ecosystem is paving the way."

The alternative-protein sector includes cow-free dairy protein made through precision fermentation; plant-based substitutes for meat, dairy, and egg; and cultivated meat and seafood made from cells. All told, there are about 57 alternative-protein companies.

Other examples include the "circular economy," in which one company uses unsorted household waste to create recyclable thermoplastic materials. Another one takes unused wood waste to create high-end, competitive wood products and materials. Carbon capture is yet another example, which entails removing carbon dioxide from the air to reduce GHG emissions. One

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Israeli company is taking a radical approach and removing CO₂ from the world's oceans.

The story is not all milk and honey, so to speak. Israel's climate-tech companies aiming to pierce global markets face some real hurdles. For example, very few Israel-based investment funds are climate-focused. So access to capital is challenging, especially for early-stage start-ups.

Access to global markets isn't close to reaching its potential, as there are limited multinationals based in Israel that are mandated to engage with the local climate-tech sector. According to Yael Weisz Zilberman, head of Start-Up Nation Central's Climate Sector, "engaging global corporates to explore climate solutions in Israel's ecosystem may be the greatest impetus for encouraging more entrepreneurs and more VCs to choose ClimateTech."

Israel's regulatory landscape is improving, but many barriers remain for start-ups in the climate-tech and food-tech sectors, especially relating to the pace of regulatory approvals. As a result, start-ups that are ready to scale realize quickly that they need to set up their production facilities overseas. The regulatory landscape

has some way to go to become more confident, faster, and in step with the regulatory scene in other parts of the world.

Friends of Israel can engage in tangible ways to support Israel's innovation role in the global climate battle. Jaffa oranges are still part of Israel's brand. But 75 years in, Israel is proving it can do so much more to turn its own past victories over a harsh climate into victories for the rest of the planet, too. *



ONE OF THE GRANDEST ACTS OF JEWISH RESISTANCE

Never confuse what Israel is and what its people aspire to become with what others want it to be. As David Nirenberg puts it in his magisterial *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*, Jews have served for centuries as an idea for others to define themselves against — “a category, a set of ideas and attributes with which non-Jews can make sense of and criticize their world.” So, too, with Israel. For 75 years, Israel has captured the world's imagination, its lovers and enemies alike demanding that it serve as an illuminating emblem.

Lovers of Israel see a historic dream fulfilled, the Promised Land that a young Paul Newman conquered on-screen in *Exodus*. Its enemies see a demonic nightmare, projecting upon it whatever particular evil they hate most. But Israel and its people have not been and will never be a uniform light for others' convenience. The magnificent miracle of Israel is precisely that it cannot be simplified or categorized, that its people insist on the self-determination to craft their own story.

The miracle is its diversity, its complexity, its mixture: of East and West, indigeneity and migration, Mizrahi and Ashkenazi, secular and religious, powerful and vulnerable, sacred and profane, Start-Up Nation and Western Wall, democracy and intractable conflict, intense and carefree, ancient and youthful.

Israel is one of the grandest acts of Jewish resistance: a refusal to be a neat and convenient light to fit someone else's narrative.

Those of us who have intertwined our fates with Israel must continue fighting for it to indeed live up to our prophetic aspirations to be a light to the nations. But on our own terms — multivocal, covenantal, so lovingly ours, and so joyfully human that it can never be reduced to a single story.

—MIJAL BITTON

*scholar in residence at the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America,
and the Rosh Kehilla of the Downtown Minyan in New York City*

Israel Is a Hispanic Opportunity



NEWS around the world hovered nervously over crackling radios on November 29, 1947, as member states of the United Nations determined Israel's fate with a simple one-syllable vote. For a decisive number of countries, that word was a resounding *sí*.

As geopolitics shifted in the years that followed, so did relations between Israel and the Spanish-speaking world. Of the 12 Latin American countries that voted, along with 21 others, for the Jewish state in 1947, several would not do so today. At the same time, at least some of the six Latin countries that abstained then are today among Israel's biggest supporters.

