



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Israel is currently in an unprecedented crisis, demonstrated by the many establishment figures calling on American Jews, in their capacities both as Jews and as Americans, to make clear that we will not accept Israel going down the path that nations such as Hungary, Poland, and Turkey have trodden during the last decade.

Below is an article I published recently in *Ha'aretz* making that same argument, that now is precisely the time for American Jews who care about Israel but are deeply critical of many of its policies to do whatever we can to prevent this “judicial coup” from going through the Knesset. It is very much our business.

We at Partners do not seek simply a return to the *status quo ante*. We seek a change of direction of Israel's 55-year-old policy of holding on to the West Bank as, in effect, a colonial possession, where the inhabitants are forbidden from choosing their government. This stain on Israeli democracy will remain even if the “judicial reforms” being pushed by the rightwing bloc are defeated.

The “reforms” now being strong-armed through the Knesset are all about removing the checks and balances that every democracy must maintain in order to guard against the seemingly opposite dangers of undue power being exercised on behalf of a minority, on the one hand; or, just as bad, a majoritarian democracy in which a simple majority can dictate fundamental changes or ride roughshod over the rights that every liberal democracy, by definition, must grant its minorities, be they political, ethnic, gender-based, or any other. Every democratic nation has developed these “antibody institutions” to protect itself. Most countries

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President's Message

embed them in a constitution or bill of rights, as the US does, where the federal system and three independent branches of government are among the main protectors against anti-democratic initiatives.

Israel, lacking a constitution, has developed different mechanisms to protect itself, including a committee system for judicial appointees comprising judges, lawyers, and politicians; an attorney general empowered to constrain the government in some instances; independent legal advisors in cabinet ministries; and a judicially-created right to annul laws deemed "unreasonable." The latter is rarely employed but essential in a system where a narrow Knesset majority combines both the executive and legislative powers that our own system divides. Without these checks, even a duly elected government can game the system to keep itself in power or suppress minorities, a process currently being played out around the world.

The current crisis was made politically possible by a coalition of three distinct minorities with varying political goals or grievances, in combination with PM Netanyahu's desperate attempts to end his ongoing trial for corruption. 1) The Haredi ("ultra-Orthodox") parties want to block the Supreme Court's repeated rejection of their blanket exemption from military service, as well as excepting their schools from minimum secular education requirements; (2) Extremist settlers want to remove any legal obstacles to increased settlement or annexation of part or all of the West Bank, and prevent punishment for atrocities like the recent settler pogrom in the West Bank village of Huwara; and (3) Groups like the Kohelet Forum, a well-financed and influential think tank, are pushing for the removal of legal norms preventing adoption of American libertarian principles foreign to Israel.

This unholy coalition has seized on the seeming opportunity to entrench itself and its political goals after narrowly winning the last election. Partners hopes you will work with us as we and our allies fight against it.

**Support our matching grant campaign,
[Fight for Democracy, End the Occupation!](#)**



Paul Scham

President, Partners for Progressive Israel



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American Jews Have the Right - and the Duty - to Oppose Israel's Current Government's Policies

INSIGHTS

By Paul Scham



This article by Paul Scham was first published on February 13, 2023 in Ha'aretz.com

Danny Ayalon and my friend Chuck Freilich, both pillars of the Israeli security establishment, have strongly criticized J Street and its supporters and praised AIPAC in Haaretz ([In Israel's Current Crisis, AIPAC Is Vital and J Street Is Dangerous.](#))

While I am not now nor ever have been a spokesman for J Street, I strongly support its activities, electoral and otherwise. My own organization, Partners for Progressive Israel, works closely with J Street in the Progressive Israel Network, comprised of more than a dozen American Jewish organizations that are both pro-Israel and pro-peace. That stance necessitates taking public positions critical of many Israeli policies; especially, of course, the continuation of the occupation.

Freilich and Ayalon's arguments are deeply flawed and misconceive the relationship between American Jews and Israel in [today's context](#). They begin with the usual assertion that "the only place to change Israel's policies is in Israel." That old saw is simply incorrect. Israel – like all countries – responds to events everywhere that affect it; that is largely what international relations is about.

However, they are also wrong in a more fundamental

and normative sense. American Jews who choose to care about Israel are affected by Israel's policies both as Jews and as Americans. As Jews, we care deeply about Israel's future, and we would not be involved in this work if we didn't believe passionately in the need for an Israel that is both secure and democratic.

As Israelis frequently proclaim, Israel is inseparably connected with the Jewish people. With that connection comes responsibility, not merely the role of cash cow. We have both the right and the positive duty to [express ourselves](#) about Israel's policies in every lawful and moral way, especially in concert and cooperation with our Israeli partners. Those of us who are dual citizens (including the leaders of many Progressive Israel Network organizations) also vote in Israeli elections when we are able to travel there (Israel doesn't allow absentee voting).

However, we are also American citizens, and the relationship between the US and Israel is a major geopolitical factor as well as, in recent years, a virulent domestic political issue. US taxpayers subsidize Israel's military to the tune of at least \$3.8 billion annually, as well as providing indispensable political and diplomatic support. As Americans we

are entitled to a say in how the US support for Israel is manifested, financially and otherwise.

Freilich and Ayalon, however, apparently think that, as American Jews, we have no moral or other right to express ourselves, even when, as Chuck Freilich certainly knows, Israel's government's policies are disastrous. Instead, they contend we should close our eyes to what we know is true and support AIPAC, even when AIPAC throws its hefty financial clout behind candidates who not only support the Jan. 6 insurrection in Washington and Trump's election denialism, but also the most dangerous rightwing forces in Israel.

Although AIPAC is in lockstep with Israeli government policies we abhor, we are supposed to leave our brains outside and vote just as AIPAC tells us to.

A particularly egregious example in 2022 was AIPAC's successful primary campaign against Andy Levin, a former synagogue president and staunch supporter of Israel, largely because he had the temerity to support the Two-State Solution Bill in Congress, a policy which also happens to be the position of the US government, but not the current Israeli one. He was outspent 5 to 1, largely by "pro-Israel" PACs supporting his opponent.

