

President's Messages

Partners for Progressive Israel strongly condemns the statement of President Trump on December 6, "recognizing" Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. As a fundamental change in the diplomatic posture of the United States, it manages to be both unnecessary and dangerously provocative, without accomplishing anything of benefit, whether for peace or for Israeli security, which can only be guaranteed by peace.

It is pointless and unnecessary because West Jerusalem is and has been Israel's capital, a 'fact on the ground' not seriously challenged by anyone of consequence. It is dangerously provocative because it changes the status quo by giving offense to over a billion Muslims who also have a claim on the city, and seeming to decide a final status issue without agreement between Israel and the PLO, while all other issues are left up in the air, seems indefinitely. Whether or not it leads to immediate violence, it weakens the position of the US as a peacemaker and exacerbates feelings among Palestinians already rubbed raw.

Israel needs no American assurance to control West Jerusalem. Rather, Palestinians do need assurance that their rights in Jerusalem and Palestine will be protected. President Trump's statement was a step in exactly the wrong direction.

PAUL SCHAM

President, Partners for Progressive Israel

The Civil War at Home

Partners for Progressive Israel defines itself as existing to support progressive organizations in Israel by educating Americans – especially, but not only Jews – about the activities, challenges and successes of the Israeli "moderate left" (admittedly an imprecise and subjective cohort). We are American Jews with strong ties to Israel – variously through family, citizenship, Judaism, sense of a shared destiny, and much more.

Nevertheless, we are an American organization and part of the American Jewish community, again in various ways, personally, collectively, and institutionally. Thus, we cannot ignore the vicious attacks on organizations like our by the expanding number of right wing Jewish organizations in this country, many of which are linked to organizations affiliated in various ways with Israeli right wing parties and, sadly, in some cases, with Israeli government institutions.

This is not new, of course, but it has been gathering momentum for several years and in the last year has become almost ubiquitous. Partly this has to do with the BDS

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The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement

INSIGHTS

By David Abraham



The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement (BDS) has much vexed progressive Jews. The official three core BDS demands are ambiguous in a number of ways. They are: an end to West Bank settlement and removal of the “apartheid” wall; full equality for Palestinian Arab Israelis; and the Right of Return for Palestinians and their families displaced (per UN Resolution 194) or ethnically-cleansed by the establishment of Israel. Most progressive Jews consider it at least admissible to demand an end to the settlement project, and most certainly profess to support full equality for all Israeli citizens (though what should be “Jewish” about Israel has not been well thought-through among progressive American Jews). Taken seriously, however, a full Right of Return would at the very least overwhelm Jewish Israel, if not end it.

Many leaders and core thinkers in the BDS movement, Jews and no-Jews alike, do see BDS as a tool to delegitimize Israel’s very existence, to mark it as an immoral state, one founded on an original and perhaps reversible sin—namely, the dispossession of the native Palestinian population. For some of these true-believers the Occupation began not in 1967 but in 1948. All of Israel is thus illegitimate, and though it may not

be possible to return the U.S. to the Native Americans, Canada to the First Nations, or Australia to the Aborigines, at least as an aspiration, Palestine ‘from the River to the Sea’ should be returned to the Palestinians. Even the leaders of BDS do not expect that boycotts, divestment actions, or international sanctions would materially harm Israel’s economy or turn the tide of its domestic politics (though some adherents point to the success of just such measures in turning around South African politics), but they do believe that delegitimation would demoralize and weaken an aggressive state while building support for the Palestinian cause.

Viewed this way, BDS looks like the mirror image of the Israeli Right: the conflict is a zero-sum game, 1948 and 1967 are the same, it’s all ours, this is a Jewish land or no land, etc.

