

# Lamed-E

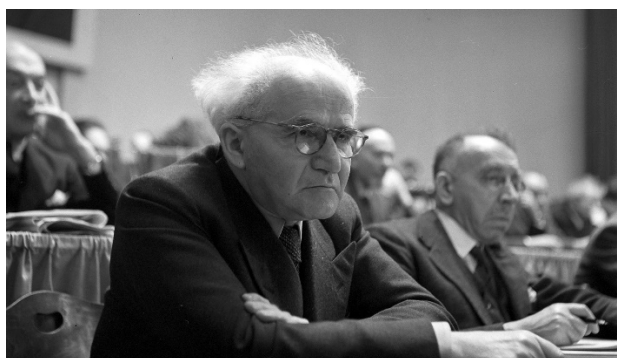
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## What Would Ben-Gurion Do?

*Israel's founding father argued for a conception of politics uniquely tailored to the Jewish state. Fifty years after his death, his country could use it more than ever*



*David Ben-Gurion at the 22nd Zionist Congress in 1946. RDB/ullstein bild via Getty Images*

**By Neil Rogachevsky**

David Ben-Gurion died 50 years ago, December 1, 1973, at the age of eighty-seven. He lived just long enough to see the state survive the Yom Kippur War, its “most serious and cruel war,” as he described it in one of his final notes. He had been in reasonably good health until he suffered the first of two strokes a few days after the outbreak of the war. A doctor who examined him after the stroke later recalled encountering “an old and weary lion.”

Though he had often threatened retirement (and left the premiership briefly in the mid 50s), Ben-Gurion’s *final* retirement had been short. Like many of the best (and worst) leaders, he had great difficulty surrendering power. In 1965, he was essentially expelled from the Mapai party (the

precursor to today’s Labor) after he attempted a rebellion against Levi Eshkol, who had replaced him as prime minister two years prior. He resigned from the Knesset for good in 1970, only three years before he died.

Excluded for the first time in three decades from leadership, Ben-Gurion in these last years remained engaged politically. After the triumph of the Six-Day War, he called for proactive policies to turn the military victory into a political one. According to his plan, Israel would annex the whole of Jerusalem; as for the remainder of the territory conquered from Jordan, Ben-Gurion advocated for an Israeli security zone along the Jordan River and negotiations with local Arab leaders over control of the rest of the West Bank. He had long seen Gaza as a source of instability. Shortly after the Suez War of 1956, he predicted that “the Gaza Strip would be a source of trouble as long as the refugees had not been resettled elsewhere.” Having conquered a then-much-more-sparsely populated Gaza from Egypt, he urged relocating some number of refugees to the West Bank—if they agreed. (Israel would formally annex the eastern neighborhoods of Jerusalem in 1980; no other aspects of this vision came to fruition.)

Ben-Gurion was even busier intellectually: reading, writing, carrying on epistolary dialogues with statesmen, philosophers, Bible scholars, Jewish thinkers. Joseph Stalin famously subjected terrified Politburo colleagues to mandatory drunken viewings of cowboy movies at his Kuntsevo dacha in his final years. Ben-Gurion, by contrast, assembled somewhat bemused or bored associates and scholars for Hebrew Bible study at his Negev cabin in Sde Boker. Ben-Gurion’s reading groups were not merely an expression of vanity or antiquarian curiosity. If Israel was to continue to succeed, he explained in 1968, Israelis needed to be “an exceptional people with an exceptional government.” The Jewish state had been created. But what would its purpose be? Much more work on this question remained. And, he thought, the political and ethical ideas of the Hebrew Bible were the necessary starting point. “I drew all of my humanitarian and Jewish

principles from the Bible,” he reflected in a late interview. In his experimental disquisitions on biblical politics, prophecy, and law (most of which are collected in a 1972 English volume called *Ben-Gurion Looks at the Bible*), Ben-Gurion tried to articulate how biblical ideas might be deployed and recast for a new era of Jewish history—one defined by political sovereignty. The 50th anniversary of David Ben-Gurion’s death, coming as it does amid Israel’s most grievous challenge since 1973, presents an altogether fitting occasion to reflect on Ben-Gurion’s statesmanship and the lessons it might present today. It would be folly to draw specific policy prescriptions from any human being who died half a century ago. But the key principles of his statecraft may rather serve as a source of both inspiration and insight as Israelis navigate the challenges of a post-10/7 world.

To be sure, other models of Israeli statesmanship resonate now too: Herzl’s argument for the necessity of Jewish sovereignty, Menachem Begin’s embodiment of loyal opposition, Levi Eshkol’s single-minded devotion to building Israel’s political and military capacities. But no other leader did more to shape modern Israel than Ben-Gurion. Creator of the nation’s government structure, principal author of the Declaration of Independence, first commander in chief, prime minister for most of the country’s critical first fifteen years, molder of the national culture, Ben-Gurion was Israel’s Washington, Jefferson, and Hamilton in one. He was indispensable in the establishment of the state, and he laid the foundations for its survival and success. Anyone who wishes to understand modern Israel and how it ought to govern itself must inevitably reckon with the rebellious man from Plonsk. In his early years, he later recalled, he was on the path to becoming one of the “dangerous young men” who would ultimately set the Russian empire aflame. Instead, he decided “to make the revolution within himself.” And he thus became, in the eulogizing words of Israel’s fifth president, Yitzhak Navon, “the most significant Jewish political leader since antiquity.”

### I. The Standard of Statesmanship

Quizzed in September 1948 about the absence of the word “democracy” from Israel’s Declaration of Independence, Ben-Gurion denied this meant Israel would not conduct its politics democratically. He had not used this word, he said, because he wanted to express substantive political principles in Hebraic terms: “As for Western democracy, I’m for Jewish democracy. ‘Western’ doesn’t suffice. . . . The value of life and human freedom are, *for us*, more deeply embedded thanks to the biblical prophets than Western democracy.” It is worth noting that

expressing universal ideas in a native vernacular has been an obsession of many statesmen of the first rank. Winston Churchill recalled that in his great wartime speeches, he would always opt for an Anglo-Saxon derived word rather than a Latinate one where possible.

This taste for Hebraic concepts and neologisms makes understanding his political thought fraught at times, no more so than with the label he essentially invented to describe his ideas: *mamlakhtiyut*. What is *mamlakhtiyut*? Literally translated as “state-ism,” scholars puzzle over its meaning to this day. It is also a difficult term to translate: “grandeur,” “state consciousness,” and “civic virtue,” have been tried. Though perhaps more redolent of Greek than Hebrew, my own preferred translation is “statesmanship,” which refers to the peak political virtue that a human being can attain. It speaks to an ability to understand the whole political scene, at home and abroad, and to act prudently to advance the interests of the state and its community. *Mamlakhtiyut* is the Hebraized articulation of the same human capacity that Aristotle called *phronesis*, simultaneously the precondition and consummation of statecraft.

To define it further, we could do with Ben-Gurion’s own explanation from a 1952 essay (recently cited in *Mosaic* by Philologos):

We have brought with us from the Diaspora anarchic and disintegrative habits—a lack of *mamlakhtiyut*, of national solidarity, and of the ability to distinguish between the essential and the trivial, the permanent and the passing. In renewing its independence, the Jewish people has to confront two encumbering traditions: its problematic sense of *mamlakhtiyut* in antiquity and the anti-*mamlakhtiyut* of exilic existence. *Mamlakhtiyut* is the essential quality of national self-government, and its opposite is what typifies Jewish statelessness. Like some political Zionists before him, Ben-Gurion argues that the Jews of exile had internalized a lamentable apolitical or even anti-political ethos. While the Jews had produced important works of humane learning during exilic times, this ethos left them largely defenseless against military threat, intimidation, and outbreaks of violence. For Ben-Gurion, this was an intellectual as much as a practical error, because politics are inescapable. Perhaps the wise men of Israel, and through them some of the people at large, might have maintained a healthily ironic attitude to worldly politics. Utter contempt for politics could however make them numb to important human possibilities. And it also made them vulnerable, unable to protect the rich intellectual heritage they valued so much. As Ben-Gurion put it in a letter to the Zionist agriculturalist Menachem Ussishkin, the Jews could create a university in exile but did not know the first thing about running a state:

The few sages who could see into the future . . . understood the importance of saving “Yavneh and its sages.” “Yavneh and its sages” are important, but they do not constitute a Jewish state. And did we come over here, the people of BILU [a late 19th-century Zionist movement], the members of the Second Aliyah and the New Aliyah, to build in this country “Yavneh and its sages?” And under the auspices of the mufti?! We want to build a state, and we shall not be able to do so without political thought, political talent, and political prudence. High-flown phrases, vision, and emotion alone are not sufficient to build a state; they may be sufficient for *Netsah Yisrael*, or existence in the Diaspora, for maintaining a yeshiva, a rabbinical court, a university—but not for the construction of a state. The Jews of antiquity offered an encouraging alternative model. These Jews had the experience of political sovereignty. Ben-Gurion’s turn to the Bible was, above all, an effort to find wisdom about prudent political action from within the Jewish tradition. Ben-Gurion also drew a cautionary lesson from ancient Jewish politics. The Jews of ancient times had been especially susceptible to political schisms, which had been caused largely by theological and doctrinal divides rather than the purer class conflict that plagued other ancient polities. Inevitable differences in the understanding of man’s relationship to God had led to bitter factionalism among different Jewish orders or sects. In Ben-Gurion’s view, political schism rooted in religious division was the reason Jewish sovereignty had been so short. As he continued in his 1936 letter to Ussishkin:

During the time of the First Temple we did not conquer the entire country, and we maintained our independence only for a few years because we were always divided and quarreled among ourselves, and the nations around “ate us with every mouth.” . . . The legions of Rome would not have destroyed the country if the Jews had not prepared the ground for it. At the time of the gravest danger in our history, before the destruction of the Second Temple, the Jews did not know how to unite, did not identify the external dangers, and did not find in themselves the political talent to prevent the catastrophe, which would have been averted if such a talent had been found in the Jewish people at that time. Political skill, awareness of dangers both manifest and latent, seeing the interests of the country over and above mere sectarian interests—these were the traits the Jewish state would have to embody. Achieving it would require national unity, respect for laws and institutions, a sense of civic obligation and service. Israel would thus require a civic culture that would inculcate these traits in its citizens.

To be sure, Ben-Gurion—and the Labor movement that led the country from its founding until 1977—did not always act in accordance with this concept. Indeed, both probably damaged the reputation of *mamlakhtiyut* by implementing it in particularly partisan ways. To cite the most famous example: the erstwhile militia leader Menachem Begin, whose movement had broken away from mainstream Zionism, accepted the legitimacy of the state of Israel in 1948. His Revisionist Herut party worked to advance its vision of Jewish statehood from within the framework of the state. Despite this essential contribution to *mamlakhtiyut*, Ben-Gurion could not bear to address Begin by his proper name, and he sometimes equated a vote for Herut with a vote for national dissolution. Later in life, he admitted he had been too hard on his rival. In 1969, soon after his wife Paula’s death, he told Begin in a letter that Israeli history would have been different had he judged Begin more honestly: “the better I have come to know you in recent years, the more I have come to admire you, and my Paula was very happy about that.” One sees Ben-Gurion’s undeniable instances of partisan myopia in a different light when one recalls what the alternatives were. As the historian Avi Bareli has shown, some of Ben-Gurion’s fellow labor leaders went so far as to stress the “unity of the party and state,” as East European Communist leaders did. “Mapai is Zionism,” said one of Ben-Gurion’s Mapai party colleagues in 1949. But overall, Ben-Gurion’s record of statesmanship stands up well. As prime minister, Ben-Gurion managed to balance the need for a strong state with respect for political, religious, and ethnic differences. Ultimately, he understood the state would be stronger precisely if it respected the rights of citizens.