An ever-increasing number of American Jews are rejecting the untenable position that unconditional support for Israel's policies, including the everlasting occupation, is the sole litmus test they should apply. Admittedly, it is much easier to create a bright line that support for Israel's government is the only thing that matters, and that all those who don't toe that line should be consigned to a political and communal kherem.

It is indeed a judgment call as to exactly who is "pro-Israel," since support for far-right forces in either country is dangerous for democracy. But AIPAC – and Freilich and Ayalon – demand that American Jews leave their consciences and values at the door. Thus, they question whether J Street – and presumably its thousands of supporters – "can truly be considered a pro-Israel organization," as if that is a title they can bestow or withhold.

Freilich and Ayalon caricature J-Street's positions, claiming it believes American pressure for the two-

state solution would "magically" produce a solution to the conflict. But genuinely magical, or perhaps deeply anachronistic, thinking is conveyed by their statement that "AIPAC seeks to be a home for the entire pro-Israel community, from the left to the right."

Anyone who has the slightest knowledge of [AIPAC's Super PAC](#) in the 2022 cycle knows that it supported 109 of 147 House Republicans who voted against certifying President Biden's victory." Is that really something any conscientious American (Jewish or not) should ignore? Shut our eyes and think of 1948 or 1967, when Israel's existence was genuinely in danger? Most American Jews have rightly moved beyond that logic.

Today, it is simply impossible for supporters of Israel to ignore the issue of democracy, both in Israel and in the US. AIPAC has failed in that regard.

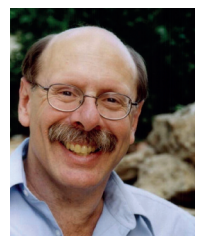
Harkening back to a time when American Jews were more united does not solve today's issues. That means that defining "pro-Israel" cannot be franchised out to an organization that has clearly shown that democracy is not its concern. Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir must be opposed by American Jews as strongly as they oppose Donald Trump.

We recognize, of course, that there are genuinely anti-Israel forces in the US and in the world. But we cannot shut our eyes to the truly dangerous forces within Israel as well.

Iran is currently the only potentially existential outside threat that Israel faces – and it is beyond question that the American Jewish left has demonstrated its resolve against Iran.

American Jews have both an American and a Jewish duty to vote their consciences on Israel, not to subvert democracy by blind support of an Israeli government that does not believe in its basic tenets.

Paul Scham is President of [Partners for Progressive Israel](#) and Director of the Gildehorn Institute for Israel Studies at the University of Maryland, where he is a Professor of Israel Studies. The views expressed here are his own.



From Tel Aviv to Washington: A Fire in My Heart

INSIGHTS

By Avraham Spraragen



“We have on this land that which makes life worth living,” wrote the late Palestinian national poet Mahmoud Darwish. These words, in English translation, adorn the walls of the Masafer Yatta home of Palestinian activist [Basel Adraa](#) whom I visited last month as a 2023 Naomi Chazan Global Activism Fellow of the New Israel Fund (NIF). This eight-day trip to Israel-Palestine followed my participation in the [Partners Israel-Palestine Symposium 2022](#) digital trip to the region.

Adraa’s village in the southern West Bank, at-Tuwani, faces impending home demolitions and forced evacuations. My 2023 NIF cohort, from the U.S., Canada, U.K., and Australia, met with Adraa in Masafer Yatta as a show of diaspora Jewish solidarity with Palestinian victims of Israeli occupation. We declared that “not in our name,” the name of the Jewish people, would his people suffer. The Darwish quote above, in the original Arabic, similarly adorns the walls of downtown Amman, where I recently lived

for six months while studying Arabic. (I wrote about my experience as a lone Jew in Jordan for the *Israel Horizons* [September](#) and [December](#) 2022 issues).

During my time in Jordan, I befriended exiled Palestinians from Jerusalem to Jaffa. This winter, as part of the NIF fellowship, I visited Palestinians who remain in these and other cities, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, to further the mission of Arab-Jewish partnership that I joined while in Jordan.

This mission of co-resistance for coexistence is embodied by [Standing Together](#) (פּוֹנֵן דְּחִיב מִיַּדְמוּעַת), the largest grassroots Arab-Jewish movement in Israel-Palestine. At the Abraham Hostel in Tel Aviv, its façade adorned with an Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) poster — “No Human Rights, No Democracy” — my cohort met with the Standing Together co-directors, Jewish Israeli Alon-Lee Green and Palestinian citizen of Israel Rula Daood. Having already met two other movement leaders

Uri Weltmann and Sally Abed at the 2022 J Street [conference](#) (where I represented PPI) in Washington D.C. prior to the NIF fellowship, I was eager to further my activism with Standing Together on the ground. When Green and Daood invited my cohort to participate in their post-Shabbat demonstration at Habima Square in central Tel Aviv, I was elated.

We proudly joined more than 30,000 Jews and Arabs that night, including a Knesset champion for Arab-Jewish unity [Ayman Odeh](#), holding signs in Arabic and Hebrew to demand justice, equality, and peace for all between the river and the sea. Other rallygoers waved the Palestinian flag in support of an independent State of Palestine. The far-right Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, previously convicted of supporting a Kahanist terrorist group, responded to the Palestinian flags at our rally by criminalizing public displays of the black, white, and green. Later in the NIF trip, we protested this illiberal order alongside Palestinian activists in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem, by displaying the flag in front of Ben-Gvir's makeshift office (built as a provocation atop Palestinian land amid the May 2021 cycle of violence).

The sign that I brought home to Washington from the Standing Together rally, “Jews and Arabs refuse to be enemies,” has informed my continued Progressive Israel Network (PIN) advocacy since then. Earlier this month, I delivered a [speech](#) on behalf of Partners at a PIN-organized protest in front of the Israeli Embassy in D.C. Holding the above sign in Hebrew imported directly from the streets of Tel Aviv, I shared the message with American Jewish protestors that “Arab-Jewish unity is possible.”