Latinos could once again have an impact on Israel's future, this time as Israel's strongest ally.

As someone who works on the front lines of Israel's communications war in Spanish and Spanglish, I know that we have strong allies within the U.S. Hispanic community. But those relationships cannot be taken for granted.

Today, some 63 million people in America — nearly 19 percent of the population — describe themselves as Hispanic. That figure will rise to about 30 percent by the middle of the century. It's a trend that can have powerful implications for the U.S.-Israel relationship, as political and cultural outlooks change among young people, Hispanics included.

The 2022 midterm results demonstrated that Latinos do not vote as a bloc. Like American Jews, American Latinos are aspirational immigrant communities hailing from numerous countries and cultures. Also, like Jews, Hispanics are generally mistakenly regarded as a monolithic group by those seeking votes ahead of elections.

The rest of the time, Latinos are mostly ignored—but not by everybody.

If you don't speak Spanish, then you probably don't know about the campaigns against Israel, and to some extent Jews, in the Hispanic world. Most of those campaigns originated in Spain, spread rapidly throughout Latin America, and are now testing the Latino community in the United States.

Iran, Russia, and others have long understood the importance of connecting with Latinos. HispanTV, Tehran's 24/7 news network, is heavily invested in disseminating the mullahs' messages of hate in Spanish, reaching a vast audience in the U.S. and elsewhere through its TV and digital news presence. The same is true for Qatar's AJ+, Russia's RT, and many other multimillion-dollar state-sponsored and independent media networks.

Once prevalent only in Latin America, these sites now reach millions in the United States across social-media platforms, including YouTube.

Unfortunately, Israel lacks similar international networks. And with a deeply rooted tendency to preach to the converted, an Israeli-crafted engagement strategy would probably not resonate, even if it had the inclination and ability to connect in Spanish.

Why should you care about any of this?

Spanish is the second-most-spoken language in America. The

median age of U.S. Latinos is 31, about nine years younger than the rest of the population, and we use social media to consume news and information more than other ethnic groups do, making us primary targets for disinformation.

The quickest way to connect with millions of people in a short amount of time is through mass media, and we Hispanics are major consumers of news and information in both Spanish and Spanglish. We thrive on social media, especially Instagram and YouTube. TikTok is our playground. Meanwhile, radio, the same method of communication that relayed the 1947 vote in real time, remains a major medium for Spanish-speakers.

Although social-media giants claim to be combating hate speech on their platforms in English, disinformation in other languages is unchecked. These arenas share a common theme: a lack of compelling, Spanish-speaking Israeli and Jewish voices. The silence will present a major challenge to Israel in the coming years, with a gradual, negative shift in Hispanic public opinion on the Jewish state.

The digital pogroms that erupted over the 2021 Israel– Hamas war prompted Fuente Latina, the nonprofit and nonpartisan media organization I founded, to conduct nationwide research to better understand how Millennial Americans view the conflict. Results were eye-opening. Focus groups showed that long-standing messaging employed by many Jewish and pro-Israel organizations—such as that Israel has a right to defend itself—no longer resonate. Pro-Israel messengers were dismissed as disingenuous for talking only about Israel’s suffering.

Of the young (18–35) Hispanics polled, some 37 percent believe that Hamas is a terrorist organization, compared with 33 percent who say Hamas is defending the Palestinian people, and 30 percent who are unsure. The proportion of Latinos who believe that Hamas is protecting the Palestinians is higher than in all other ethnic groups surveyed in this study. Latinos also appear to more frequently embrace classic antisemitic beliefs than other Americans do, though the *overall* number of Latinos of all age groups who

hold a positive view of Israel is greater than for white Americans.

The challenge is the trend. Fuente Latina’s study showed a decline in support for Israel since 2010 among English-speaking Latinos under 30, particularly among women. And in tandem with other Americans their age, many young Latinos view events in Israel through a racial-identity lens. Sadly, this perspective, as it is widely marketed today, tends to side with those seeking Israel’s destruction. Digital media outlets such as AJ+ are capitalizing on this zeitgeist to our detriment.