## II. Culture War and the Spirit of Compromise

For Ben-Gurion, a key plank of *mamlakhtiyut* was aversion to culture war. When the various “Who is a Jew” controversies erupted in Israel in the 1950s and 1960s, his response was to convene a diverse array of Jewish experts around the world to write learned essays on the subject, rather than to press for political action. While some Labor-movement colleagues in the first years of the state sought to create a single, uniform national education system that would aspire to turn new immigrants into labor Zionists, Ben-Gurion successfully advocated for educational pluralism.

In other words, he refused to make war on the cultural traditionalism and religiosity of new immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa. National service and patriotism were essential to inculcate across sub-cultures of Israel.

But culture war, especially on religious and constitutional matters, was simply dangerous. If a small state like Israel devoted itself to culture war, it would tear itself apart before its enemies could. In a highly significant speech to the Knesset in 1949—*Mosaic* published the translation in 2021—Ben-Gurion cautioned against culture war and urged a muddling-through approach to thorny questions about religion, state, and the nature of the regime. He warned also against debating the chief question on everyone’s minds, of whether Israel should establish a formal constitution. Such a debate would embroil most of the members of the Knesset, and of course the newspapers—*Ma’ariv* and *Y’diyot Ahronot* surely. The matters are maybe important, but they’d instigate a fight and an argument. . . . If we begin to engage in major philosophic arguments, we will damage the essential needs of the state.

A religiously and intellectually diverse nation had to leave the deepest questions partially unresolved if everyone were to live together tolerably. Surrounded by enemies, Israel had to concentrate instead on building its political and economic might. The Jewish penchant for intellectualism and theory, while a source of strength, could be debilitating if it absorbed too much political attention. “We very much love theoretical debates,” Ben-Gurion continued in the same speech: “One person will declare allegiance to Israel, another to socialist revolution. A third will say he’s loyal to popular democracy, and another to pioneering. It’s a divisive and futile debate . . . and it will distract us from the essence of the matter.”

The “essence of the matter” is political. Questions of war, peace, and diplomacy had to be front and center for ordinary Israelis, to say nothing of the political class. And the political class had to be perpetually interested in “foreign threats”—a subject that involved not only understanding how Israelis saw the world but also how other powers viewed Israel.

In his early years, Ben-Gurion had a much narrower sense of geopolitics than some of his far-sighted contemporaries. The Revisionist leader Vladimir Jabotinsky clearly saw that the Ottoman empire was on its last legs before World War I and thought that the Jews of Palestine had to throw in their lot decisively with Britain. Ben-Gurion saw later than Jabotinsky did that Arabs would not surrender their own political agenda if given various economic benefits by the Zionists. By 1948, however, his domestic and international vision far exceeded that of his colleagues and rivals. Just before independence in 1948, some left-wing Zionists like Moshe Sneh and Yaakov Riftin gave speeches denouncing “Anglo-American imperialism” and implicitly calling on the Jews of Palestine to align with the Soviet

Union. Broadly comprehending the relative power of England’s newly diminished role in world affairs, and the strategic orientation and capabilities of the unfolding cold war, Ben-Gurion saw the situation more clearly. The British would reinforce their Jordanian allies, but they would not launch an actual invasion of the Jewish state.

Meanwhile, he saw that the state would have to engage in a fragile balancing act between the Soviets and America—even as, very early on after independence, he subtly began to turn Israel toward the West and away from the Soviet Union—though even here Ben-Gurion always attempted to maintain maximum freedom of action for the Jewish state. This meant, as a full essay on Ben-Gurion’s generally brilliant foreign policy would demonstrate, taking friends where he could find them. Completely boycotted by the Arab world in the 1950s, Israel looked further afield for allies, to Iran and many African states. Formally subject to an American arms embargo, Israel reconciled with its former colonial master Britain, and developed strong ties with France as well.

Though political exuberance sometimes overtook him, he saw it as the responsibility of the statesman to be keenly aware of real and potential dangers around the corner. After Israel’s victory in the Six-Day War, Ben-Gurion was overwhelmed by “profound joy,” he wrote some time after. “I experienced something as profound only on my first night after arriving in Petah Tikvah, when I heard the howling of the jackals and the braying of the donkeys and I felt that I was in our nation’s renewed homeland, not in exile.”

In general, though, he felt that it was the responsibility of statesmanship to guard against undue optimism. “I mourn amidst the rejoicers,” Ben-Gurion wrote in his diary both after the UN had approved the partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states on November 29, 1947 and after he declared independence on May 14, 1948. He anticipated the dangers to come. During World War II, he studied Churchill’s great speeches carefully. He especially admired that Churchill could share “bitter truths” with the British people. Fear of evil, Ben-Gurion believed, makes a sounder basis for policy than hope.

### *III. Economics and the Spirit of Sparta*

On economic matters, the mature Ben-Gurion balanced pluralism with a martial austerity that complicated his attitude to national wealth and development. He held conventional labor-Marxian beliefs in his early years in Palestine, to which he made his way from the Russian empire in 1907. But as he rose through the ranks of the Zionist leadership, and certainly by the time he

began to take the reins of Palestine-based Zionism in the 1930s, his ideological rigidity had waned. His lodestar became a strong Jewish state—and he was willing to countenance whatever economic policies he thought would strengthen the state. He retained a lifelong commitment to the idea of pioneering and of settling all the land—pillars of the labor movement. In the 1950s he still would speak of inculcating the “pioneering spirit” in newcomers to Israel. But as prime minister, he never seriously attempted to stifle the growth of a more “bourgeois” mindset and lifestyle in Israel’s larger towns and cities. Those lacking the Histadrut union “red card” would face economic discrimination for decades.

If not for Ben-Gurion, however, many Mizrahi Israelis may not have come to Israel in the first place. In 1949, the Mapai party flirted with immigration restrictionism partially because of the immense economic strains on a country that had just barely emerged from the War of Independence but also, just as importantly, owing to prejudice that Mizrahi Jews were somehow unfit for the pioneering life. Ben-Gurion fought against this narrow Labor parochialism. Israel desperately needed Jews. These Jews needed Israel. With the passage of the Law of Return in 1950, Israel essentially opened the door to cultural and economic diversity even as economic statism remained the dominant economic paradigm until the 1980s.

Despite this commitment to de-facto economic and cultural pluralism, Ben-Gurion also sought to model austere virtue for generations of Israelis. He had moved to the Negev kibbutz of Sde Boker in 1953—before air conditioning—hoping to set an example of continued toil and struggle for the coming generations. Austerity was a common social as well as ideological marker of the labor Zionist elite. And whatever tastes they may have had, they arrived in an early-20th-century Ottoman Palestine which was among the poorest regions in the world. The rustic and simple lifestyles of David Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir, Levi Eshkol, and Moshe Dayan set the tone for Israel’s entire political class, left and right, well into the 1990s.

Behind this seemingly superficial stylistic matter was a salient insight about the potentially corrupting effects of wealth on civic virtue, an insight that writers ancient and modern had addressed. Though ultimately necessary to perpetuate the state, the drive toward the limitless accumulation of wealth at the same time risks producing beliefs and habits that can endanger the state. In the 20th century, writers such as Raymond Aron, Irving Kristol, and Daniel Bell similarly analyzed the “cultural contradictions of capitalism.”

Ben-Gurion did not live to see Israel become prosperous. Yet he worried that cultural and economic laxness could lead to civic decline. And on some matters, he was willing to use law or bureaucratic means to restrict practices that might damage the national spirit. It was David Ben-Gurion who ensured that the “useless” color television did not make its debut in Israel until 1983. In 1965, the Mapai party banned the Beatles from playing in Israel for fear of corrupting the young. (Paul McCartney would ultimately play in Tel Aviv’s Yarkon Park in 2008 to great adulation). It was this aspect of early Israel that led perceptive commentators to compare the Jewish state to ancient Sparta.

#### *IV. Has Israel Lived Up to Ben-Gurion’s Ideal?*

Really existing states rarely stand up to the exalted visions of their creators. Israel is no different; few Israelis, at any time, would describe its politics or daily life as fulfilling Ben-Gurion’s ideal of statesmanship. But understood at the most basic level as commitment to the country, *mamlakhtiyut* has been an extraordinary success. After elite flirtation with post-Zionism in the 1990s and 2000s, today both elite and ordinary Israelis are invested in the future of a Jewish state, even as they differ, sometimes radically, about what a Jewish state ought to mean. In moments of crisis, political figures and the nation at large have been able to put the cause of the state above partisan distinctions or personal political fortunes. On October 6, opponents and supporters of judicial reform were having a caustic war of words at Shabbat tables and on the streets. On October 8, they were ready to fight together as brothers-in-arms in Gaza. Indeed, national service remains robust: witness the return of reservists in numbers from abroad immediately after October. Druze and Arab-Israeli citizens have contributed both on the battle front and home front; a recent poll indicating that 70 percent of Arab Israelis identify with the Jewish state is powerful reason to believe in the Jewish and liberal aspirations of Israel’s founders. (In the early days of the war, the papers were full of heartening stories of young ultra-Orthodox men enlisting in the army. This seems to have tapered off, and ultra-Orthodox enlistment may reemerge as a radioactive political issue when the fighting stops.) The national war slogan, “together we will win,” speaks to an actual national consensus in favor of winning, though there has been minimal public debate about what winning might mean. The nationwide mobilization and solidarity displayed since 10/7 should dispel any notion that Israel is weak because it is politically divided, soft, or distracted.

Still, other aspects of *mamlakhtiyut* have either declined in recent times or simply never took hold in the first place. Ben-Gurion hoped Israelis would develop “respect for law and institutions.” This has been a mixed success at best. The Israeli state has often been strong. It has known its share of imaginative and effective bureaucrats. But government, bureaucracy, and courts have often been seen as unresponsive, unrepresentative, and ideologically biased. Government and parliament have often been weak, and the quality of the political class has declined over decades, so that now the weakness of Israel’s current leadership is widely accepted.

All of this was bad enough in peacetime. During the war, many Israelis have expressed, with some justification, that feel abandoned by a government still driven by narrow personal ambitions and partisan score settling. Even longtime admirers have been disappointed by Benjamin Netanyahu’s reluctance to take responsibility for what happened on his watch. Despite the national emergency, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich has continued to deliver large transfer payments to favored groups and constituencies rather than redirecting funds to the war effort. And by not forcefully acting against vigilantism in the West Bank, and by repeatedly urging the permanent transfer of Gaza’s civilians, parliamentarians like Itamar Ben-Gvir have failed the basics of not only *mamlakhtiyut* but of liberal democracy, according to which the state alone is responsible for justice. On the left, there have been many who are all-too comfortable to enlist the U.S. government and foreign NGOs in domestic political battles, a dangerous affront to national sovereignty and Israel’s freedom of action. Above all, Israel’s descent over the last handful of years into all-out culture war represents perhaps the most flagrant deviation from Ben-Gurionite *mamlakhtiyut* in Israeli history. It has been a massive failure to follow his dictum to distinguish “the essential from the ephemeral.” At the time, the battle over judicial reform may have seemed like a debate over the most essential matters in Israeli public life. In hindsight we can see it for what it was: a terrible national distraction. (That such a debate could be considered a distraction just goes to show how difficult it is to distinguish the essential from the ephemeral.) For whatever one’s position on the authorities of the Supreme Court, it hardly represented an imminent threat to the safety, security, or flourishing of the state.

In a tragicomedy of errors, Israelis persuaded themselves that the future of the Jewish state hinged on the reasonableness standard in judicial review. The national debate frequently got lost in trivialities, such as whether bread products should be allowed in hospitals on Passover. One cost was the ripping apart of a difficult but tolerable

truce between the different parts of Israeli society to the point that many feared serious violence; a prominent Israeli politician told me recently: “Had October 7th not occurred, there would have been blood in the streets, shed by us.” Another cost was even worse: matters more truly relating to life and death—normalization with Saudi Arabia, the growing threat of Iran, and, as it turns out, the capacities of Hamas—were placed out of sight, out of mind.