But most members or supporters of BDS, especially on campuses but also in the broader public arena, are not advocates of Israel’s destruction. They are simply beside themselves with frustration and grief over the relentless and uncompromising takeover of Israeli politics by the Right. They also see how Israel has both become embedded in a growing international right-wing nexus and, in recent years, exercised a deleterious

impact on liberal Jewish life in the US, France, and numerous other lands, not to mention Israel itself.

For the majority of its supporters, BDS is more a *cri de coeur* than a political agenda. One might object that such politics are ineffective (if not counter-productive) and merely reflect a penchant for moral righteousness. But the politics of emotions are important, and American politics in particular are notoriously driven by ideological commitments, and nowhere more so than among conservative American Jews who consistently create and mobilize fear and insecurity in order to justify Israel's extreme positions.

Prudential calculations are not enough, however. The BDS movement is gaining in prominence and support not because it offers efficacious solutions: it is advancing because of the weakness of progressive politics in Jewish America and in Israel itself. The only real answer, then, for those who do not share the maximal BDS vision but who see the dead end of current Israeli policies, is to fight those policies ourselves, tooth and nail, in the US and in Israel. That means rebuilding the Left. We may be seeing the start of something like that in the US; we need to help make it happen in Israel as well.

“We should consider that pro-BDS initiatives may be positively counterproductive, creating a backlash that leaves us to the Right of where we began.”

In the meantime, however, we should consider that pro-BDS initiatives may be positively counterproductive, creating a backlash that leaves us to the Right of where we began. Several states have passed statutes prohibiting any public-sector cooperation with BDS and threatening private parties with exclusion from state contracts should they endorse BDS. A similar measure is moving forward in the US Congress now, where a near wall-to-wall lineup of liberal to reactionary legislators have signed on to the preliminary version of a bill, the “Israel Anti-Boycott Act” (S.720/H.R.1697). The bill criminalizes actions “intended to penalize or otherwise limit commercial relations... with Israel or persons doing business in Israel or in Israeli-controlled territories,” (emphasis added) thereby ignoring the Green Line and putting another nail in the casket of the two-state solution.

This same bill takes a swipe at NGOs, the UN, and other international organizations— in the spirit of the purveyors of infectious illiberalism, such as Erdogan, Putin, Orban,

Modi, and Netanyahu. “Furthering” or “supporting” a foreign country's or international organization's boycott targeted at Israel or the Occupied Territory settlements could be prosecuted for violating US anti-boycott laws, a criminal offense. The penalties associated with these offenses are serious, potentially including substantial fines and prison time of up to 10 years (50 USC §4610). The bill's criminalization of requests for or the furnishing of boycott-related information is a direct threat to free speech and would put organizations like PPI and Americans for Peace Now, which have endorsed not purchasing settlement goods, in direct jeopardy.

Anti-boycott legislation that once sought to support underdog Israel against Arab state and secondary boycotts (Subaru was for years the only Japanese car maker not adhering to the Arab boycott of Israel) is now turned against the EU and liberal-left organizations supporting any aspect of the Palestinian cause. The Israeli government now sees the EU and NGOs as the last bastions of support for Palestinians, ones that must be isolated and defeated. Wittingly or not, the pending legislation is part of this attempt to criminalize opposition to the current Israeli government's agenda both at home and abroad. As with measures by Hillel International and others to exclude progressive voices from the halls of Jewish debate, the success of these efforts will not only advance the cause of that agenda but also of its mirror opposite— BDS. ■

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Emeritus at the University of Miami and a
member of PPI's Board.*



Balfour, Arab Nationalism, and Palestine

By Jerome A. Chanes



With all the hoopla surrounding the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration—most of which is richly deserved—there is something missing.

We know that the notion of a “national home”—a central location of the Declaration—was embraced, with greater or lesser enthusiasm by Jews around the world. But what about the Arabs, especially those at the time in Palestine? What was their take on Balfour? A touch of historical context is necessary in order to address this question.

First, we need to recall that in 1917 there was no “Palestinian Arab nationalism”—at least not the kind we would recognize a century later, in 2017.