The good news is that Fuente Latina’s study, along with my thousands of hours of one-on-one conversations with Latino leaders, reveals that Hispanics are, for the most part, still undecided when it comes to Israel. This glass-half-full situation should be seen as an opportunity, but it’s unclear how long that data will hold true unless we communicate our story ourselves, in both Spanish and Spanglish.



I’m frequently asked how to keep this relationship healthy. Here is my prescription:

When it comes to appreciating and understanding Israel, there is no substitute for experiencing the country personally. Many Latinos, regardless of their age or religious affiliation, regard visiting Israel, or *Tierra Santa*, as a lifelong dream and a top destination on bucket lists. On these trips, authentic interactions with Spanish-speaking Israelis are vital. Israel is home to a vibrant Latin-American immigrant community. As immigrants to Israel, many have incredible stories to tell, and they can give insight into the complexity of Israeli life beyond the headlines and social-media memes.

We must also invest in strategic new Latino relationships while maintaining existing ones. Many new relationships are being forged by Hispanic Evangelical Christians, who make up 19 percent of the U.S. Latino population today and are slated to increase in numbers in the coming years. More and more of the Hispanic

THE LIGHT HAS DIMMED

Protestant population is skewing younger, but their support for Israel isn't an absolute given.

U.S. Latinos are as diverse as America itself and therefore cannot be addressed with any single approach. Twenty-eight million consider themselves multiracial, and more than 36 percent of Hispanic homes are bilingual. This means that communicating with Hispanic audiences requires a nuanced and tested approach. Translating English messages into Spanish and blasting them at a culturally diverse audience while hoping for the best isn't going to work.

On the flip side, many Hispanics are reaching out to the Jewish community. Genetic studies reveal that a significant percentage—some scholars say up to 25 percent—of Latin Americans and U.S. Latinos are of crypto-Jewish heritage. Discovering Jewish roots with a DNA test can spark a curiosity that many fulfill by traveling to Israel or visiting a local synagogue or simply talking to Jewish people. There is an untapped potential within this Hispanic community to create new friends Israel didn't know existed.

We should also see media as a tool that brings us together. As much as we complain about press coverage, digital media give us the opportunity to take control of the narrative and tell our own stories. But the storytellers have to be authentic, not *hasbara* spokespeople. That is why Fuente Latina recently launched Activista Media, to engage the next generation of English-dominant non-Jewish Latinos with visually appealing and culturally relevant content.

Finally, we need to bust out of our own echo chambers by changing our messaging with non-Jewish Latinos, even if it pushes our traditional boundaries. Being honest about what moves the needle and what doesn't with non-Jewish audiences is a first step. Focus-group testing can help to determine what messages and messengers will change narratives and perceptions of Israel among audiences in the long term.

While the days of tallying up votes as history is made over the airwaves are long gone, our relationship with the Spanish-speaking world is more important now than ever. *Vamos.* *

Israel and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were both born in 1948—wings of a phoenix that rose from the ashes of Auschwitz, symbols of regret of a world shamefully chastened.

While Israel and the Declaration were historically fused as compensatory justice for Jews, they also became symbols for justice of a more universal kind. Israel was looked to as a symbol that democratic values can flourish even in an environment thick with siege and extremism. It was a “light unto the nations.” The Declaration was looked to as a symbol that the international community remained dedicated to the ideal of human rights and justice for all.

Seventy-five years later, it is worth reflecting on how securely the commitment to tolerance is fastened to the spirit of our times. For me, not securely enough. It has been particularly disturbing to watch this play out in Israel, to see the demonization of Israel's courageous and internationally respected Supreme Court. It is disturbing not because judges should not be criticized, but because what is really going on is a decades-long struggle by the political Right to pry Israel's soul away from the commitment to democratic rights and freedoms that inspired its creation in 1948. The Right is forgetting what Israel is for and why.