I have also brought home with me the knowledge I gained from our binational “Yaffa to Yafo to Jaffa” tour, from touring the Arab-Jewish cities of Ramle and Lod, and from the [Breaking the Silence](#) tour of the ghost town Hebron has become under Israeli occupation and settler domination. In Jaffa, we visited an Arab-Jewish theater facing Israeli censorship, in Ramle and Lod we saw the aftermath of the Arab-Jewish violence



in May 2021, and in Hebron we saw the affront to Arab-Jewish partnership that perpetual occupation poses.

The historic Arab-Hebrew Al Sarya Theater in the Old City of Jaffa was targeted by the far-right Israeli government for screening *Farha*, a 2021 film about the Palestinian Nakba, as part of the national campaign to censor Nakba commemoration, along with the Palestinian flag. On our Negev day trip, my NIF cohort was reminded of another incident of Israeli censorship that targeted students at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. During a student protest on Nakba Day 2022, Palestinian displacement was commemorated on the Negev campus with Palestinian flags and Mahmoud Darwish's poetry. Ben-Gurion University later summoned for disciplinary proceedings the Palestinian student who read aloud the words of the national poet of Palestine at the Nakba Day protest.

If only for a few days, on the heels of the Partners Symposium, I was proud to be on the frontlines in the fight against this illiberalism, censorship, and

discrimination, inspired by former Knesset member and Hebrew University professor emerita Naomi Chazan. Chazan, whom our cohort met in the NIF Jerusalem office, was a member of the PPI-affiliated Meretz Party and has been a lifelong champion of Israeli-Palestinian justice, equality, and peace. We sought to honor her name and live up to her legacy at every stop along our countrywide journey. Two other stops along this journey were the Tzedek Centers in the “mixed cities” of Ramle and Lod, epicenters of the May 2021 Arab-Jewish violence. In the aftermath of this violence, the Tzedek Centers, located in eight Arab-Jewish cities, have worked to promote a shared society through communal leadership programs, local events, and campaigns.

The word *Tzedek*, meaning justice, is a Jewish call to action found in Deuteronomy: *tzedek, tzedek tirdof*, “justice, justice you shall pursue.” In Hebron, the illegal Israeli settlers have abandoned this call to action, purportedly in the name of Judaism, no less. At the entrance to the Old City of Hebron, Israeli-American terrorist Baruch Goldstein is memorialized and his disciple Itamar Ben-Gvir lives in an illegal settlement downtown. The Goldstein tomb, on which Israeli settlers place commemorative stones, is located in Meir Kahane Park, named after the assassinated founder of the terrorist-designated Kach Party. Our NIF cohort was led on a tour of the park and old city by a Breaking the Silence tour guide from New York, a modern Orthodox Jew wearing a *kippa* embroidered with the flags of both Israel and Palestine. A provocateur from the same hate group, Im Tirtzu, that targeted the Palestinian student for quoting Darwish, also targeted our tour guide while sporting a “Make Hebron Great Again” cap, reviling him for exposing us to the injustice of Israeli occupation.

Despite the separate roads for Arabs and Jews in Hebron, displays of the Kach symbol in East Jerusalem settlement construction sights, bulldozers, checkpoints, roadblocks, and walls, I discovered ‘on this land that which makes life worth living’; i.e., meaningful Arab-Jewish partnership for a shared future.

My eight days travelling throughout ‘this land’ also

reinforced the lesson of the Partners Symposium that the far-right Israeli government poses a threat, not only to Arab-Jewish partnership, but to other diverse groups as well: the LGBTQ community, women, refugees and asylum seekers, the irreligious, and the political opposition in Israel-Palestine. On the first day of the NIF fellowship, we took a walking tour “In the Footsteps of Tel Aviv-Jaffa’s LGBTQ History,” in solidarity with this community under threat by the homophobic Noam Party led by Avi Maoz. The far-right Knesset member, whose party focuses on the “threat” that Pride constitutes to the Jewish People, now heads the new “National Jewish Identity” authority in the Prime Minister’s Office.

The call to action of *tzedek, tzedek tirdof* applies to all of these communities and their struggles, especially with the Israeli far-right now in power. Co-resistance today among these diverse groups will be the key to coexistence tomorrow. On our last day, we traveled south for a “Tour of the Unrecognized Bedouin Villages in the Negev.” My fellow diaspora Jewish activists and I were invited for Arabic coffee under a desert tent. While sipping our coffee, a Palestinian Bedouin sang to us about the “fire in his heart.” That is, the ‘fire’ that prevents him, and indeed all of us in the Progressive Israel Network, from giving up on the mission of co-resistance for coexistence.

Crucially, the Israeli-Palestinian civil society actors we organized, strategized, and demonstrated with on our countrywide journey urged us to co-resist, not for a return to the status quo ante of Arab-Jewish separation, but for a future of Arab-Jewish coexistence. This means, as I outlined in my PIN rally speech, an end to occupation and settlement expansion, no to annexation of Palestinian territory, and no to the Israeli government’s assault on our liberal, democratic Jewish values.

Avraham Spraragen is a dual JD-MA Arab Studies degree candidate at Georgetown University. He previously studied at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv University.



By Adena Ben-Reuven



Haqel: In Defense of Human Rights is an Israeli NGO engaged in strategic litigation on behalf of Palestinian landowners and entire communities in the area of the West Bank classified as “Area C” under the Oslo Process. We maintain a specific focus on the South Hebron Hills, the Bethlehem region, and the area of the Jalud Valley in the northern West Bank. Haqel currently represents over 18,000 beneficiaries. Haqel, meaning “field” in Arabic and Aramaic, is the root of the Hebrew word for both “agriculture” and “farmer”. The field is a symbol of renewal, an essential source of income, and is integral to Palestinian life and culture. Haqel’s work presents the Palestinian narrative. The sabra plant, the organization’s logo, symbolizes resilience in the face of dire hardship.