In the early years of the twentieth century, Arabs in Palestine—Ottoman Palestine—participated in a broader Arab culture that was neither Ottoman nor particularly Muslim. It was largely Christian, and this broad Arab culture of the “Syrian” provinces (including Palestine, historic Eretz Yisrael) represented the beginning of an Arab national identity. Arabs in that part of the world had a shared language (Hashemi Arabic), a shared culture, a shared geography.

The geography is important. The Arabs of Palestine had no desire to be “Palestinians”; they saw themselves as a part of a larger Arab world. They counted themselves as part of what was known as “Greater Syria”—present-day Syria, Lebanon,

and Jordan, with Palestine being “South Syria.” Culturally, they were less “desert” than the North African Maghreb, most certainly less than Arabia. The leadership were cosmopolitan and cultured, and were ethnically—and politically—part of a Greater Syria.

So what happened? Any aspirations for an Arab state of Greater Syria were crushed in the late ‘teens to the early 1920s by the French, who had hegemonic aspirations in the north, present-day Syria and Lebanon. Palestinian Arabs were now on their own and—like it or not—“Palestinians.” Originally viewing themselves as Arab South Syrian nationalists, they were now, willy-nilly, Palestinian nationalists. And their new identity was developed as an “against” identity: against and in response to two new dynamics: the failure of a broader (that is, Greater Syrian) nationalism, and the new challenge of Zionism.

It is against this historical backdrop that we can understand the Arab view of the Balfour Declaration.

The key phrases in the Declaration were, as is well known, “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people”; and, “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.”

Sounds okay. So what, to the Arabs, was wrong with this picture?

First, in terms of the “national home” clause, as a practical

Balfour, Arab Nationalism, and Palestine

matter, Britain was not in control of that part of the world. On what basis were the British issuing a declaration on a “national home” in Palestine?

But this was not the main issue for the Arabs of Palestine. Putting aside for the moment that (as outlined above) there was in 1917 no Palestinian political nationalism to speak of, the disparity in the two clauses gave pause to many in the Arab world. A “national home for the Jewish people” was language that suggested some kind of state, and we recall that the “state” was the most valued institution of late-19th-century Europe.

The point is the point-counterpoint of the “national home” and the “civil and religious rights” clauses. As noted by analyst Hussein Ibish, the operative clause—“the civil and religious rights of non-Jewish communities in Palestine”—was, in the eyes of Arabs, a vehicle to transform 93 percent of the inhabitants of Palestine into “non-Jewish communities.” To the Arab population, the Jews—all of seven percent of the population—were to have a “national home,” perhaps a state. In contrast, the “non-Jewish” populations—the 93 percent—were to have nothing; they were to have only “civil and religious rights.” Civil and religious rights are individual rights, good to have, but they are not collective rights. Collective rights were reserved by the Declaration for the Jews in Palestine—the seven percent.

The sum of the Arab calculus? “We are being deprived by foreigners of our earlier Greater Arab national aspirations; the British (in cynical support of their war-aims) are reducing us—93 percent of Palestine—from a polity to individuals. Something is very wrong with this picture.”

Those historians who maintain that the Arab-Jewish conflict began with the 1920 or 1929 riots are missing a crucial historical moment—the Balfour Declaration; the point, at the very beginning of a Palestinian Arab movement, that generated much of the future conflict. If much of contemporary Jewish history flowed from Balfour, much of the conflict directly derived from Balfour as well. Policy-makers: take note.

Jerome Chanes, senior fellow at the Center for Jewish Studies at the CUNY Graduate Center, is the author of four books and numerous articles, reviews, and book-chapters on Jewish history and public affairs. ■



Jerome Chanes is a fellow at The Center for Jewish Studies of the CUNY Graduate Center.

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Citizens, Clerics, and Neo-Liberalism

By Laura Wharton



Here's an example of what's wrong with religious-state relations in Israel today—and why so many Israelis are frustrated by them.