Unfortunately, the reform debate may not be over. On January 1, the Supreme Court canceled the government’s law rejecting the Court’s power to invoke the reasonableness standards in rulings. At the same time, it claimed for itself the power to overturn Basic Laws if, in the judgment of the Court, the law does not conform to Israel’s Jewish or democratic character. This ruling could either be the end of Israel’s recent experiment with judicial reform or else set the stage for an even more intense fight after the war. In either case, one hopes that the experience of the last year will lead protagonists to think twice about putting the country through another bout of civil conflict amid so many foreign-policy dangers. Why did this cultural and constitutional showdown break out now? I have written elsewhere that the judicial-reform crisis is really a species of Israel’s parliamentary crisis stretching back half a decade, as the country absorbed election after election without clear results and the legitimacy of politicians and the system itself came to seem doubtful. But another factor was at work too. Before 10/7, Israelis felt far more at ease than in many decades, perhaps than ever before. A streak of utopian thinking of both left- and right-wing varieties gripped Israelis in the almost two-decade period of relative calm following the Second Lebanon War in 2006. Many centrists came to think that there were technocratic solutions to every political problem. The state-of-the-art security fence could almost make one believe that Israel really had “disengaged” (Ariel Sharon’s term for his withdrawal in 2006) from Gaza. Some on the right thought that the government’s successful blocking of an unworkable two-state solution with the Palestinians meant Israel now had a free hand to do what it liked in the West Bank and elsewhere. And the small remnant of the Israeli left continued to dream that peace was simply a matter of everyone willing it.

This kind of utopianism was enabled by economic trends in Israel that go back decades. Israel is no longer Sparta, and it hasn’t been for a while. Both color TV and economic liberalization were relatively late to the game in Israel, but the cultural and economic changes they wrought were enormous. In 1984, the Ben-Gurion protégé Shimon Peres enlisted the young MIT economist Stanley Fisher to restructure a dysfunctional

economy that saw 450-percent inflation in 1984. Under Fisher's economic stabilization plan, banks were privatized, and state expenditures cut. The first of several efforts to diminish the power of the Histadrut labor union was launched. The liberalizing reforms were later advanced adroitly by Benjamin Netanyahu during his tenure as Ariel Sharon's finance minister from 2003 to 2005.

Sound economic policies and global economic developments combined in Israel to produce a run of astounding economic growth, which really got going after the second intifada (2000–2005). Israel sailed through the global financial and Eurozone crises that marked the end of the first decade of the century and began to experience the benefits of having its highly educated workforce link up with foreign firms and capital. This was the zeitgeist captured by Dan Senor and Saul Singer's *Start-Up Nation*. Some Israeli academics wondered whether their country had become fundamentally "bourgeois" or middle class. It would be too simple to say that Ben-Gurion would have opposed this development in Israeli society. Indeed, at the time of Ben-Gurion's death in 1973, his fears about money may have seemed obscurantist. Why worry about the moral effects of wealth or luxury when there was so little wealth or luxury to go around? In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, Israel saw dramatic decline in economic growth and rising inflation, after steady and sometimes dramatic growth in the 1950s and 1960s. There was to be no quick recovery. The combination of rising military expenditure and welfare-state transfer payments finally brought the economy to its knees during the second part of Menachem Begin's premiership, in the early 1980s. The structural reforms of the mid-1980s helped stabilize the situation, but Israel at the turn of the 21st century was hardly rich, and what wealth it had was not consumption-driven.

When I first visited Israel some quarter-century ago, owning a private car was considered a luxury. Most Israelis still took their post-army long trip but the frenetic travel around the world we see today was unheard of even for the well to do. Keeping in touch with friends and relatives abroad by long-distance phone call was a serious expense. That charming if dilapidated apartment in the center of Jerusalem or Tel Aviv could have been had for a song in the early 2000s; now it would fetch Manhattan-level prices. Though ubiquitous national and military service still mitigates against this, the question of the moral effects of wealth has become relevant in a country whose GDP now rivals that of some European countries.

As recently as the 2000s, Israel could reliably count on a large share of its best and brightest staying in the army or other public-sector jobs.

The explosion of the tech sector changed all that. In the last fifteen years in particular, start-up nation has meant higher income and more interesting life opportunities—like making the color TV shows that are now among Israel's chief cultural exports. The result has been that Israel's best and brightest could exercise their talents beyond the military and the political spheres. Indeed, the most coveted military assignments are now in cyber-units that prepare their veterans for business opportunities afterwards.

No one would wish for Israel to be poorer. One lesson from the classical literature on the dangers of wealth is that states *must* pursue as much national wealth as possible, without limit, if they have any hope of competing with other states that inevitably will do the same. Yet the blessings of Israel's newfound wealth have fed a deeper problem.

### V. *Normaliyut and the Return of Statesmanship*

Perhaps the opposite of *mamlakhtiyut* is the English-derived word *normaliyut*, normalcy. Widely used in the country since the 1990s, it connotes a wish to lead normal lives after all the travails of the Jewish and Israeli past. This desire is natural. Yet, fed by economic and cultural success, over the last couple of decades it grew into something of a seductive fantasy—a belief that Israel had become a high-tech utopia living in the so-called "End of History," or at least had become strong and powerful enough that it could afford to view life and politics through cultural or spiritual lenses rather than political ones. For despite the growth in prosperity, despite the Abraham Accords and other regional breakthroughs, the dangers were there all along. Now that they've been revealed, *normaliyut* will have to be put on hold yet again.

As the war continues, there are signs that some Israelis are replacing the desire for normalcy with a steely *mamlakhti* resolve. Asaf Zamir, the former consul-general in New York, recently summed up Israel's grave challenge in language that could have been ripped from David Ben-Gurion:

If this war ends without it being completely safe to return to live on the border of Lebanon, and around Gaza, and if it's impossible to return and hold festivals and events in the entire country without any fear, we lost. Not the war, the country. Want to know what the goals of the war are? These are the goals of the war. No less. Otherwise it's over. Maybe slowly, but over. Some prominent politicians have made substantive expressions of national solidarity. In the first days of the war, the former prime minister Naftali Bennett volunteered near the front, packing supplies. The fact that Benny

Gantz, now a minister in the emergency war cabinet, named his party the Mamlakhti Camp likewise indicates that the concept retains at least rhetorical power, and perhaps even political force. In mid-December, Gantz announced that he is moving to the western Negev, clearly attempting to follow in Ben-Gurion's footsteps. Ben-Gurion had moved to the arid region in the 1950s not only to exemplify the pioneering spirit but also because he knew that a civilian presence in the area was ultimately essential for Israel's national defense: if Israel's periphery wasn't safe, its center ultimately wouldn't be either. The stories of heroism and leadership from the front have been too numerous to count. And who can now say what future leaders are at this moment being formed on the battlefield in Gaza and in the command rooms in Tel Aviv?

Ben-Gurion demanded a great deal from Israelis. As he put it in his final public Bible lecture: We are the smallest of nations and, thus, we must be an exceptional people. Only our superior quality has sustained us. We succeeded in the Six-Day War because we succeeded in building an exceptional army. And we need not fear evil if we also succeed in establishing an exceptional government. The Jewish people has the needed traits to be an exceptional people, but to achieve this, more than any other nation in the world, we need an exceptional government. Yet perhaps Ben-Gurion expected too much from his countrymen. Designing America's government, the American founders soberly understood that "wise men will not always be at the helm," and thus instituted a system of checks and balances to compensate for the inevitable failings of human nature and to channel human energies in constructive directions. Israel is not blessed with such a system. After the war, Israelis may be forced to examine ways the design of its governing institutions has failed to account for these failings and how it can be strengthened, though the bitter experience of judicial reform may forestall that task. In any case, even if Israel boasted exemplary institutions, it could ill afford a sustained run of mediocre leadership. Ben-Gurion's *mamlakhtiyut* ought to be one cornerstone of an Israel that emerges stronger from this great test. Following the example of its indispensable founding father, the Jewish state must learn again to bear the burdens and embrace the splendors of statesmanship.

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*Mosaic, Januar 8 2024*

## Sharansky: Oslo sowed the seeds for the October 7 massacre

*At the Table: An international icon and a local Jerusalem celebrity, often glimpsed on streets and in stores, Natan Sharansky's presence adds to the "modern-day miracle" feel of life in Israel*

**By Maayan Jaffe-Hoffman & Erica Schachne**

Sharansky orders coffee with milk but is not patient with a digitized menu. "I just want a salad," he says. "Lots of vegetables." His smile is infectious as he talks about his eight grandchildren. A son-in-law was in the reserves for 147 days, and his daughter and her five sons moved into his home in the capital.



*Natan Sharansky is seen greeting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and wife, Sara, at a party celebrating the 25th anniversary of Sharansky's liberation, Feb. 2011. (credit: Moshe Milner/GPO)*

"One of the best parts of being a grandparent is that you enjoy the kids, then they go home to their parents," he says with a laugh. He admits to being busy since the war started. Sharansky, a former minister and executive chair of the Jewish Agency, is chairman of five Jewish nonprofits – including two that fight antisemitism and the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center, through which he is digitizing 200 years of archives. He jokes that his wife, Avital, keeps asking when he will retire: "I retired five years ago." The conversation takes us from Russia (where he was known as Anatoly) to Israel to US college



campuses. Sharansky talks animatedly and with a heavy Russian accent.

He vividly recounts the moment he stepped off the KGB airplane toward his newfound freedom. In defiance of the guards' orders to walk in a straight line, Sharansky chose to zigzag across the tarmac. Another memorable scene is his now-legendary stride across Berlin's Glienicke Bridge, where he took his first steps toward liberty clad in oversized civilian pants given to him ahead of his release. He leaped to freedom wearing a rope that served as a makeshift belt, causing the rope to snap. During the subsequent press conference, anxious to be reunited with his wife, he had to clutch his trousers to prevent them from slipping down.

Sharansky also talks about the first time he met Avital in Russia and how "it was love at first glance." He endearingly tells of urging the young woman to join his group's Hebrew program, promising he would help her, since he "knew 1,000 words in Hebrew." Happily, that was the exact amount Avital knew as well. It didn't take long to realize they both had exaggerated in their mutual eagerness to be together, each knowing only "maybe 900 Hebrew words less."

### *Hamas-Israel War and October 7 failures*

THE DISCUSSION quickly turns to Oct. 7 and the "shocking" and "terrible" failure beforehand of Israel's intelligence community and of the IDF that day. He says that everyone wants "to fight back and restore peace, but our perception of our security changed that day."

On the other hand, he says, "I think so much good has come out of our people" since the massacre.

"In one day, we went from being a polarized society to the most united. Suddenly, it was clear that the whole year of these mutual accusations was not in the hearts of the people.

"I am sure there will be at least two new parties in the next elections: one to the left of Likud, and one to the right, with new faces for everyone."

But Sharansky cannot let go of what he believes was the catalyst for the Gaza war: the Oslo Accords, meaning that the seeds of Oct. 7 were planted 30 years ago. He says the Oslo approach essentially communicated that "It's not our business, and it's not important for us in what kind of society the Palestinians live" but rather that Israel "find a dictator who can guarantee our stability."

"That was the idea of Oslo," Sharansky explains. "We are bringing [Yasser] Arafat. We know that he is a ruthless dictator. And we say to the Palestinians, 'Whether you want it or not, he will be your leader.' And we say to ourselves, 'Our prime minister said that it's good he [Arafat] is not restricted by democracy because that's how

he will defeat Hamas much quicker than we can do it.'"

Sharansky opposed Oslo because he believed Arafat would quickly understand that the only way he could maintain power by force was to find an external enemy. "What other external enemy would he have except us?" he asks. "A lot of public money was put into Arafat's account so he would be loyal to us. And it failed big."

The former minister says that not only did Arafat fail to defeat Hamas, but "Hamas defeated him." Then came the Disengagement in 2005 and the vision that Israel could separate from Gaza. Sharansky was the first minister to resign over the idea.