Nothing has changed about why Israel matters. If anything, it matters even more in a global moral climate dangerously polluted by antisemitism. But what *has* changed is one government's failure to remember.

I was born in a displaced persons camp in Germany to parents who survived the Holocaust. It was two years before Israel and the Universal Declaration were born, but they became my lifelong touchstones. I will never give up on either, but the light has dimmed.

—ROSALIE SILBERMAN ABELLA
visiting professor at Harvard Law School and
retired justice of the Canadian Supreme Court

Israel Is Less Fragile Than We Feared, More Fragile Than We Imagine



At 75, Israel is already one of the world's oldest countries. In 1949, it became the 59th member state of the United Nations. There are now 193 states, meaning that well over two-thirds of the world's countries are younger.

That feels counterintuitive. Instinctively, we think of the Jewish state as very new and thus forever vulnerable to one existential threat or another, particularly given that its neighbors and much of the world do not consider it legitimate. Coupled to our sense of Israel's vulnerability, however, is another, almost opposite instinct: We think of Israel as the country that invariably manages to survive. Today, it faces an existential threat in the shape of judicial reform. What should we expect? An examination of Israel's earlier crises may be instructive.

Challenges to Israel's existence have come in many forms. Its earliest moments of vulnerability were, of course, military. Asked by the People's Administration on May 12, 1948, about the Yishuv's chances of surviving the military onslaught certain to follow a declaration of independence, Yigael Yadin, later a leading archaeologist but at the time the commander of the Yishuv's military forces, said, "50-50." Just three years after the liberation of Auschwitz, the leadership of the Yishuv understood that independence might result in yet another slaughter.

They risked it, and Israel more than survived, expanding considerably beyond what UN Resolution 181 had allotted in the 1947 Partition Plan. But defeat did nothing to lessen its enemies' appetite. May 1967, the month before the war that was certain to come, is called the *hamtanah*—"the waiting period." Though some Israelis left to escape the "certain" bloodbath, Israel tripled its size in six days. Having gained control of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, and the Golan Heights, it had defensible borders for the first time and the beginnings of a world-class military. Six years later, however, when Egypt and Syria attacked on Yom Kippur with support from Iraq and Jordan, IDF soldiers died by the hundreds in the Golan and the Sinai, IAF jets were shot down by the dozen, and Israeli forces either retreated or struggled to blunt the Egyptian and Syrian incursions. And yet, by war's end, Israel had clawed its way back to the borders from which it had started, encircled Egypt's Third Army, and could easily have marched on Damascus.

Economically, the ship came close to sinking more than once, too. Throughout the 1950s, food was so scarce that the government instituted rationing: Its agents could inspect parcels on public transport and in iceboxes at home. Families were allotted 1,600 calories a day per person. They received a monthly allowance of 750 grams of meat, 200 grams of cheese, and 12 eggs. Nor was scarcity confined to food. The country, desperately strapped for cash, had few resources

to house the hundreds of thousands of impoverished, broken souls making their way from Arab countries to the Jewish state after the war, expelled for the crime of being Jewish. Israel faced economic collapse again in the 1980s, when inflation reached 445 percent and was projected to run as high as 1,000 percent.

Salvation came in the form of both national resilience and assistance from abroad. Israelis toughed it out during the War of Independence, despite the deaths of 1 percent of the civilian Jewish population (which would be 70,000 people in today's Israel). But the international community also proved critical. American Jews provided money, while some American Jewish pilots, veterans of World War II, became the backbone of Israel's new air force. Stalin supplied aircraft and massive amounts of weaponry via Czechoslovakia. By 1967, Israel fielded a seasoned army well supplied with weapons from France, Britain, and the United States. And after the 1967 war, America supplied Israel with a steady flow of arms. At the beginning of the 1973 war, when Israel found itself outnumbered, outgunned, and outmaneuvered, President Nixon delivered over 100,000 tons of matériel by air and sea to resupply the equipment Israel had expended.