It is estimated that more than 100 illegal generators are in use in Ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods of Jerusalem. Religious extremists, apparently driven at least in part by greed, have convinced thousands of their neighbors that the electricity provided by the National Electric Company is not “kosher” and in its stead offer the use of their privately owned—and pricey—generators. These pieces of equipment have been declared a danger to the public by the Electric Company, the Ministry for Infrastructure, the Ministry for the Protection of the Environment, the Fire Department, safety experts and, finally, by the courts. Yet the local government has enlisted every possible excuse to avoid disconnecting and banning them. In other words, the mayor doesn't want to have to confront the fanatics. Religious mavericks do what they want—usually at the bidding of or with the blessing of their leaders—even at the expense of the people, and the politicians shirk their responsibilities.

In the past, bad relations between church and state have led to some of the bloodiest clashes in history: the Crusades, the Thirty Years War, or the attacks on the clergy during the French Revolution. Most people probably believe this kind of conflict is over, with modern democracies having developed

a variety of arrangements entailing some degree of separation between church and state that has led, for the most part, to a workable arrangement. Now that post-communist Russia has permitted the re-emergence of the Russian Church, the U.S. has sanctioned the teaching of creationism and evolution side by side, and even countries like Sweden have demoted the church from its established status, it might seem that some degree of reconciliation now generally characterizes what used to be a contentious relationship. Yet these images are deceptive.

Today's battles for control and allegiance are indeed less violent, or less overtly so, than Henry II's sending men to stab the recalcitrant Archbishop of Canterbury. But today new trends in the struggle for supremacy have emerged, and it seems that all of them are being played out in Israel.

First, if in the past elites confronted elites, with royalty and clergy at loggerheads, today those who hold power can address the people directly. The Pope doesn't use his Swiss Guard to confront the Italian army; rather, he can direct his appeal straight to the citizens and explain to them why they mustn't use birth control. Religious leaders in the U.S. don't just lash out at politicians for allowing abortions: they enlist their followers to lobby the legislature. The British sociologist Michael Mann wrote in “The Dark Side of Democracy” of the less positive development of democratization—that

wars brought down to the people have morphed into ethnic cleansing. Similarly, the democratization of religion means everyone with cable or satellite T.V. or an internet connection can get an explanation as to why he or she must oppose same-sex marriage, join ISIS, or help reconquer the Temple Mount. The most dangerous religious authorities in Israel, like the ones who advised Yigal Amir to assassinate Prime Minister Rabin, make their appeals directly to a growing audience via the internet and clandestine meetings.

Second, as an extension of this development, state authorities who once held off religious encroachment nowadays stand aside. Just as the state has stepped back from regulating the economy, in many places it has completely disappeared with regard to limiting clerical meddling. As concerns grow regarding the effect of multinational corporations on national labor organizations, religious forces—perhaps the most powerful multinational bodies—threaten national control and protection. Pakistani leaders are loathe to assert control over large swathes of their country and thereby millions of their citizens are left to the mercy of Al Qaeda. Even in France, politicians are wont to ignore female circumcision and other egregious violations of human rights. Ultra-Orthodox Jews in New York now send women to sit in the back seats of buses without compunction—or the intervention of the law. People may think that tensions between church and state have been resolved, just as supporters of the First Socialist International thought that nationalism was a thing of the past, but they are wrong. The conflict has just taken a new form. In Israel, authorities know well who is inciting racism, violence, and extreme religious intolerance—but they choose to stand aside. Despite the widespread publication and distribution of extremist literature penned by well-known rabbis, no religious figures have been tried for incitement. The state-employed rabbi of Tzfat is still a paid public servant despite having called for Arabs to be expelled from the city.

“We don’t want religious figures using their sway in political decisions, nor do we want politicians deciding religious issues or imposing religious decisions on anyone.”