Area C of the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) makes up sixty percent of the West Bank and falls under full Israeli military and civil control. The indigenous Palestinian population there subsists from a traditional way of life as farmers and shepherds. These communities suffer some of the most devastating effects of human rights and international humanitarian law abuses in the oPt. Landowners struggle to eke out an existence and are faced with ongoing harassment, attack, and intimidation by settlers living in close proximity to their lands. Farming and cultivating these lands are extremely challenging. Landowners are threatened,

harassed, and often attacked by marauding settlers who prevent farmers from accessing their lands. Settlers make constant attempts to take over lands that are left inaccessible to their Palestinian owners.

As access becomes increasingly difficult, huge financial losses are incurred by farmers due to their inability to reach their lands on a sustained basis. The ongoing presence and control of the Israeli security forces and the State’s declaration of large swaths of land as closed military zones, State lands, and nature reserves have resulted in forced displacement of families and communities and expropriation of thousands of dunams of land. In addition, as a result of discriminatory planning in the occupied territories, leaving Palestinians no choice but to build without permits, homes and essential structures are faced with the ongoing threat of demolition resulting in increased poverty and marginalization in communities and villages throughout the oPt.



Adv. Quamar Mishirqi-Assad meeting with landowners from Bir Al Eid and Jinba villages regarding proposed patrol road (June 2022)

In response to the deepening crisis in the Southern Hebron Hills area of Masafer Yatta, recently declared a live firing zone by Israel’s High Court of Justice (known as the 918 Firing Zone), Haqel has represented communities in Masafer Yatta regarding a military order issued to construct a patrol road between the villages of Bir Al Eid and Jinba. This road would not only expropriate 278 dunams of privately owned agricultural

land, but severely restrict freedom of movement and deny residents the ability to access emergency medical care and other essential humanitarian services.

It is within the context of this difficult reality that Haqel's legal representation is critical to Palestinian landowners and their communities to ensure their survival and sustained viability. Haqel's legal team works to thwart displacement of Palestinians by preventing encroachment on and expropriation of privately-owned lands, protecting farmers' rights to land access, and demanding better enforcement of the rule of law.

Haqel is co-directed by Dr. Adv. Quamar Mishirqi-Assad and Adena Ben-Reuven. Adv. Mishirqi-Assad is the director of Haqel's legal work. She is an expert on local law, international human rights, and humanitarian rights law. Fellow NGOs, activists, and land rights scholars rely on her expertise and experience. She recently attained her doctorate from the University of Haifa. Adena Ben-Reuven, originally from South Africa, has over 25 years of experience in fundraising and financial and organizational management. She is responsible for the daily operation of Haqel. Although Haqel was established in 2016, Haqel's Co-Directors have been working on behalf of the project beneficiaries since 2005.

Haqel's holistic approach addresses the multiple aspects of life of the Palestinian population in the oPt, which is supposed to enjoy legal protection under the law of occupation. Legal intervention cannot be tackled in a vacuum, but has to address all aspects of socio-economic and cultural life under occupation. In this respect, Haqel's approach is unique and is driven from the grassroots upwards. As a Palestinian, Adv. Mishirqi-Assad relies on close, personal, longstanding connections with landowners, community activists and leaders, village mayors, and heads of village councils. Haqel works synergistically in cooperation with a wide range of Israeli and Palestinian NGOs, which serves to better address the multifaceted aspects of human rights violations in the oPt.

Despite the challenges, Haqel's work has had unprecedented and life-changing impact on hundreds of

landowners and entire communities throughout the oPt over the last 17 years:

- Through ongoing coordination with the Civil Administration, the Israeli Defense Ministry's division for civil affairs in the oPt, hundreds of families have succeeded in entering their agricultural lands to harvest olives, almonds, wheat, and barley. Families have ploughed and prepared their lands for planting. In several cases, families succeeded in entering their lands for the first time since the Second Intifada.
- Through years of relentless legal work in the Israeli courts, Haqel has helped win back lands in several cases in the last year. One of Haqel's most prominent cases, described below, is that of the Haj Muhammad family in the Jalud Valley.

The family, from the village of Jalud, northeast of the settlement of Shiloh, owned 250 dunams (roughly 62 acres) of agricultural land. Until a little more than 20 years ago, the family patriarch cultivated the fields and planted crops of hummus, lentils, wheat, and barley. In the fall, he plowed and sowed ahead of the rains; in the spring and early summer, he brought in the sheep and harvested. The harvest helped support the large family.

It is not always easy to prove rights to land in the West Bank, but the Haj Muhammad family does have Jordanian title deeds. These have been held by them since the days when the family's grandfather cultivated the land in the 1940s. At the beginning of this century, the family was expelled from the land, by settlers from the settlement of Shiloh who sought to expand the territories they possessed. Vineyards were planted and the "Olive Oil Land" company was established by settlers, who now sell the prestigious boutique brand, "Meshek Ahiya," which produces and markets olive oil, wine, olives, and tahini.

Haqel has been engaged in a lengthy legal battle since 2007 to prove the family's ownership and win back these lands through the Israeli courts. In 2007, the Civil Administration recognized that these were privately-owned lands and ordered that the vineyard be removed,

but there have been multiple delays in implementing the order. The most recent delay included a postponement until February 2023 as a result of the year of *shmitah*, with its religious injunction to do no agricultural labor.

In an [interview](#) with *Zman Israel*, one of the family members said: “The whole village knew that this is our land. It was our main source of livelihood... I feel immense pain when I see the pictures of my father cultivating these lands, which were taken from us by force. My father died in 2017 at the age of 58, ... we have been fighting since his passing to get the land back.”



Haqel Co-Director Adv. Quamar Mishirqi-Assad, and Nasser Nawaja, Haqel field worker (right forefront), with landowners from Jinba and Bir Al Id villages, at Israeli High Court of Justice hearing on objection to military patrol road (September 8, 2022)

Haqel will continue to work to ensure that the order is in fact implemented and the lands returned to their rightful owner.