It's not that he does not want peace or believe it is achievable, Sharansky stresses. Rather, he does not think Israeli and world leaders have gone about obtaining it in the right way. He calls former prime minister Shimon Peres "primitive and a neo-Marxist," having fully bought into a blissful vision of Mideast peace.

"He was so popular because of his optimism," Sharansky says of Peres. "I am also optimistic, but I am not naive." Former prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, he opines, was more realistic but felt it was worthwhile to proceed.

He says he does not believe that then-prime minister Ariel Sharon really felt the Disengagement would achieve its goal. Sharon told Sharansky that he thought if Israel separated from Gaza and gave the Gazans complete independence, Israel would have 10 years of international approval – and be able to respond if Gazans carried out attacks against the Jewish state.

"I told him, 'We don't have 10 years; we don't have 10 days,'" Sharansky says. "I was wrong. We had a couple of months.

"We are paying a very big price for our attempts," he continues, speaking quickly. "We have no choice now. If we want to continue to exist as a state, we have to destroy Hamas. We have to take control over the security."

*Netanyahu 'should resign after the war' but is 'not prolonging the war to stay in office'*

THE CONVERSATION jumps to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who Sharansky believes should have had a two-term limit and needs to retire immediately after the war. But he also says Netanyahu "did great things for our people" and has played "a very important leadership role" in the country's success.

The former Soviet dissident and refusenik cites Netanyahu's role in developing Israel's capitalist economy, ensuring the Taglit-Birthright free trip to Israel program (of which Sharansky was an

early champion), and highlighting the danger of Russian weapons sales to Iran.

“He deserves a lot of credit,” he says. “No one remembers,” noting that Netanyahu also went out of his way for Sharansky and his family on a personal level.

Anyone who claims Netanyahu is prolonging the war to stay in office is spreading a blood libel, he asserts, and the notion is “nuts.”

“I think that if [Benny] Gantz were the leader today, he would have done the same war as Bibi,” Sharansky says. “I don’t see many choices.”

He also believes there is a second front: American college campuses, which opened up to anti-Israel movements long before this war.

“In 2003, being a minister in the Israeli government, I had a kind of tour of all the universities because I was looking for the roots of antisemitism,” Sharansky recalls. “It was the time of the Second Intifada... when hundreds of our citizens were killed by suicide bombers, and we were fighting against it.

“And then I heard from one student – she was a post-graduate student in Harvard Business School. She explained to me that she wanted very much to sign the letter against divestment in support of Israel. But she knew for sure there will be three professors who are very important for her career who will not like it. And that’s why she decided to be silent for a few years until her career was guaranteed.

“And I remember I thought, ‘My God, it’s not at Moscow University in my days when people were double-thinkers: [It’s now] here in the free world.’”

Rather than using blanket hasbara (public relations), Sharansky adds, the goal today should be to illustrate how antisemitism is the first warning to a society that it is becoming “illiberal.” He worries the Western world is betraying its liberal ideas in favor of progressive ones.

“The most important struggle in America is not between Left and Right but between liberals and progressives,” Sharansky says. “Progressives are not allies; they are enemies of liberalism. And it was very difficult for many organizations, especially Jewish liberal organizations, to accept this.”

We mention the storm of criticism against Jewish director Jonathan Glazer’s Oscar acceptance speech this past week, in which he “refute[d his] Jewishness and the Holocaust being hijacked by an occupation.” All Jews, Sharansky points out, regardless of ideology, would be rounded up like the ethnic German Jews if it came down to it. But he believes Oct. 7 should have enlightened these Jewish organizations, along with figures like Glazer – especially given the response to the heinous sexual crimes perpetrated by Hamas against Israeli women.

These have been “the most awful violation of women’s rights” going back hundreds of years, “and these organizations [like UN Women] are not ready to say a word. They are silent at best,” Sharansky says, noting that some progressives even say the Israelis deserved it because they are “oppressors.”

“That’s like the best proof that progressive organizations are not liberal organizations,” Sharansky concludes.

*Pamela B. Paresky contributed to this article.*

*March 16, 2024*

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## The Two-State Delusion

*The Biden administration is leading a push to recognize a Palestinian state that will be a danger to the security of Israel*

**By Elliott Abrams**

Everyone knows what to do about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Arrange the “two-state solution.” That has been a commonplace for decades, going back to the Oslo Accords, all the international conferences, the “Roadmap,” and the efforts by a series of American presidents and their staffs of ardent peace processors.

In the West, the call for a “two-state solution” is mostly a magical incantation these days. Diplomats and politicians want the Gaza war to stop. They want a way out that seems fair and just to voters and makes for good speeches. But they are not even beginning to grapple with the issues that negotiating a “two-state solution” raises, and they are not seriously asking what kind of state “Palestine” would be. Instead they simply imagine a peaceful, well-ordered place called “Palestine” and assure everyone that it is just around the corner. By doing so they avoid asking the most important question: Would not an autocratic, revanchist Palestinian state be a threat to peace?

No matter: The belief in the “two-state solution” is as fervent today as ever. The German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said it’s the “only solution” and Britain’s defense minister chimed in that “I don’t think we get to a solution unless we have a two-state solution.” Not to be outdone, U.N. Secretary General Guterres said, “The refusal to accept the two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians, and the denial of the right to statehood for the Palestinian people, are unacceptable.” The EU’s Foreign Minister Josep

Borrell said recently, “I don’t think we should talk about the Middle East peace process anymore. We should start talking specifically about the two-state-solution implementation process.” What if Israel does not agree, and views a Palestinian state as an unacceptable security threat? Borrell’s answer was that “One thing is clear—Israel cannot have the veto right to the self-determination of the Palestinian people. The United Nations recognizes and has recognized many times the self-determination right of the Palestinian people. Nobody can veto it.”

In the United States, 49 Senate Democrats (out of 51) just joined to support a resolution that, according to Sen. Brian Schatz, is “a message to the world that the only path forward is a two-state solution.” Biden administration officials have been a bit more circumspect in public. At the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos in January, Secretary of State Blinken told his interviewer, *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, that regional integration “has to include a pathway to a Palestinian state.”

National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan called for “a two-state solution with Israel’s security guaranteed.” And President Biden meandered around an important security point: “there are a number of types of two-state solutions. There’s a number of countries that are members of the U.N. that ... don’t have their own military; a number of states that have limitations, and so I think there’s ways in which this can work.”

What if ‘what the Palestinian people want’ is mostly to destroy Israel?

The Biden administration, then, joins all enlightened opinion in saying there must be a Palestinian state, but adds that it must not have an army. No other precondition seems to exist for the creation of that state once the Palestinian Authority has been “revamped” or “revitalized” so that it becomes “effective.” And most recently, Blinken has asked his staff for policy options that include formal recognition of a Palestinian state as soon as the war in Gaza ends. This would be a massive change in U.S. policy, which for decades has insisted that a Palestinian state can only emerge from direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. But the pressure is growing, it seems, to skip niceties like negotiations and move quickly to implement the “two-state solution.”

There are three things wrong with this picture. First, none of the current proposals even acknowledges, much less overcomes, the obstacles that have always prevented the “two-state solution.” Second, the “effective governance” reforms fall very far short of creating a decent state in which Palestinians can live freely. And most important, any imaginable Palestinian state will be a dangerous threat to Israel.

Start with the issues—beyond violence and terror—that negotiations to create a Palestinian state must resolve and are being ignored. Take borders, for instance: Where are they? In the round of negotiations in 2008, after the 2007 Annapolis Conference, Palestinian representatives demanded that Israel get out of the West Bank towns of Ariel and Ma’ale Adumim—populations 20,000 and 38,000, respectively. Are those still Palestinian demands? How many of the Israelis living in the West Bank must leave? Must the new state of Palestine must be *judenrein*?

But those are the *simpler* border issues; the tough one is Jerusalem. Will East Jerusalem be the capital of a Palestinian state? If so, what does that mean? The old Arab Quarter only, or the Christian and Armenian quarters too? Do their residents have any say in this? Is it actually being proposed that the Western Wall would be the Israeli border, and if you stand there and look up you are looking at another country? Or that David’s Citadel and the Tower of David would be in Palestine? A look at the map of Jerusalem shows how impractical is the division of Jerusalem again if the city is to thrive, but what about politics? Which Israeli politicians of the left or center are going to be in favor of dividing Jerusalem again, going back to the pre-1967 days—and doing it in the aftermath of the Hamas massacres of Oct. 7?

The Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 is sometimes suggested as the basis for negotiations, but it demands “Full Israeli withdrawal from all the territories occupied since 1967, including the Syrian Golan Heights, to the June 4, 1967 lines as well as the remaining occupied Lebanese territories in the south of Lebanon.” More border troubles! Especially since the U.S. has recognized Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, which includes areas claimed by the Lebanese. And what about the issue of “refugees?”

UNRWA, the U.N.’s discredited but powerful Palestinian refugee agency, says there are 5.9 million “Palestinian refugees,” using its definition that includes generation after generation no matter what citizenship they have. Will there be a “right of return?” In the negotiations in 2008, the private Palestinian demand was much smaller—in the range of 10,000 or 15,000. But Israeli negotiators rejected those numbers, taking a position of principle against the “right of return” but also noting the impossible problem of deciding who would qualify for it. Will Palestinian politicians agree to abandon it once and for all? If not, how will negotiations succeed?

Second, suppose negotiations do succeed and the borders of a Palestinian state are drawn. Does anyone care what is going on *inside* those borders? In January Secretary Blinken said, “It’s I think very important for the Palestinian people

that they have governance that can be effective. ...” They need a Palestinian Authority, he said, that can “actually deliver what the Palestinian people want and need. ...”

There are some words missing in all the calls for a Palestinian state—words like democracy, human rights, and liberty. EU Foreign Minister Borrell said in 2022 that “our message to the incoming Israeli government, which we hope will confirm the country’s full commitment to the shared values of democracy and rule of law, and with which we hope to engage in serious conversation on the conflict and the need to re-open the political horizon for the Palestinian population.” This is not new: In his speech in Israel in 2013, President Obama called for “Two states for two peoples. ... [T]he only way for Israel to endure and thrive as a Jewish and democratic state is through the realization of an independent and viable Palestine.”

More on the Palestinians and U.S. Policy

It seems the state on the west side of the Jordan River, Israel, must be democratic but not the new state on the east bank, Palestine. Why the distinction? Because no one thinks the Palestinian state will be a democratic state—or seems much to care. *Palestine* might be free, but no one seems to care whether *Palestinians* will be.

Why not? Natan Sharansky explained in 2000 that “Israel and the West are too quick to rely on strong leaders for stability. Democracies often prefer to deal with dictators who have full control.” That was the view Israel took in the Oslo Accords, handing the Palestinians over to Yasser Arafat. His dictatorial control was thought to be an advantage to Israel, for he would supposedly crush Hamas. The Gaza war demonstrates how tragically wrong that outlook proved to be, because the corrupt and ineffective Fatah autocracy proved to be no match for the corrupt and effective Hamas terrorists who turned Gaza into an armed camp.

Today, just about no one but Sharansky is calling for Palestinian democracy. The Arab states are not, of course, because not one of them is a democracy. The Europeans and Americans are not, I imagine, because they do not believe the Palestinians can do it—can create a working democracy. So the U.S. and the EU are willing to create a Palestinian state in the hope that it would be a better autocracy than it is at present—better at policing the terrorist groups, better at fighting corruption, and less repressive.

How likely is that? Fighting corruption, for example, requires a free press to investigate it and independent courts to try cases. But no one (except Sharansky!) is calling for any of that as a precondition for declaring a Palestinian state. So it is highly likely that a new Palestinian Authority will soon be as corrupt as the current one.

But there’s a much deeper problem: No one is explaining how that state will live in “peace and security” with Israel if its people would prefer war with Israel. What if, to use Blinken’s language, “what the Palestinian people want” is mostly to destroy Israel?