Third, in an even worse development, religious and political leaders have joined forces. Orthodox rabbis support the right-wing government by justifying the ongoing occupation of the territories in religious terms. They encourage dividing the Israeli public into sectors of religious and non-religious, Muslims and Jews, Mizrachim and Ashkenazim, thereby providing the basis for a “divide and conquer” policy of weakening opposition to government policies. Politicians reciprocate by generously over-funding Orthodox religious

schools and organizations in comparison to comparable secular or non-Orthodox institutions. They allow Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox control of the Ministries of Education and Interior. Together they drive a wedge between liberal Israelis and Jews abroad.

In Israel, we clearly don’t want to initiate a holy war among the Jewish sects or anyone else; our history is stained by conflicts that led us to internecine wars. Although secular Jews remain the largest sub-group in Israel, they have no desire or intention to act against religion in general. Yet while we wouldn’t want a return to wars between religious and political leaders, we don’t want them in “cahoots,” either. We don’t want religious figures using their sway in political decisions, nor do we want politicians deciding religious issues or imposing religious decisions on anyone. We need protection from undue influence in all spheres, and we refuse to let extremists cut us off from one another, within or beyond our geographic borders. We need and want politicians who are willing and responsible enough to pull the plug on the “kosher” generators and enforce the law. ■

Laura Wharton teaches at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and is also a Jerusalem City Councilor.



Trip to Israel

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and social life in Israel

June 14-21, 2018

Experiencing Israel: The 2017 PPI Study Tour

PARTNERS' TRIP TO ISRAEL

By Ayala Emmett



On Sunday morning, as the sun begins to warm the chilly air, we are on our bus from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. We must be in East Jerusalem for an 8:15 meeting, and we eat a neatly-packed Israeli breakfast on the bus. This is the sixth day of our seven-day intensive study tour. We meet daily with a wide range of people, from the most powerful politicians to the least powerful, out on the social margins. It is a concentrated, tightly scheduled tour, and we rarely sit down for dinner before 8p.m. We eat in local restaurants and enjoy the food. After a long exhausting day crammed with experiences, we are grateful to sit at a table; all we have to do is order food.

On Sunday we are making a second trip to Jerusalem; our first had taken us to meet with Meretz Members of Knesset. The study tour gave us access to elected politicians, a rare and educationally significant opportunity. Even more instructive was the serious exchange of ideas between our group and the MKs. While the meetings were warm and friendly, our group asked tough questions. We wanted to hear clear programs for meaningful political change.

From the other side of the political spectrum we met with MK Yehuda Glick of the Likud. Glick, an Orthodox rabbi,

seemed happy to engage with us. He insisted that his plan to provide Temple Mount access to Jewish worshippers was simply a matter of equality. He told us that, “God’s name is Shalom, which means that Palestinians should live side by side with Jews. However, God gave us the state of Israel.” According to Glick and others who support the policy of a ‘Greater Israel’, “living side by side with Jews,” does not include giving Palestinians citizenship rights.

On our way to Jerusalem again, we are quiet, saving our energy for the day ahead. In East Jerusalem we meet with Gerard Horton from Military Court Watch. Gerard is a co-founder of the organization, a lawyer, and an expert on Palestinian minors brought before military courts. We join him on a visit to a military court in Ofer. In a small, crowded, and badly lit courtroom we stand in the back and watch the military judge reviewing a father’s petition to have his 13-year-old son released to his custody until the boy’s trial date. The boy is accused of throwing stones, in an incident in which no one was hurt. He was arrested later because one soldier reported that he recognized the boy by the jacket he wore. The boy looks lost and bewildered as his father pleads, promising he will keep the boy out of mischief; but the military judge refuses his request. In the

back of the room, the father weeps; the suffering inflicted by a draconian occupation shocks us.