Additional Haqel projects:

- Haqel [published](#) a joint report with the Kerem Navot NGO in 2019 involving ground-breaking research on the discriminatory implementation of evacuation orders in the West Bank. We are currently completing a second report on land confiscations which will be published in early 2023.
- In June 2022, Haqel published a booklet of personal testimonies of eight women living under occupation, entitled “[I raise up my voice](#)”. (For the booklet in Arabic, click [here](#).) The stories presented in the booklet reflect an ongoing reality for families and communities whose lives and livelihoods are

threatened with survival. Over 130 participants registered for the launch event, which included the participation of our special guest, international gender equality expert, Kavita Nandini Ramdas. (Watch our full launch event [here](#)). As part of Haqel’s women’s empowerment work, the organization has been engaged in educational initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality with the focus on breaking social norms by drawing women into legal representation as family representatives.

- Through our 24/7 Emergency Hotline, Haqel has tackled hundreds of cases of settler violence which has seen an unprecedented spike in the last two years. Haqel’s legal team serves as the essential link between Palestinian victims of attack and the duty-bearers who are responsible for their welfare. Haqel has provided legal, psychological, and emotional support to hundreds of Palestinians who have suffered from extreme incidents of violence. Haqel’s legal team submits an average of two to three letters a week to the Civil Administration, the Attorney-General’s office, and the State Comptroller demanding real action against tacitly sanctioned settler impunity. Haqel has helped put settler violence on Israel’s political agenda.

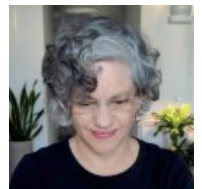
To learn more about Haqel, please visit our website at haqel.org.il and read our [2020](#), [2021](#), and [2022](#) end-of-year newsletters summarizing our work. To contact Haqel, write to development@haqel.org.il.

חַקֵּל Haqel חַקֵּל

تضامن لحماية حقوق الإنسان
ברית להגנה על זכויות אדם
In Defense of Human Rights



Adena Ben-Reuven is
Co-Director of Haqel. She made
aliyah from South Africa in 1994.
Before the establishment of Haqel,
she worked at Rabbis for
Human Rights for 17 years.



Hashomer Hatzair: A History of Youth Empowerment and Progressive Values

YOUTH

By Assaf Galin



Throughout its history, Hashomer Hatzair has been a key player in the Zionist youth movement scene, with a presence in dozens of countries and a mission to create a generation of young leaders committed to progressive values, social justice, and the establishment of a democratic and peaceful Israel.

Hashomer Hatzair, which translates to “The Young Guard,” is a youth movement with roots in the early Zionist movement. Founded in 1913 in Galicia, a region that straddles present-day Poland and Ukraine, the movement aimed to educate Jewish youth in physical labor and a connection to the land of Israel, as well as instill a sense of social justice and collectivism.

During World War II, many members of Hashomer Hatzair were actively involved in the resistance against the Nazis. In particular, the movement

played a key role in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943, with members of Hashomer Hatzair leading the Jewish fighters in their courageous struggle against the Nazis. The bravery and sacrifice of these young people remains an inspiration to this day, and serves as a reminder of the important role that young people can play in standing up for justice and freedom. At Hashomer Hatzair, we continue to honor the memory of those who fought and died in the resistance, and we remain committed to the values of courage, resistance, and social justice that they embodied.

The movement’s ideology is based on a combination of socialist and Zionist principles, and it places great emphasis on the importance of communal living, mutual responsibility, and active engagement in society. Members of Hashomer Hatzair live together in kibbutzim or urban communes, where they work together, share

resources, and engage in various activities that aim to build a strong sense of community and a commitment to social change.

One of the hallmarks of the Hashomer Hatzair ethos is its commitment to peace and reconciliation. The movement has a long history of promoting dialogue and cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians, and has been involved in various peace initiatives over the years. Its members have also been active in social justice and human rights causes both in Israel and around the world, working to combat poverty, inequality, and discrimination in all its forms. Members of the movement from North America established an organization called Achvat Amim (solidarity of nations) promoting peace and human rights in Israel.

Despite its relatively small size, Hashomer Hatzair has had a significant impact on Israeli society and beyond. Many of Israel's prominent political and cultural figures have come out of the movement, as well as writers, artists, and activists who have made important contributions to Israeli culture and politics.

Today, Hashomer Hatzair continues to be a vital force in Israeli society and in the global Jewish community. While the movement has faced many challenges over the years, including declining membership and shifting political and social landscapes, it remains committed to its core values and to creating a better future for all Israelis and for Jews around the world.

At Hashomer Hatzair, we believe that the next generation of young leaders must be equipped with the tools and values necessary to create a more just, equal, and peaceful world. Our movement is open to young people of all backgrounds who share our commitment to social change, community building, and progressive values.

This year, Hashomer Hatzair is celebrating a significant milestone: our 110th anniversary. It's an

opportunity for us to reflect on the legacy of the movement and the many contributions that our members have made to social justice, peace, and equality over the past century.

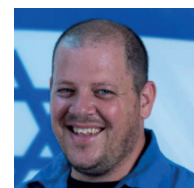
In addition, we are also celebrating the 100th anniversary of Hashomer Hatzair's presence in the United States. Since our founding in the US in 1923, we have been committed to building a more just and equal society, both in America and around the world. As we mark this centennial, we are proud to continue this work, and we remain committed to our core values of socialism, Zionism, and social justice.

We invite all those who share our commitment to these values to join us in celebrating these anniversaries and becoming part of the Hashomer Hatzair community. Whether you are a young person looking to develop your skills and values, or an adult interested in supporting progressive causes, we welcome you into our movement. Together, we can build a more just, equitable, and sustainable future for all.

We are grateful to Partners for Progressive Israel for providing us with the opportunity to share the history and values of Hashomer Hatzair in their Israel Horizons e-zine. Your support for progressive causes and commitment to social justice is deeply appreciated, and we look forward to continuing to work together towards a better future.