And they may: Opinion polls suggest that very many Palestinians and not just those in Hamas consider the State of Israel illegitimate, want it eliminated, and favor “armed struggle.” That is, their Palestinian nationalism is not positive—mainly about building a democratic, prosperous, peaceful state of their own—but negative, mainly about destroying the Jewish state. According to a recent poll, if the last parliamentary election were repeated now, Hamas would win an outright majority.

But then what is the nature of the Palestinian state that Western governments are demanding? A terrorist state? A state with a coalition government that is half terrorist, based on admittance of Hamas into the PLO? A state that is an autocracy where “armed struggle” against Israel is widely popular and is prevented only by severe repression by local authorities—who are bound to become increasingly unpopular as they resist the popular will for a fight? Or, conversely, a state like Lebanon, where the authorities are too weak to restrain Hezbollah and in fact have become complicit in the group’s activities? And creating that state is supposed to be the *solution* to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

Despite all this, Israelis are supposed to be reassured that a Palestinian state will be no threat to them because it will have no army and will be “demilitarized.” Israelis are not so dumb—nor should we be.

Perhaps there will be no standing army. But when the Palestinians decide to “upgrade” their police by purchasing armored personnel carriers or night vision goggles, or “defensive” weapons like drones or submachine guns, who will stop them? If your answer is “surely, Israel,” you may be right—but Israel will no longer be able to do that the way it now does, by patrolling the West Bank. Instead its only recourse would be invading or attacking the new sovereign state. Would those Israeli measures to enforce the demilitarization be applauded and defended by the British and the Germans and the U.N. secretary general? Will they be defended in Washington? Or will they be called acts of war across sacred international boundaries? Wait until the International Court of Justice gets the case.

What other “demilitarization” measures will be imposed by the “international community” on Palestine? A ban on treaties with other nations? A ban on permitting an Iranian embassy, which will on the day it opens be a nest of spies and an arms depot? What about a Syrian embassy, or a Lebanese embassy with a Hezbollah presence?

Who will inspect diplomatic pouches carrying arms and ammunition for terrorists? Will dual use items be banned in all Palestinian commercial agreements with Russia and China and North Korea?

It's true that limitations on Palestinian sovereignty can be built into any "two-state solution" and Palestinian officials can sign them in blood. But the blood will fade; the limitations will be viewed by Palestinians the way most Germans viewed the limitations imposed by the Versailles Treaty. Those who seek to live with them will be called traitors, and those who demand abrogating or violating them will be "nationalists" and heroes. And the Israelis will find many deaf ears in the "international community" about the growing dangers, until they try to do their own enforcement. Then they will hear loud voices in every U.N. body and dozens of world capitals, denouncing their aggression against the new Palestine. Now add Iran to that mix. The great threats to Israel today (unless and until Iran develops a nuclear weapon) all come from Iranian proxy groups: Hezbollah, the Houthis, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the rest. The day a Palestinian state is declared is the day Iran hypes up its efforts—which are already considerable—to turn the West Bank into what Gaza became in the last decade: a maze of arsenals, training centers, tunnels, launching sites, and bases for terrorist attacks. Only this time the geography will be different, because the hills of Judea and Samaria overlook Ben-Gurion Airport, Jerusalem, and the coastal plain where most of Israel's economy, its largest port, and its largest city are located.

Iranian-supplied weapons will be sneaked into "Palestine" from Syria, over the Jordanian border. Even if one postulates that the Jordanians may try to stop this, they have been unable to stop the current weapons flows and Iran will be trying much harder. Israelis now refer to the Iranian "ring of fire" that surrounds them, in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Gaza, and to a lesser extent the West Bank. Adding a Palestinian state will be a great Iranian achievement and will add a vital piece to that ring of fire.

Amazingly enough, that seems to be the new "Biden Doctrine"—as Thomas Friedman describes it in *The New York Times*. The Biden Doctrine calls for recognizing a Palestinian state ("NOW," as Friedman puts it) "that would come into being only once Palestinians had developed a set of defined, credible institutions and security capabilities to ensure that this state was viable and that it could never threaten Israel." But in the real world those institutions and capabilities will never be developed, so the pressure will mount from day one to lower the bar and start planning Independence Day parties. First the Arabs, then

the Europeans, and finally the United States will recognize whatever exists in the West Bank and Gaza; that's the Biden Doctrine when it comes to fruition.

The other relevant part of that new Doctrine, according to Friedman, is "a strong and resolute stand on Iran, including robust military retaliation against Iran's proxies and agents in the region." In other words, the same mug's game the United States has been playing for 40 years: Iran pays no price for its murderous activities because we punish only the proxies while Iran itself is sacrosanct. Biden policy toward Iran has from his first day in office been to weaken sanctions, to watch as Iran moves toward a nuclear weapon, and to keep repeating that "we want no conflict with Iran" while it attacks American soldiers. Leaks from the administration that it will soon hit Iranian targets in Iraq and Syria, giving Iran time to vacate those sites, suggest that the United States will continue to play slightly new versions of the old game.

Creating a Palestinian state will not end the "Israeli-Palestinian conflict" because it will not end the Palestinian and now Iranian dream of eliminating the State of Israel. On the contrary, it can be a launching pad for new attacks on Israel and will certainly be viewed that way by the Jewish state's most dedicated enemies. A peaceful Palestinian state that represents no threat to Israel is a mirage. It is an illusion indulged by people in the West who want to seem progressive and compassionate, and those in the Arab world who fear resisting the powerful anti-Israel currents that circulate there and are now fortified by Iran. The future security of Israel depends in good part on resisting the two-state formula for endless conflict.

*Elliott Abrams* is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and the chairman of the Vandenberg Coalition.

*Tablet*, February 01, 2024

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## On Palestinian statehood

### *Lessons from Germany and Japan*

**By Daniel Pomerantz**

As Israel nears its goal of eliminating Hamas from Gaza, the United States, the United Nations and European allies are aggressively pushing for the near-term establishment of a Palestinian state. Saudi Arabia has made Palestinian statehood a condition of normalization with Israel, while President Biden and Israeli Prime Minister

Netanyahu lit up headlines last week with conflicting visions of a post-Hamas Gaza. Yet in their rush to implement a “two state solution,” Western leaders have overlooked a critical impediment: the Palestinian people don’t actually want one.

Hamas leader Khaled Mashal summed up the prevailing Palestinian attitude in an interview last week, “...especially after October 7, there’s a renewed dream of the hope of Palestine from the river to the sea, from the north to the south...we reject [a two state solution], because it means you are required to recognize the legitimacy of the Zionist entity [Israel]. This is unacceptable. [This is] the position of Hamas *as well as the majority of the Palestinian people.*” (Emphasis added.) Mashal’s assessment is correct: According to Arab research sources, 75 percent of Palestinians desire a Palestinian-only state that entirely supplants Israel, while 72 percent support the Oct. 7 massacre. The Palestinian Authority government (the presumptive leader of a future Palestinian state) has publicly committed to spending at least \$2.8 million per month out of its national budget as a cash reward to the individuals (including the terror operatives) who carried out the Oct. 7 massacre. Palestinian support for the total annihilation of Israel and of all its people is, therefore, not limited to Hamas, nor would such support automatically disappear in a post-Hamas world.

To ask Israelis to entrust their safety to the Palestinian Authority, a government that both supported and has committed to funding the Oct. 7 massacre, would be inappropriate and dangerous. To provide such a government with significant resources, including increased funding and international legitimacy, will both plant and water the seeds of more Oct. 7-style massacres to come.

The West has a history of willful blindness to Palestinian public opinion. For example, the 1990s saw widespread Israeli and Palestinian support for the Oslo peace process. But there was a critical difference between the two sides: Whereas Israelis envisioned the peace process as bringing an end to the conflict, both Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat and more than 72 percent of Palestinians did not. To the contrary, the prevailing Palestinian vision at the time was to accept the benefits and resources provided by the Oslo process but without any intent of actually ending the conflict.

Accordingly, Western nations initiated a massive influx of funding, resources, weapons, training and international legitimacy, in the naive hope of somehow changing Palestinian priorities. Nonetheless, much of these resources flowed to a variety of Palestinian terror organizations — thus vastly increasing the power and destructiveness of those groups, right up to the present day.

Since that time, decades of academics have sought to explain why Oslo failed, often placing blame on the West for not providing even more resources and concessions than it did. However, history shows that a peace agreement cannot possibly work if one of the sides does not actually want peace. That was the case in Palestinian society during the Oslo era and it remains the case today.

All of this leads to a critical question: What can be done today to ensure a better tomorrow for Israelis, Palestinians and the world at large?

It is exceedingly rare that an aggressive dictatorship transforms into a peaceful and prosperous democracy, but there are at least two historical examples: post-war Germany and Japan. Both cases began with full scale war and complete defeat, followed by total and unconditional surrender. During post-war “reconstruction,” the pre-existing governments were completely dismantled and former leaders subjected to war crimes tribunals. Germany underwent an intense program of “de-Nazification” and Japan underwent “de-empiricism” and “Westernization,” in both cases with the primary goal of ensuring that these former enemy powers could never again threaten the safety of the world.

Local populations understood, unequivocally, that any dreams of achieving victory through violence would have no possibility of ever succeeding.

Only as these processes began to truly take root over the course of years did Germany and Japan gradually rejoin the international community as functional and prosperous independent states. Less thorough efforts, such as in Afghanistan and Iraq, have resulted in disaster. It is notable that Iran played a role in undermining stabilization efforts in those regions, just as it is presently doing in Yemen, Lebanon, Syria and Gaza, and attempting to do throughout the Red Sea shipping lanes and within Israel.

The question the world must ask itself today is whether we envision a Palestinian future that resembles modern day Germany and Japan, or Afghanistan and Iraq. If we desire the former, history and common sense demand we take the same steps that achieved it: including total dismantling and reconstruction of Palestinian governing institutions, accountability for all Palestinian leaders who have supported terror, justice for Israeli and international victims of that terror, and an unequivocal demonstration to the Palestinian people that the goal of supplanting Israel and the tool of violence will have no chance of success, ever.

It may also be necessary to defeat or at least massively deter Iran and its proxies. Anything less will result in a danger to Israel, an ongoing threat to the world and a disaster for the Palestinian people.

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*The Hill*

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## Why is It So Difficult for Israel to Decipher Hamas?

By Michael Milshtein

As they were marching towards Jerusalem, the knights of the First Crusade lay siege to the city of Antioch in southern Anatolia from October 1097 to June 1098. They were approached there by envoys of the Fatimid dynasty ruling Egypt, who offered the Crusaders a plan to cooperate against the Seljuk state then in possession of Jerusalem, a plan to divide between them territory to be conquered from the Seljuks.

Based on past experience and historical memories, the Fatimids deemed the Crusaders to be mercenaries in the service of the Byzantines, European adventurers motivated primarily by material gain. Thus the Muslim side fundamentally failed to understand “the Other”: the force they now met was driven by faith, and was determined at almost any cost to realize the messianic vision for which they undertook their prolonged and bloody march from Europe to the Levant.

A thousand years later, the roles are reversed. Now it is the West which is stricken by distortions in its perceptions of the Middle East, where key players are driven by ideological fervor, largely religious in nature. Westerners adhere to theories of *realpolitik* which center on the belief that realities and the very essence of being can be shaped by material means.

America’s roles in both Afghanistan and Iraq were undertaken under optimistic assumptions and ended in painful retreats – reflecting the West’s failure to recast consciousness, to create new collective identities, to implant imported political and social patterns, and to bend ideologies through economic leverage. But the Americans are certainly not the only ones with failed perceptions of the Other.

Israel’s 36-year long confrontation with Hamas constitutes a unique test case of the difficulty in reading another culture, generally, and modern Islamism, specifically. It is an experience that exemplifies a number of basic problems: the projection of one’s own logic on “the Other” – and particularly the difficulty for a society in which ideological fervor has declined to understand another in which it is still at full force.