The same was true on the economic front. Israelis were largely compliant with the strictures of the *tzena* (as the food rationing program that lasted from 1949 to 1959 was known), but help came again from American Jews and—infinately more significantly—from German reparations, saving the Jewish state from collapse. Germany gave Israel 3 billion marks (approximately \$714 million based on 1952 exchange rates), equivalent to \$8 billion today. Israel used the money to improve housing, create a national shipping fleet and airline, build roads and telecommunication systems, and establish electricity networks. Reparations also helped finance Israel's National Water Carrier project, which made arid

Many who care deeply about Israel,
who understand that the future of the
Jewish people is inextricably tied to the
future of the Jewish state, take comfort
in Israel's history of averting the worst.

parts of the country habitable—critical as the population swelled. Similarly, when Israel faced economic collapse once again in the 1980s, it was a combination of Israeli resilience and Shimon Peres's austere economic-recovery plan, developed in concert with the United States and supported by American funding, that pulled the country out of its nosedive.

Some of those early crises are difficult to imagine today. No enemy state has attacked Israel since the IDF's recovery from its disastrous performance in the early days of the 1973 war. Israel, the Arab world came to understand, could not be defeated by standard armies using conventional weapons. In 25 years, Israel had gone from Yadin's "50-50" chance of survival to seeming invincibility. As for those economic maelstroms: Young Israelis, accustomed to a burgeoning food scene, find it difficult to imagine rationing. Israel's formidable economic engine makes it difficult to recall the fiscal vulnerabilities of yesteryear.

Even the diplomatic isolation with which Israel once contended now seems almost quaint. The international community does not love Israel any more than it did during the Arab boycott of the 1970s, than in 1975 when the General Assembly passed the "Zionism Is Racism" resolution, or than in 2001, when the World Conference Against Racism proclaimed Zionism a form of racism

and discrimination and used the conference as an opportunity for anti-Israel marches. T-shirts with swastikas were handed out, as were copies of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Today, however, Israel has signed joint normalization agreements with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco.

Israel, we told ourselves, had mastered the art of avoiding disaster even in the face of existential threat. The Jewish state, it seems, always avoids the abyss.

That, though, is but part of the story. Grave errors have left deep scars that still plague Israeli society. Most obviously, Ben-Gurion's decision to put Israeli Arab citizens under military administration from 1948 to 1966 continues to haunt Israel's relationship with the Arabs who make up 20 percent of its population. We do not yet know what that means for Israel's viability.

Internal political violence has been no less problematic. It is comforting to point to the "Altalena Affair," in June 1948, when deadly gunfire broke out among IDF soldiers who retained many of their Irgun or Haganah loyalties, as a case where violence among Jews was quickly reined in. The evacuations of Yamit in 1982 and Gush Katif in 2005 were bloodless, too. But perhaps Israel has been lucky thus far. The potential for violence is never far below the surface when Israel faces deeply divisive decisions.

Consider Israel's history of political assassination. Most people recall only Yitzhak Rabin's death in 1995, but there have been others. Jacob de Haan, who accused the Yishuv of not doing enough to reach agreement with local Arabs, was killed in 1924 by a member of the Haganah. The gunman reported decades later that Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, Israel's second president, had ordered the hit. Haim Arlosoroff, head of the Jewish Agency's political department, was shot on a Tel Aviv beach in 1933, almost certainly by a political opponent. Emil Grunzweig was killed by a hand grenade thrown by a Jew at a peace rally in Jerusalem in 1983, after the Kahan Commission report on Sabra and Shatila established the culpability of Ariel Sharon and Menachem Begin.

External crises foster a sense of shared identity. Israel has done much worse with those that stem from deep-seated fissures in Israel society itself. Competing visions for the Jewish state prevented the writing of a constitution in 1948 and have done so ever since: Jew versus Arab, religious versus secular, Left versus Right, Ashkenazi versus Mizrahi—these unresolved fissures have resulted in violence on more than one occasion.