As the executive director of Hashomer Hatzair, I am proud to lead an organization that has such a rich history and a bright future. We remain committed to empowering young people, promoting progressive values, and building a better world for all.

Assaf Galin is Executive Director of Camp Shomria & Hashomer Hatzair USA. He is trained as a teacher and informal education guide.



MATCHING GRANT CAMPAIGN

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28 Feb -
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MATCHING GRANT CAMPAIGN

It is incumbent upon us to support our friends in Israel and urgently raise our voices in opposition to the new administration's judicial changes as well as call for an end to the ongoing violence, vandalism, displacement, and death in the West Bank.

In response to these unprecedented times, Partners for Progressive Israel has launched a month-long [FIGHT FOR DEMOCRACY - END THE OCCUPATION](#) campaign. We have been given a generous gift that will match dollar for dollar each contribution made through March 27th.

[Donate](#) now to help Partners realize the full benefit of this matching grant and we will continue to fight for democracy and an end to the occupation!

It has never been more important!

[CONTRIBUTE NOW!](#)

Israel-Palestine Symposium 2022

The Struggle For Human Rights:
From Declaration to Occupation



7 Sundays between October 23, 2022 - January 8, 2023

Third Virtual Israel-Palestine Virtual Symposium

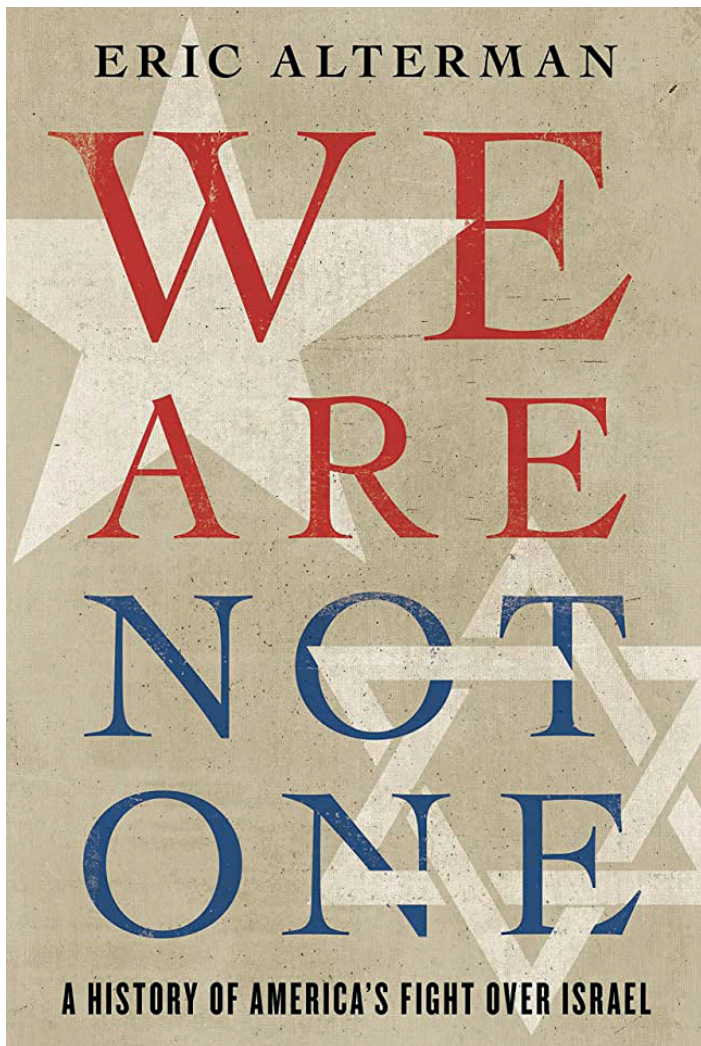
Partners for Progressive Israel's third digital symposium took place on seven Sundays from October 23 2022 through January 8 2023. As in previous symposia, two two-hour sessions were held on each of the Sundays, with 90 minutes devoted to a panel of speakers engaging in dialogue with participants and the final half-hour dedicated to participants reflecting on what had just transpired. This past year's symposium, entitled "The Struggle for Human Rights: From Declaration to Occupation," was primarily attended by an especially spirited group of participants from the US, Canada and the UK who actively engaged in the dialogue. Topics included "Balancing Security with Human Rights"; "Case Studies in the Protection of Human Rights: Women and the LGBTQ+ Community"; "Religion and Human Rights"; "Human Rights Education (Or Miseducation)"; and "Where Do We Go From Here?" Given the fact that the symposium took place at election time in Israel, two sessions were devoted to the results of the election and their effect on human rights. The over 40 panelists who joined us from Israel and Palestine were extraordinary. You can read more [here](#) about the symposium and the panelists who participated.

Although Partners will continue with a digital format in the future, our hope is that in the fall, 2023 will see a return to a thirty-year tradition of in-person, one-week symposia in Israel and Palestine. Click [here](#) if you would like more information once we confirm the dates.

Review of Eric Alterman, *We Are Not One: A History of America's Fight Over Israel* (Basic Books, 2022)

BOOK REVIEW

By Peter Eisenstadt



So Israelis are incandescent with rage and the West Bank is catching fire, as American Jews look on with varying degrees of concern, outrage, and horror. Almost everyone has the sense of profound change, entering into a new, uncharted, and incredibly dangerous time. And I am supposed to calmly write a book review? Is this the time for American Jews to say to Israelis that we have been moving in different directions for years; we no longer really have anything in common; and in the immortal words of Tammy Wynette, the divorce becomes final today. Or is this the time, with a renewed and almost telepathic sense of empathy, to make common cause

with those in Israel and Palestine who are trying to keep fascism at bay?

Whom am I kidding? I am doing what I usually do in crises, which is to read books. Of course, political disasters are a golden opportunity for historians and other professional explainers to tell us how it was and how it is that we became mired and begrimed in our present predicaments, and Alterman's excellent book, which takes us to the brink of the recent Israeli election, is a sobering, distressing, and absorbing review of the history we all need to review and rethink right now, which is the sad history of how Israel and American Jews have arrived at this terrible moment.