### *Mistaken Perceptions from the Beginning*

The failure to decipher what drives Hamas goes back to well before Hamas was officially founded in December 1987, shortly after the eruption of the First Intifada. Contrary to the common myth, Israel did not set up Hamas as a counterweight to Fatah and the PLO, Israel’s main enemies at the time. For decades prior to that, the Muslim Brotherhood movement had been active in Gaza and the West Bank. Its core activity was a social and spiritual appeal (*da’wah*). It became the “organization womb” giving birth to Hamas. Israeli thinking at the time assumed that the Brotherhood was less dangerous than other Palestinian groups, since it was focused on moral, faith and social activism, and thus it would be safe to let it be. Only by the mid-1980s did the first alarm bells ring, as religious leaders and charity organizers showed signs of involvement in terror activity as well.

Once established, Hamas has been engaged in a constant dynamic of extending its realm and building up its political and public base. Its domestic goals are taking over the Palestinian system as a whole and posing an alternative – political, social and cultural – to the PLO and its secular nationalist creed. This was to be the way station to the destruction of Israel and the establishment of Shariah-based religious governance in all of historical Palestine.

Adherence to this long-term goal enabled the movement to survive multiple low points in which its activities were curtailed, its cadres arrested en masse, its leaders struck down, and heavy losses incurred in confrontations with Israel.

Inside Hamas, there are no clear distinctions between social, military and political activity; ambiguities are deliberately created to blur those distinctions. The questions raised in Israel over three decades and a half: is Hamas a terror organization, a political party or a social movement? Answer: all of the above. Is it more Palestinian or more Islamic? Answer: it is both. Is there a difference between its political and military wings? Answer: this is another myth that the movement seeks to perpetuate.

Hamas' win in the 2006 parliamentary elections, and its violent takeover in Gaza in 2007, were seen by many in Israel as stepping stones towards an "evolution" of the movement which would force it, in a deterministic manner, to follow the trajectory of the PLO – i.e. "soften up" in both ideological and practical terms, when faced with governing. Israelis falsely assumed that radical and revolutionary elements, in coming to power, would find themselves facing unfamiliar constraints forcing them to moderate their stances.

But, as modern history taught us, extremist ideological elements who take power – by force or through the ballot box – usually move in the opposite direction: they gain more resources which enable them to set in motion more violent action than ever, aimed at realizing their vision. Nazi Germany, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) all followed this path. Being in government does require them to provide public services and the daily needs of people – but it also enables them to amass and develop weapons, use service provision as a means to extract loyalty, and shape the orientation of the societies they control and mobilize them for the struggles they conduct.

Thus, for the last 16 years Israelis came to describe an intense divide within Hamas between the polarized aspects of "resistance" (muqawwamah) on one hand and governance on the other, along with the claim that the movement assigns growing priority to the demands of the latter due to its new duties as a sovereign, and particularly the need to take care of the heavily burdened and needy Gazan population. In fact, during this past decade and a half Hamas deliberately avoided any such choice, and handled both poles with equal attention: managing the sewage in Gaza while also investing in a military buildup and preparation for a doomsday war with Israel.

Since the round of fighting between Israel and Hamas in May 2021, Israel conducted a strategic experiment in Gaza. At its core was an attempt to improve the conditions of life there, mainly through the promotion of civilian projects, allowing for the flow of money into Gaza and more Gazans to work in Israel. All this was driven by the basic assumption that these were means to prevent escalation and create for Hamas a disincentive for war. Public pressure would restrain the movement's hand in the case of deterioration with Israel, and the steady rise in the quality of life would over time lead to the transformation of Gaza's rulers, bending their ideological will and weakening their position in the Palestinian balance of power.

In hindsight, it was plain to see warning signs that should have alerted Israel to its fundamentally false conceptual framework. Hamas actively

promoted terror and incitement in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, allowed Palestinian Islamic Jihad to conduct rounds of violence against Israel from the Gaza Strip, and utilized the work of day laborers in Israel and the passage of goods to pursue its military goals, such as intelligence collection and arms smuggling. Yet when sharp contradictions emerged between Israeli groupthink and the actual behavior of Hamas, explanations were forthcoming. Prominent among these was the claim that Yahya Sinwar, the Hamas leader in Gaza, had become "messianic" or pathological and had lost his sense of reality.

### *The October 7 Assault*

The assault on October 7 proved to be the most extreme and tragic expression of Israel's difficulty to decipher Hamas. While everyone agreed that Hamas was an enemy preparing itself for a future war with Israel, it was also agreed that Hamas had no current intention of launching a war. It was defined as deterred and focused upon improving governance and quality of life in Gaza. Insofar as there was any discussion of its offensive options, what was envisioned was usually a limited military action. A combined assault by 3,000 men on all neighboring communities and the temporary conquest of some of them were way beyond any imagined IDF military intelligence scenario.

The groupthink that held until that fateful morning was the product of dialogue among policymakers and politicians in both the government and opposition, and the security establishment. Hamas contributed its own part by a prolonged and deliberate strategic deception – aimed at confirming that it was deterred and turned inwards. And thus, while Israeli decision-makers focused during these last two and a half years on promoting civilian advancement for Gaza, Hamas leaders were busy at the very same time planning the most painful attack ever launched by the Palestinians against Israel.

Remnants of the old groupthink still surface in the ongoing public discussion in Israel of Hamas' "motivations" and "goals" on October 7. The analysts and pundits still fail to understand that for Hamas, the duty of Jihad is paramount.

Hamas' purpose is to undermine the foundations of Israeli existence, paving the way for the latter's utter elimination. This way of thinking has no use for "scenarios" or an "exit strategy." Sinwar has been working on this plan for a decade. He knew full well the heavy price that it would exact from the Palestinians. This attack was his life's mission, not a step taken for security or political reasons such as the wish to derail Israeli-Saudi normalization or to improve living conditions in Gaza.



## *Stop the Groupthink*

Sinwar may indeed have a messianic streak and live in the timeframe of *al-Akhirah*, the end of days – based on the sober assessment that at any moment he and those close to him may be killed. And yet, the accusation of being cut off from reality applies even more to those who studied him, and yet could not figure out his intentions. Instead of cracking open the enemy's logic, and carefully reading its value system which reflects a different model of rationality, many of the analysts and pundits were projecting their own logic upon Sinwar, effectively playing chess with themselves.

This failure also reflects some structural problems of Israeli society, where fewer and fewer people – even among those in government, academe, media, and even security and intelligence – have command of the region's languages, fully understand its culture or know its history. Among other reasons, this is the result of a steady decline in the study of the humanities and social sciences and of the reverence, within the defense establishment and elsewhere, of the information and cyber revolution, the ease of Google translate, AI and Big Data. These are seen as tools that can absolve an analyst from the need to know Arabic – and yet seemingly enable her or him to accurately assess what will transpire in a region driven by very different cultural imperatives.

The security and intelligence communities have indeed long been captured by the allure of technological capabilities which seemingly assure Israel of superiority over its enemies. It is already becoming clear that many of the early warning signs of what was about to happen on October 7 came from relatively simple collection devices – tactical signals intelligence, direct observation, even open source material. Over all of this loomed a severe gap in humint – human intelligence, sources within Hamas – who could have offered crucial details as well as warned against enemy deceptions. Israelis at all levels today – particularly in the intelligence community – know much more now than they did in the past, but understand much less.

Once the war is over it will not be enough to investigate the policymakers, reorganize the intelligence bodies and enhance their internal controls, and expand the IDF and improve its fighting capabilities. There must also be a national soul-searching, posing as a challenge to ourselves the question of whether as a society we truly understand our regional environment, both in terms of fighting our enemies and of building up relations with our partners. In this respect, we must discard the infatuation with technology, and return to traditional skills such as command of the language, knowledge of history and appreciation

for the culture of “the Other,” and, to the degree possible, engagement with our neighbors.

*Michael Milshstein* is the head of the Forum for Palestinian Studies at the Dayan Center of Tel Aviv University and a senior researcher at the Institute for Policy and Strategy of Reichman University. He wrote (in Hebrew) *The Green Revolution: The Social Profile of Hamas* (2007).

*The Jerusalem Strategic Tribune, December 2023*

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## **Iranian bombs dropped on Israel are transported on ships using European ports**

**By Melanie Swan**

Iran is using European ports to provide cover for shipments of weapons to Hezbollah, *The Telegraph* can reveal.

The Lebanese terror group has received missiles and bombs on ships that go on to dock in ports in Belgium, Spain and Italy, sources said.

Hezbollah and Israel are close to all-out war amid daily exchanges of cross-border fire, causing border regions to be evacuated.

Iran has switched to shipping weapons by sea after Israel's air force began to target consignments coming in by land into northern Syria via Iraq, the source said.

Weapons and other goods are now shipped to the Syrian port of Latakia before the vessels go on to ports in Antwerp, Valencia and Ravenna, *The Telegraph* was told, in an attempt to disguise the purpose of the journeys.

From Latakia, the weapons are transported south to Lebanon.

“Using Europe helps to hide the nature and the source of the shipments, switching paperwork and containers... to clean the shipments,” a senior intelligence source in Israel said.

“Europe has huge ports so Iran is using that as a camouflage. It's very easy to do manipulations in those big ports where things have to get moved quickly, rather than a small port where there will be more scrutiny.

“It's like a cat and mouse between us and the Iranians. They're trying to smuggle and we're trying to stop it. It's been at least three years like this.”

## *Israeli attacks prompt a change in tactics*

Ronen Solomon, an independent intelligence analyst based in Israel, said that Iran was also shipping weapons directly to Syria. The use of separate routes via Europe was to “legitimise” their cargo and “distract attention” from those direct shipments.

The port of Latakia was targeted by air strikes in 2021, though these were not claimed by Israel, which rarely confirms operations in Syrian territory.

“The reason we see Iran’s efforts to transfer through the sea in the last month is because of Israeli attacks on air and land infrastructure in Syria to Lebanon, so we are seeing an increase in container shipments,” Mr Solomon said.

Mr Solomon, who works with intelligence officials in Israel, said the Iranian corridor to Syria and Lebanon by land, air, and sea “operates continuously”.

The flow of weapons comes amidst the worst tensions between Lebanon’s Hezbollah and Israel since the second Lebanon war.

Hezbollah launched 100 rockets at the Golan Heights in a single day this week. Around 60,000 Israeli civilians have been evacuated from the northern border regions, and Israel’s leaders have regularly warned they are prepared for a ground war against Hezbollah.

Mr Solomon added that the weapons will also reach Hamas in Lebanon and the routes, which include Egypt and Libya, are used to channel weapons to Hamas in Gaza.

“Switching ships and containers via Europe, especially under the cover of companies based in countries such as Romania, allows Iran to stay further under the radar,” he said.

“Libya has long been known to be a route for weapons to travel to Hamas via Rafah in Egypt, and this could still be the case with the latest shipments, as Egypt’s checks are not thorough the way they are done [at] Israel’s borders.”

Since the beginning of the Gaza war in October, five Iranian ships – Daisy, Kashan, Shiba, Arezoo and Azargoun – have unloaded goods in Syria, starting their journey in Bandar Abbas in Iran, according to intelligence handed to Solomon.

Co-ordinated by Iran’s Quds Force Unit 190, the weapon transfers are then managed by Hezbollah’s Unit 4400, which is responsible for arms shipments.

“Some ships like Daisy are also docked next to the Iranian spy ship Behshad which sits in the Red Sea and receives regular supplies unloaded in Egyptian and Libyan ports,” Mr Solomon added. The US has been urged to strike the Behshad, which has also been co-ordinating the Houthi attacks on global shipping.

*The Telegraph*

## **Russian dissident journalist warns no country - not even the US - is safe from fascism after Ukraine war**

**By Erin Snodgrass**

A Russian dissident journalist who suffered a suspected poison attack last year says no country is safe from fascism.

Elena Kostyuchenko said she never believed Russia would descend into full-on war.

"If I could send a letter in the past to myself, I would say: 'Be alarmed,'" she said.