And now these fissures, and the lack of a constitution that is just one expression of them, have led us to this year's judicial-reform crisis. Europe-oriented elites are largely comfortable with the status quo, even if many acknowledge that some change in the judicial system is warranted. Others want to see the Supreme Court constrained. Mizrahi Jews are generally suspicious of privileged elites and "liberal" judges. Religious Jews see the Court's defense of individual liberties as undermining Israel's Jewish character. They believe that the Court is opposed to settlements, despite its having overwhelmingly ruled in support of the settlement project, except for construction on private Arab land. Hawkish Jews support stronger measures against terrorism, even though the Court has almost without exception given the army great latitude and has consistently upheld the demolition of homes of terrorists.

Those on the Right in favor of the reforms appear for the most part not to have read them: If the reforms pass, the Knesset could decide to hold elections every 15 rather than every four years, and there would be no Court to overrule it. A simple majority would allow the Knesset to shutter mosques, Reform and Conservative synagogues—again, with no court having a say. Even many of those who voted Likud or Right would find those steps abhorrent; that is why the number of Likud voters in favor of slowing down the process has been steadily rising.

Israelis in the center and on the Left who oppose the reforms also appear not to have read them. Nor are they conversant with those

cases in which the Court has, indeed, taken great liberties that those on the Right now wish to curtail. They sense, however, that what their parents and grandparents died for might now be stolen from them. Many have pledged that they will do whatever it takes to prevent Israel's democracy from being irreparably altered. Zeev Raz, the national hero who led the 1981 Osirak attack that destroyed Iraq's nuclear capability, posted on Facebook that "if a man, Israeli or foreign, takes over my country and rules it undemocratically, there is an obligation to kill him." Ron Huldai, the mayor of Tel Aviv, stated publicly that "dictatorships only become democratic again with bloodshed."

Toward the end of his life, Menachem Begin remarked that he was prouder of the moment when he ordered the Irgun troops not to fire back even if fired upon than of any other in his storied life, and rightly so. After Rabin's murder, the sense of national shock was so pervasive that everyone stepped back from the abyss. No single statesman led the country back to sanity. The nation somehow managed it because of collective terror and grief.



As of this writing, it is impossible to know how the winter-spring of 2023 will play out. Certainly, if Israel chooses to damage itself irreparably from within, international help will not be able to save it, as it did in earlier military and domestic crises.

The Altalena reminds us that violence has erupted before and could easily have spread. It bears recalling that that battle did not divide the entire nation or bring massive crowds into the streets week after week. The last time Israelis *did* protest in such numbers, Yitzhak Rabin ended up dead. Israel is no less flammable today than in July 1948 or November 1995. For a few weeks in February, the muffled conversations in my synagogue were not about whether violence would erupt, but when, and who would start it. That a congregation consisting largely of academics, lawyers, and other professionals should consider violence all but inevitable was terrifying.

This time, as in 1948, great statesmanship did emerge: On several occasions, President Herzog warned the country that it was about to devour itself and begged sides to step back before reaching the point of no return.

Many who care deeply about Israel, who understand that the future of the Jewish people is inextricably tied to the future of the Jewish state, take comfort in Israel's history of averting the worst. Those with deeper knowledge know that neither civil discourse nor political compromise has ever been the country's strong suit.

Will some version of Herzog's proposed compromise be accepted? Can he convince the country to embark on a serious conversation about a profound constitutional issue? Can those urging caution convince the people in power that genuine democracy is more than majority rule—before they use a narrow parliamentary majority to ram through legislation that will radically alter the country? Will the prime minister abandon the thugs he had invited into his government and reach out to Benny Gantz, Avigdor Lieberman, and Yair Lapid to create a centrist national-unity government—something that first happened in May 1967? On the other side, can Israel's religious and political leaders encourage the passionate engagement of the center and the Left, but persuade them to curtail the general calls for "any means necessary," and for the more specific, bloodcurdling ones?

We don't know. This moment is rich with potential for national greatness but may bring irreparable disaster. One thing we do know: For the first time in many years, everything hangs in the balance. *

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