But *We Are Not One* is not primarily about Israel (or the Palestinians, for that matter.) It is a history of American, and especially American Jewish, attitudes toward Israel. And it shows that at the root of the of many of the problems between American Jews and Israel has been sheer ignorance. In truth, American Jews have never known much about Israel. This is to some extent inherent in what used to be called "the Zionist idea." Jews may have coined the term "diaspora," but we have been at it so long we have forgotten how it is supposed to work. Leaving ancient history aside, unlike every other diaspora, such as the Chinese, the African, the Irish, what have you, people leave the homeland to create a diaspora. The Jews, at least in modern times, did it in reverse.

The Jewish diaspora created the homeland, and in many ways Israel is a fictive Jewish homeland. This is not a criticism, just a statement of fact. That is to say, certainly in 1948, very few American Jews knew anything about it except some Bible stories and a few newsreels. Very few American Jews had visited Israel, or could speak the language – if they spoke a Jewish language it was Yiddish, not modern Hebrew. They knew few Israelis and had no kinship ties, no sentimental stories from elders about the old country, and no familiarity with

its culture. And of course they knew even less about the Palestinians.

And so, it became very easy, from the early 20th century on and especially after 1948, for American Jews to use Israel as a sort of Zionist *tabula rasa*, a blank slate on which to project their hopes, fears, and anxieties about themselves, their status as Americans, and the future of the Jewish people. And Israelis, knowing how little American Jews knew about Israel, have been complicit in fostering and manipulating American Jewish illusions ever since. But liars come to believe their lies. And probably the most basic lie is refusing to accept that for all that Israel has accomplished and all the ways it has led to a revival of the Jewish people, one of its foundations is the dispossession and exile of the Palestinians. And as a consequence, there has been a willing away of all historical complexity, a determination to reduce the Israeli-Palestinian struggle to one of innocence against terror, good versus evil. All I would say here is that my version of the history of Israel and Palestine has both sides, all sides, finding themselves, for various reasons, trapped in historical circumstances in which they had assigned roles to play, and from which they have been unable to extricate themselves.

For Alterman, the void of American Jewish knowledge about Israel was filled by the Ur-text (Uris-text?) of American Zionism, Leon Uris's execrable novel (1958) and equally rotten film (1960) film, *Exodus*. One of the highlights of *We Are Not One* is Alterman's surgical evisceration of Uris and his discussion of how its celebration of Israeli machismo and Palestinian evil is central to the American Jewish myth of Israel, and that has, unfortunately, resonated through the decades and is reverberating still. *Exodus* turned the history of Israel into something they could more easily understand, a not very good Western, with pioneers farming in a new-found land, the cowboys versus the Indians, all presented with an utter lack of moral ambiguity. Alterman is a well-known writer on rock music, but if his book has a leitmotif, or an anti-leitmotif, it is not the music of Bruce Springsteen but the meretricious but memorable main title theme from *Exodus*, which I found myself humming to myself each time the book was mentioned. "This land is mine," sang

Rabbi Andy Williams, "God gave this land to me."

Uris was a right-wing hack, but a deep-seated refusal to look at the history of Israel without blinders was common across the American Jewish political spectrum. My favorite episode, unmentioned by Alterman, is the controversy over a mural depicting Palestinian refugees at the Jordanian pavilion at the 1964–65 World's Fair in Queens. Every politician in the city, from Mayor Wagner on down, insisted that the mural be taken down. The director of the Fair, Robert Moses, unbendingly imperious as always, and on this occasion surely in the right, angrily refused to do so, and this led to demonstrations on the fairgrounds. In one incident, a protest by the American Jewish Congress ended in the arrest of several prominent members of the Jewish left, among them civil rights stalwarts Rabbi Joachim Prinz and Theodore Bikel. Denial of the legitimacy of the suffering of Palestinians had become a Jewish civil rights issue, its recognition incompatible with their Jewish identity.

The book has many highlights, too many to mention or to cover in detail. In his discussion of the 1947 United Nations partition plan, Alterman makes the crucial point that Zionism in the diaspora was often as much, or more, about who will rule at home than about who will rule in Palestine/Israel. In the case of the creation of Israel, American Zionists engineered a decisive victory not only over non- or anti-Zionism, but over the German Jews who had dominated American Jewish life since the mid-nineteenth century.

The book provides expert accounts of the evolution of the relationship between Israel and the United States; the standoffishness of official government policy towards Israel, and then the extension of copious military aid after Israel demonstrated that it had become militarily adroit. The Six Day War is, of course, a turning point in Alterman's narrative and a paradox of the war is that it made Israel both more "Jewish" and less Jewish. Israel's image shifted from kova tembel-wearing kibbutzniks to kippah-wearing settlers all over the West Bank, initiating the creeping desecularization of Israeli life, which has continued apace, At the same time that Israel

was embracing a new and heightened sense of national-religious Jewishness, demographically it became less and less Jewish. Its Palestinian population, increasingly no longer a cowed minority, developed into a perpetually restless and hostile near majority. And American Jews, reveling in the ultimate Uris fantasy, could see none of the implications of the pyrrhic conquests of 1967.

Most of the book concerns high national politics, the work of presidents, secretaries of state, national security advisors, and the like; subjects Alterman has written about for many years. I particularly enjoyed his brutal dissection of Henry Kissinger's claims of his accomplishments in the wake of the 1973 War. Alterman's account of subsequent events, such as the Sadat-Begin negotiations, the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, and the Oslo accords, Sharon and the Second Intifada, and Benjamin Netanyahu's long reign and his utter contempt for the Democratic presidents he dealt with, are all astute, well-sourced, carefully argued, and highly recommended.