A Russian opposition journalist who was forced to abandon her reporting in Ukraine soon after Russia invaded due to an assassination threat against her is warning other global citizens to be wary of the warning signs of fascism within their own countries before those warning signs turn to war.

"I honestly believe no country is immune from fascism," Elena Kostyuchenko told *Insider*.

The dissident journalist and gay rights advocate made a name for herself as the youngest ever staff member at *Novaya Gazeta*, the famed Russian independent newspaper known for its defiant investigative journalism amid an increasingly hostile Russian media landscape.

Soon after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, *Novaya* was shuttered and Kostyuchenko was forced to flee Ukraine amid credible threats that a Chechen subdivision of Russia's internal military force had orders to capture and kill her near Mariupol.

More than a year later, Kostyuchenko is still seeking answers as to how her country descended into full-on war.

While promoting her new book "I Love Russia: Reporting from a Lost Country" last month, Kostyuchenko spoke to *Insider* about her journalism career; the suspected poisoning attack she suffered in Germany last fall, and the rise of fascism in Russia and beyond.

Her book, she told *Insider*, was an effort to track how the seeds of fascism in Russia flourished into a brutal war.

"Russia didn't become a fascist country on the 24th of February 2022," Kostyuchenko said. "It was going on long before that."

The country has a long and varied authoritarian history and President Vladimir Putin's two-decade regime has been marred by a litany of human rights abuses. But much of the world, including many Russian and Ukrainian citizens

were still taken by surprise when Russian tanks rolled into Kyiv in February 2022.

Even as someone who professionally investigated Russia's numerous and noted injustices, Kostyuchenko said she never expected her country would start a war.

"I Love Russia" by Elena Kostyuchenko is out this week. Courtesy of Penguin Random House© Courtesy of *Penguin Random House* "I was so sure that we are immune because for Christ's sake, we fought the fascists. My grandfather did," Kostyuchenko said. "We have whole movies telling us how fascism works, why it's so dangerous, and how it goes from a nice narrative to mass murders. I was totally sure we were immune."

She suggested a creeping nostalgia for the old Soviet days has bred fertile ground for a new wave of Russian fascism — not so dissimilar from American political slogans that harken back to the "good 'ol days."

The US was listed as a "backsliding democracy" for the first time in a 2021 report on the state of global democracy from the *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*. The annual report, which looked at the year 2020, found America had fallen victim to "authoritarian tendencies."

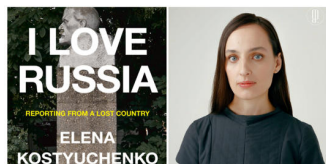
"With what's happening in the world, with this turn toward global authoritarianism and the tendencies you also have in your country, it's not safe," Kostyuchenko said, referencing the US. She said her book is a handy guide not only for people looking to understand modern-day Russia and the war, but for anyone curious about how easy it is to "lose your country."

"If I could send a letter in the past to myself, I would say: "Be alarmed. Be alarmed. Don't be afraid to be hysterical. Be hysterical if you see your country is going into the darkness," Kostyuchenko told *Insider*.

Russia's defeat in Ukraine is vital, not only for Ukraine's survival, but for the state of the world, she said.

"If Russia, God forbid, wins in Ukraine — without even accounting for how many people would be killed — it would mean that fascism grew stronger and that a next war will follow," Kostyuchenko said.

"Fascism is an expansive ideology," she added. "You build fascism not just inside your country. No, it's expansive. And it means that a next war will follow and a next war will follow and it will be a nightmare"



*Insider*, Story by [esnodgrass@insider.com](mailto:esnodgrass@insider.com)

## Europe's no-go Jewish zones are only the beginning

By Cookie Schwaeber

*When countries allow entire sectors of their cities to become no-go zones for their own law enforcement, that is when they have effectively handed over the keys to someone else*

Banning Jews represents a dark period in history, which, up until now, has been an embarrassing chapter in the background of most Europeans. In the UK, it occurred under the reign of King Edward I, whose Edict of Expulsion in 1290, was the cause of 3,000 Jews being forced to leave. Likewise, France has seen its share of Jewish expulsions during the 13th and 14th centuries, a time which is referred to as its unenlightened period.

As a whole, it hasn't happened in Europe since the 1930s. But the idea that both of these countries would, once again, see a revival of such practices has to serve as a glaring sign of the times and the frightening direction of where things are heading.

Ironically, these two countries, which are now experiencing *this unwelcoming atmosphere for Jews*, are home to a wide spectrum of ethnicities, many of whom escaped their own countries of origin after suffering from intolerance and a lack of inclusiveness for all.

This is the very reason why these open societies were an attractive option to those who valued the freedom that eluded them, appreciating such iconic and meaningful symbols as the Statue of Liberty — or the London Eye, representing the solidarity of all of London's inhabitants.

### *Does liberty include Jews?*

IN PARIS, someone apparently forgot to tell them that liberty does not exclude Jews since some Parisian activists think it does. Just last week, they were seen denying "entry of Jewish students to a Paris university, refusing to allow Jewish students access to the Sciences Po University's Emile-Boutmy amphitheater." The hall, which had been flanked with Palestinian flags, was the venue dedicated to host an event called "4 Hours 4 Palestine, where a number of lectures had been scheduled to delve into the topic of "Palestinian Perspectives, refugees, Judaism and anti-Zionism." As expected, pro-

Palestinian activists wasted no time in promoting the idea of a Palestinian state “from the river to the sea,” which would effectively make Israel a no-go zone for Jews as well.

The event, sponsored by the usual Jew-haters, whose knowledge of history or the Jewish people could fill a thimble, was predictable, but more important was how the university’s administration reacted to these events.

In this case, they were said to be launching an investigation while a state criminal investigation has also been taking place simultaneously. The official statement of the *Paris Institute of Political Studies* was, “We are committed to fighting against antisemitism and regret that conflict in the Middle East has strained relations between student communities to the detriment of a pluralism of ideas and healthy discourse.”

But the statement, which sounds reasonable, actually represents a very tepid and cowardly acknowledgment of what is really occurring, since the incident is largely being blamed on “Middle East strained relations.”

Failure to call out blatant anti-Jewish prejudice is both wrong and misses the point because what happens in Israel cannot be placed upon the shoulders of Jewish students in Paris.

It is merely a convenient and handy pretext in order to demonize a particular population that they would like to expel from their common space. In some ways, it is a microcosm of why two states can never happen because one side is unwilling to share its ground with the other.

CONCURRENTLY, FACING this same phenomenon is London, a city just under 300 miles [480 km.] away from Paris. It is there that the threat to Jews is ever increasing, given the constant pro-Palestinian demonstrations occurring regularly each weekend.

As a result, London’s Jewish community feels unsafe, as well as due to the lack of adequate policing which has failed to guarantee their protection during these protests.

As the genocidal call, “from the river to the sea” continues to be shouted, it’s no wonder that the city has, on weekends, turned into a no-go zone for its Jewish population which cannot risk being identified and attacked simply due to their ethnicity which has become a liability for them, whether or not they support Israel’s policies.

The Israel-Hamas war is nothing more than a helpful subterfuge for the real underlying cauldron of hate, which has been festering for some time. Anyone believing that this intensified loathing was the result of spontaneous combustion which occurred on October 7 but which, prior to that time, was non-existent, is delusional.

This fire was ignited a long ago and although temporarily doused, its embers were awaiting the tiniest of sparks to, once again, burst into flames.

That spark was the war, now taking place, providing useful condemnation of Israel for the suffering of the Palestinian people in order to detract from the real cause of their repression: Hamas’s deliberate quashing of those they govern, aware that their cause will not prosper without the promoting the victimhood status of their people.

In other words, it’s a clever strategy of replacement of guilt and finger-pointing, useful to those actually perpetuating the suffering of others. Unfortunately, Israel is used to being cast in that role by ignorant, small-minded people claiming they love freedom (except for those whom they deem undeserving of it), who are the disseminators of this duplicity.

WHAT BEGINS with no-go zones for Europe’s Jews has the potential to end with another call for expulsion, revealing the sad fact that history has taught us nothing if its darkest days are soon to be repeated.

But as UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres infamously said, “These events did not happen in a vacuum.” Certain Muslim-controlled areas within Paris and London have become no-go zones for local police and authorities, who refuse to enter them for fear of their own safety.

Likewise, Brussels police have also been encountering off-limit areas, admitting that have “lost control” of heavily Muslim suburbs that feature some of Europe’s most radical mosques and Islamic clerics.

When countries allow entire sectors of their cities to become no-go zones for their own law enforcement, that is when they have effectively handed over the keys to someone else, relinquishing their right to police and oversee what is actually happening in these quarters which have been taken over by force.

That is a sure recipe for disaster and one which, if allowed to continue, will only embolden these radicals to spread out until less-desired populations are also eliminated.

This is why the concept of no-go zones is so dangerous and threatening to everyone – not just to Jews but also to non-Jews. Because, as usual, what often starts with the Jews, generally ends up hurting all of mankind – at least that’s what history has shown us.

*The writer is a former Jerusalem elementary and middle school principal. She is also the author of *Mistake-Proof Parenting*, available on Amazon, based on the time-tested wisdom found in the *Book of Proverbs*.*

*www.jpost.com*

# With World's Attention on Gaza, ISIS Is Making a Global Comeback

By Tom O'Connor

With much of international attention gripped by the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip, the Islamic State militant group (ISIS) has been steadily ramping up operations across continents and setting the stage for a resurgence of global mayhem.

This latent threat came to life on Friday, Mar 22, with ISIS claiming responsibility for a massacre targeting a concert held at Crocus City Hall outside of Moscow. It marked the deadliest militant attack on Russian soil since the 2002 theater hostage crisis in the capital. Experts and officials warn the next operation could target virtually anyone, including U.S. citizens. Just one day before the attack, U.S. Central Command chief General Michael Kurilla told lawmakers in Congress that "ISIS-Khorasan retains the capability and the will to attack U.S. and Western interests abroad in as little as six months with little to no warning." Weeks earlier, the U.S. Embassy in Moscow had urged U.S. nationals to avoid crowded events, "to include concerts."

The latest attack has reclaimed international headlines for the jihadis who, at their peak just a decade ago, presided over a self-styled caliphate spanning the size of Portugal. However, the roots of ISIS' attempted resurgence have been taking hold for some time.

The group's so-called Khorasan province (ISIS-K or ISKP) has been particularly active in its base country of Afghanistan, using the Taliban-held nation to launch attacks at home and against neighboring Iran and Pakistan, in spite of efforts by all three governments. The militants also began expanding operations beyond the region, with Russia, Germany, Turkey and Tajikistan recently cracking down on alleged ISIS-K plots. "The recent spike in ISIS-K's activity in the region is not an overnight development," Amira Jadoon, a professor at South Carolina's Clemson University who has regularly engaged with the U.S. government on issues of counterterrorism, told *Newsweek*, "but rather something that ISIS-K has been planning through a multi-pronged approach since a few years."

## *From France to China and Beyond*

ISIS has never been shy about its international ambitions, but its Khorasan branch has been

particularly vocal in conveying preparations to expand its campaign. In an article of this month's edition of ISIS-K's *Voice of Khurasan* magazine, the group said that the "territory of Islam is never limited to Afghanistan, but it is much wider." "The land of Islam is the one that the Muslims gained with their sacrifices, which covers the Africa, starts from Eastern Turkestan, to Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan," the author wrote. "It extends to Chechnya and Dagestan, and from Turkey to as far as Andalus and the Middle Eastern countries, Pakistan, Afghanistan, India and so much more...."

The article went on to delineate one border of the self-proclaimed caliphate in southern France; another between Indonesia and Australia; and a third between Russia's Turkic- and Muslim-majority neighbors in Central Asia, which have long struggled with Islamist separatists; and China's Xinjiang region, where ISIS-K has sought to rekindle a Uyghur insurgency in support of an independent, Islamist East Turkestan.

The cover story of this particular edition of the ISIS-K publication placed a target on President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, where the group claimed a deadly assault on a Roman Catholic church in Istanbul in late January. The previous edition prominently featured Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei of Iran, where ISIS-K claimed the deadliest attack in the 45-year history of the Islamic Republic just weeks earlier in the city of Kerman.

ISIS-K messaging has lashed out at a wide array of foes, including U.S. Presidents Donald Trump and Joe Biden, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin, as well as leaders of Hamas and, especially, the Taliban, from which the group has sought to sap legitimacy and manpower.

## *The Graveyard of Empires*

While Afghanistan may not be the extent of ISIS-K's reach, it does appear to be the base of operations. The group first took hold in the war-torn country during its rapid rise in the neighboring Middle East a decade ago and clashed with both the U.S.-backed Afghan government and the Taliban.

By the time ISIS' original strongholds in Iraq and Syria fell to an array of separate campaigns waged by local forces backed by a U.S.-coalition, Russia and Iran, the group had already begun laying the groundwork for a transition to focusing on Afghanistan. This country has been long referred to as "the graveyard of empires" for the history of failures that have befallen greater power invaders such as the British Empire, the Soviet Union and the United States.

When the U.S. military withdrew from its two-decade campaign in Afghanistan in August 2021,

it did so with assurances that the Taliban would continue the fight against militant groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS. But the now-ruling Islamic Emirate has struggled to contain the spreading threat, despite an active counterinsurgency campaign.

ISIS-K saw off departing U.S. troops by conducting a suicide bombing at Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport, killing 13 U.S. servicemembers and around 170 Afghan civilians. The group quickly mobilized to take advantage of its newfound maneuverability to promote a mission that, unlike that of the Taliban, extends far beyond the borders of Afghanistan. "Following the Taliban's takeover, ISIS-K activated its ambitious strategy of 'internationalizing' its agenda—which appears to have resonated directly with audiences throughout South and Central Asia but also those further afar," Jadoon said. "This strategy is underscored by its multilingual propaganda campaign, which positioned ISIS-K as the principal regional and global antagonist to repressive regimes."

Colin Clarke, a senior research fellow at the New York-based *Soufan Center* who has also frequently worked with U.S. officials on counterterrorism issues, told *Newsweek* he saw ISIS-K's growing presence in Afghanistan as a key factor fueling its rise.

"The Taliban are the only counterterrorism force attempting to contain ISIS-K within Afghanistan, now that the U.S. has no presence in the country, and the Taliban is already overwhelmed with attempting to govern the entire country," Clarke said. "The Taliban were effective insurgents; they are far less effective as a counterinsurgent force." Now, Clarke warned that ISIS-K poses a "significant threat" and that both its attacks and plots from the Middle East to Europe demonstrate that the group "still very much has the intent to launch attacks, along with, it seems, a growing capability to do so."

### *The Kremlin and the White House in the Crosshairs*

The relationship between Washington, Moscow and Islamist groups is complicated, dating back to the final acts of the Cold War. When the Soviet Union sought to save a satellite government in Afghanistan through direct military intervention in 1979, the U.S. moved to counter the Kremlin by backing a broad coalition of insurgents who would ultimately emerge victorious after a decade, with the USSR collapsing just two years later.

These mujahideen devolved into infighting that gave rise to the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. After the 9/11 attacks of 2001, orchestrated by Al-Qaeda leader and Afghan-Soviet war veteran Osama bin

Laden, the U.S. would launch its longest-ever war against Afghanistan, where Al-Qaeda was being harbored by the Taliban. Putin, not yet halfway through his first term in office, was the first foreign leader to offer condolences to the White House over the historic attack on U.S. soil.

Unlike the U.S., however, Russia's war against Islamists has always been closer to home. Over the past three decades, Russia has waged two wars against Islamist Chechen separatists on its own territory and has sought to support allied former Soviet republics cracking down on jihadi activity in Central Asia.

Eyeing the rise of Islamist militants after U.S.-led interventions in Iraq and Libya, Moscow conducted an unprecedented foreign military intervention in support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad against rebels, some of whom were backed by Washington, amid ISIS' expansion in 2015. Both U.S. and Russian troops remain in Syria in support of opposing goals to this day, and Moscow has only doubled down on its influence in other ISIS-vulnerable areas such as the increasingly active frontlines of Africa's Sahel region.

Owing to Russia's geopolitical significance, its large Muslim population and the clash between ISIS' ultraconservative Islamist ideology and Putin's traditional Russian Orthodox Christian leanings, the jihadis have long had Moscow in their sights.

"Russia has been a top priority enemy for the Islamic State since its early days," Lucas Webber, co-founder of the Militant Wire research network, told *Newsweek*. "In 2014, former caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi named Russia as a primary foe alongside the United States."

"Russia has attracted the attention of IS through its military intervention in Syria and across Africa, its relations with the Taliban, and several other policies," Webber added. "Moscow is viewed as a power center for what IS has called the 'Crusader East.'"

### *An Enemy Out of Reach*

While Russia is largely expected to muster up a tough reply to the militant attack in Moscow, striking at the roots of ISIS has proven an elusive challenge.

"What is clear is that the Islamic State retains the intent and capabilities to direct external operations—on a significant scale," Webber said. "The fall of the territorial caliphate's last vestiges in 2019 was indeed a major setback, but it is a patient organization and maintains the ability to carry out attacks and incite its supporters to violence."

Iftikhar Firdous, founding editor of the *Khorasan Diary* and visiting professor at Quaid-i-Azam University in Pakistan, told *Newsweek* that one of

ISIS-K's most-devastating characteristics is that it "alternates periods of hyperactivity and semi-hibernation depending on a number of factors, which could be either dictated by local circumstances or influenced by global trends." "One of the main advantages that ISKP retains is its evident capability of building networks across different countries through individuals belonging to different ethnic communities," Firdous said. "This is visible both on an organizational level, with attacks planned in Syria, exercised in Afghanistan, and carried out in Iran or Turkey, as well as on an individual support base, with ISKP affiliates creating informal links among them to remain in contact, travel, and ask for information. "This transnational factor of ISKP makes it extremely difficult for countries to tackle the group's operational capabilities," Firdous added. Even more dangerous have been the second order effects of ISIS-K activities in the region. The group's activities have managed to exploit mistrust between Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Tajikistan, stirring tensions among nations accusing one another of harboring militants. With sophisticated financial networks, active propaganda campaigns spanning continents and a broad array of targets, Firdous said that perhaps the group's greatest asset is its "unpredictability and capability to always capitalize on local dynamics, contrary to other militant groups which do possess strict guidelines." As such, Firdous added, "the U.S. and Western governments have limited space to counter ISKP as a whole" and "directly tackling ISKP in its own areas remains highly unlikely given the current political regional scenario, especially as it is unfolding in the first months of 2024." "Mutual distrust between neighboring countries would make it difficult for an integrated and genuine security cooperation between the U.S. and allies and regional governments to take place in an effective manner," Firdous said, "beyond the mere assessment of ISKP activities on the ground."

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## **Netanyahu's war is lost. It's time to save any chance for peace**

**By Ken Brill**

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu claims "total victory" over Hamas is within reach, but the demonstrators in Israel's streets signal the truth: Netanyahu has lost his war in Gaza. The

vital question for Israel and the U.S. is whether peace can still be salvaged from the catastrophe Netanyahu has made.

Netanyahu's war was lost months ago. Initially, Israel and the world were united in outrage over Hamas's brutal Oct. 7 murders of Israeli civilians in their homes, at a music festival and otherwise going about daily life. There was no doubt Hamas had earned retribution, but the Netanyahu government's military response in Gaza seems to have mirrored Hamas's brutality toward civilians.

As the evidence of that brutality grew and the death toll mounted past 30,000 deaths in Gaza, global outrage steadily shifted from Hamas's Oct. 7 atrocities and holding of hostages to Israel's leveling of neighborhoods and towns in Gaza and the deaths of entire Palestinian families from seemingly unconstrained attacks. Monday's attack by Israeli forces that killed seven humanitarian aid workers from World Central Kitchen, a group that closely coordinated its activities in Gaza with Israeli forces, is the most recent demonstration that the Israeli military is not, despite its claims, taking every precaution to ensure its attacks are carefully targeted on Hamas. As the Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported, the World Central Kitchen's well-marked convoy was hit by three separate missile attacks.

There is no doubt Hamas has been hiding among civilians and is most likely committing war crimes in doing so. Similarly, there can be no doubt that Israel has prioritized attacking Hamas over protecting innocent civilians.

There is a price to be paid for the level of brutality Israeli forces have inflicted on Gaza. Images of seemingly wanton destruction, reports of starvation deaths and the growing risk of famine and the roadblocks Israel creates for humanitarian groups, the United Nations and even its own allies to bring in lifesaving supplies have created the narrative that Israel, not Hamas, is the problem in Gaza.

Former Israeli President Reuven Rivlin said on Tuesday that Israel's actions could cause it to face "international ostracism." That is how a war is lost in today's world.

What happens in Rafah is going to reverberate in Israel's relations with the U.S., Europe and the Arab world. If Netanyahu and his extremist cabinet ministers have their way and Israeli forces blast into Rafah the way they have elsewhere in Gaza, Israel's reputational losses will be compounded. There will also be a cost to the U.S., regional stability and Israel's hopes of normalizing relations with the Gulf Arabs. If, on the other hand, the Israeli military works with humanitarian groups and international donors to move civilians from Rafah to parts of Gaza with adequate temporary shelters, food,

water and medical support, and only then follows with precision attacks on Hamas military units in Rafah, it may be possible to start building a bridge from the war with Hamas to a long-term regional peace.

For anything positive to come out of Rafah, the U.S. must show more firmness in its dealings with the Netanyahu government than it has to date. Israeli and U.S. officials met virtually on Monday to discuss U.S. concerns about an Israeli invasion of the city and the need to protect civilians there. There was apparently no agreement except to meet again to continue the discussion.

There is too much at stake for the Biden administration to agree to disagree with Netanyahu on Rafah. Biden and the U.S. have skin in the game. An Israeli attack on Rafah that produces mass casualties will hurt Biden at home and undermine U.S. interests globally, not just in the Middle East. It would also block Biden's goal of a U.S.-led regional negotiation for a two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian issue and dangerously isolate Israel, regionally and globally.

Netanyahu has a weak hand. He is confronting demonstrations at home and strains in Israel's regional relationships. His conduct in the Gaza war has damaged Israel's political standing in the U.S. and Europe. He has become a transitional figure, tainted by his failures that led to Oct. 7 and the brutal Israeli military campaign that followed. Israeli opinion polls show Israelis want elections and Netanyahu gone.

The Biden administration needs to draw some red lines with Netanyahu on the Rafah endgame. For example, there is no reason to rush supplies of large dumb bombs to Israel; there is every reason to require that humanitarian supplies flow into Gaza in the amounts required to meet the needs of displaced Gazans. There is good reason to supply equipment to support a carefully focused attack on priority Hamas targets in Gaza, but only if those attacks occur after civilians are moved out of harm's way.

U.S. officials have consistently said the U.S. supports Israel's right to defend itself. But Israel's military campaign in Gaza stopped being about self-defense and became about vengeance months ago.

The U.S. has more than met its obligations to an ally. It is time to exercise some tough love to help Israel get out of the hole that Netanyahu wants to continue digging in Gaza — and keep alive the possibility of a longer-term peace negotiation.

*Ken Brill is a retired foreign service officer who served as an ambassador in the Clinton and Bush administrations.*

*The Hill*

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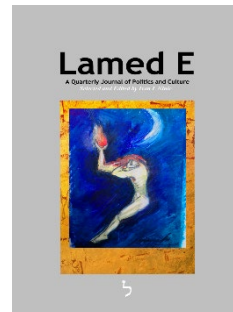
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**Tom O'Connor:** *With World's Attention on Gaza, ISIS Is Making a Global Comeback*

**Ken Brill:** *Netanyahu's war is lost. It's time to save any chance for peace.*



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