A good deal of the book is spent trying to account for, and to accurately describe, the amorphous and metaphysical entity known as the Israel Lobby, with AIPAC at its center and any number of major and minor Jewish organizations orbiting around it. One problem with the Israel Lobby is that to accurately describe its power, as Alterman notes, seems like you are borrowing a page from the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. It is so successful that it doesn't really have to lobby; those in its thrall already know, unasked and unbidden, what to do and how to vote. And the Israel lobby is so powerful that it has in recent years decided that Jews, most of whom remain liberal and MAGA-hating, are a liability, and in any event less numerous than the Christian right. But the question of Zionism remains, as it always has been, as much about domestic politics as about events in the Middle East, and now it is time to fight for democracy both in Israel and within American Jewish life.

Now comes the part of the review in which I offer a few gentle cavils and criticisms. In dealing with the Israel lobby, Alterman first makes a strong case for the impact of Jewish neo-conservatives on the decision to invade Iraq, then sharply criticizes Walt and Mearsheimer's

opus, *The Jewish Lobby and US Foreign Policy*, for offering what strikes me as only a slightly stronger version of his argument, and then even more witheringly criticizes Walt and Mearsheimer's hysterical critics, arguing that they failed to recognize the obvious reality and impact of the Israel lobby. I sympathize; the strength of the Israel lobby has so often been both overestimated and underestimated that it is hard to get the balance correct.

I was surprised that Meir Kahane is almost entirely absent from this book. As Shaul Magid and others have argued, he was a significant, if largely subterranean force in pulling the American Jewish community rightward. He was the conduit between American Jewish fears of Blacks, crime, and the realities of the urban crisis, and Israeli fears of Palestinians and terrorism, making these two very disparate phenomena as one. And, unfortunately, there is a case to be made that Kahanism, in the person of Itamar Ben-Gvir and others, has been the most distinctive and important contribution of American Zionism to the politics of Israel.

Alterman is not a fan of BDS (neither am I), and argues that it has accomplished nothing, which seems fair enough, but spends considerable time talking about Omar Barghouti's vision of BDS, which calls for the elimination of Israel, without, I felt, sufficiently making clear that there are many versions of BDS, with many different and clashing visions of the future of Israel-Palestine. I presume that Alterman approved of the efforts, ultimately unsuccessful, of Ben and Jerry to pull their eponymous ice cream from the West Bank, which was widely attacked as an example of BDS. BDS is a tactic, not an ideology, and whether or not it makes sense is situational. As to charge that BDS is ineffective, there's a lot of ineffectiveness going around on the Jewish left these days, and say what you will, BDS attracts attention and draws the right enemies. One can only guess that, given the current government in Israel, there will likely be more BDS rather than less in our future, and those of us on the Jewish left need to be in dialogue with its supporters.

Alterman devotes considerable space to the left-wing academic discourse on Israel—Edward Said and

his successors; discourses on settler colonialism, intersectionality, and the like. Without denying the ways in which intellectual ideas filter down from torrid academic enclaves to a wider public, Israel's current problem is not that it has lost the sympathy of left academics. The ghost of Edward Said did not make Donald Trump more popular in Israel than in almost any other country in the world. The problem Israel faces, if it doesn't sound too epistemologically naïve, is simple reality. Americans simply know much more about Israel than they did in 1948. For those interested, there is a plethora of first-class histories, much good reporting in mainstream America media, several English-language daily newspapers from Israel including the excellent *Ha'aretz*, and myriad internet sources.

Compared to decades ago, there are far more Israelis living in the United States, far more American Jews who have visited or lived in Israel, and organizations like Partners for Progressive Israel—twice mentioned by Alterman—committed to the accurate dissemination of news from Israel; all this, to say nothing of the much greater availability of Arab and Palestinian sources. It has become more difficult for Israel to convincingly lie.

Many Americans and American Jews have discovered that Israel day-by-day is becoming less democratic and more theocratic; that it has not faced a genuine existential threat to its security in half a century and yet the condition of the Palestinians has steadily worsened. And many feel that Israel, at least since 1967, has been engaged in what has been called a [Chad Gadya history-ism](#), doing the same thing over and over again, each time in a more complex and convoluted fashion, each time with more violence, shedding of blood, and death.

As I read *We Are Not One*, I feel Alterman's ultimate purpose in writing the book, perhaps inherent in its title, was as much religious as political. American Jews, he argues, need a Judaism that no longer feels the need to live vicariously through the tragedies and triumphs of the last century, a Judaism that can draw on and stand on its own spiritual strengths, an American Judaism that

desacralizes Israel. As Alterman shows, Zionism from its beginnings tried to negate the *galut*, and this sense of Zionist superiority to diaspora Jews is still very much with us. Alterman presents a long list of Israelis who barely tried to hide their contempt of American Jews; charging that we are assimilated, unlearned in Judaism, unacquainted with real suffering, lacking everything except lots and lots of money. But as long as we are speaking about the problems of assimilation, it seems to me that the country with the more serious problem of Jewish assimilation is Israel. They have created a new Jewish reality, a mixed Jewish/Palestinian polity, a country of some fifteen million people with about seven million Jews. Whatever Israel is, it is not a Jewish state. I do not know what will happen in the future, but Israel faces a stark choice between Jewish supremacy and democracy, and this is at the core of today's struggles.

We are at a turning point in the history of Israel as profound as anything that has happened since 1948. I hope that their new government will shock Israelis into recovering their forgotten moral senses. This, and the vehement opposition of Americans and American Jews, really does matter. For better and worse, American Jews and Israelis know each other much better than ever before; familiarity breeds both solidarity and contempt; crises bring us together and pull us apart. The Jewish people today still have much in common, a shared past, a beautiful religion, an uncertain future. I kept thinking reading Alterman's book that its title was intended as a commentary on that most central of Jewish prayers, the Sh'ma: When Moses proclaimed that God is one, he was saying that oneness was an attribute of God alone, and not of the Jewish people, who definitely were not one, and never would be. Denounce evil wherever you find it. Seek justice with raised fists and voices. False unity is the golden calf.

Peter Eisenstadt is a member of the board of Partners for Progressive Israel and the author of Against the Hounds of Hell: A Biography of Howard Thurman (University of Virginia, 2021).



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