We leave Ofer to go to Efrat, a Jewish settlement about seven miles south of Jerusalem. Our host invites us to his home. We enter a lovely suburban house and sit in a large living room facing a blooming, well-tended garden. He tells us about the many opportunities that life in Efrat offers, admitting that he and many other settlers are attracted to the economic benefits of low cost homes in a country with soaring real-estate prices. He and his wife, he says, could never afford a similar house in Israel, certainly not in Jerusalem. He praises Efrat's many amenities: first-rate schools, a state-of-the-art hospital, a spacious community center, a shopping center. In response to our questions about the legality of settlements and rights of Palestinians to their land, our host invokes biblical authority for Jewish ownership of the whole West Bank.

“What distinguishes the PPI tour is the opportunity to meet so many Israelis who love their country, who recognize that suffering does not stop at borders, and who oppose oppressive government policies.”

We return to Tel Aviv for a 6p.m. meeting with Noam Shuster-Eliassi, the coordinator for Interpeace's Base for Discussion, in partnership with the UN in Israel. Noam is the daughter of a Jewish Iranian mother and a Holocaust survivor. Like other young Israelis that we meet, she has a clear vision for political change. Noam is fluent in Arabic as well as Hebrew, and an activist for peace and social justice. The Left, she tells us, needs to aggressively encourage Mizrahim and Orthodox Jews to join, and make clear that the Left has place for them.

While much of the news from Israel is focused on the right-wing government and its policies to erode democracy, on our tour we have met many Israelis committed to strengthen civil society, democratic principles, and Jewish values of justice. Uncomfortable as it was for us to hear, they explained, that people who live at or under the poverty line, who worry about jobs and food insecurity and their children's inferior education, feel abandoned by the Left and are unable to respond to the plight of Palestinians.

And on the other side of the wall, Breaking the Silence soldiers took us through a checkpoint to Palestinian territory. We saw Palestinian suffering, the scope of settlers' grabbing of Palestinian lands, the destruction of farmers' fields and

olive trees and villages like Susya, whose residents are repeatedly forced to evacuate.

What distinguishes the PPI tour is the opportunity to meet so many Israelis who love their country, who recognize that suffering does not stop at borders, and who oppose oppressive government policies. Their response to suffering is activism, working for democratic change.

The PPI study tour offers a different conversation about Israel for American Jewish communities concerned that the younger generation is losing a connection to Israel, especially given the occupation. Americans who are anxious to end the occupation do not need to disconnect. They can and must find allies among progressive Israelis. Our encounters with them offer a way to be connected to Israel and also remain honest about oppression and suffering within Israeli society and of the Palestinians.

I fully agree with Israelis who argue that change must come from within. We who want to see the end of the occupation must support them and help them gain a voice in our communities.

Now, almost a year after our trip, I still pore over my scribbled notes, and I continue to process my experience and try to make use of it. I am an Israeli-American anthropologist who has done fieldwork in Israel. I am often invited to speak publicly in non-Jewish as well as Jewish communities about Israel. I now start by talking about suffering and what progressive Israelis are doing about it. ■

Ayala Emmett is Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at the University of Rochester and a member of PPI's Board.



Partner's next trip to Israel will be June 14-21, 2018. Interested in joining us? Want more information?

Please contact us at info@progressiveisrael.org or call **212.242.4500**

The Future of the Iran Nuclear Deal: (Re)considering Israeli and US interests

CONVERSATIONS



This is an edited version of a webinar held on 6 November by Partners for Progressive Israel and The Alliance for Israel's Future. Maya Haber, the former PPI Director of Programming and Strategy was the moderator. The two speakers were Brian Katulis and Avishay Ben Sasson-Gordis. Katulis is a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, where his work focuses on US national security, strategy and counterterrorism policy, and Ben Sasson-Gordis is a PhD student at Harvard University's Department of Government, who has written extensively on Israel's security and foreign policy.

Maya: Brian, let me start with you. What's at stake? What is the significance of the deal to US security? What are the consequences for the US of pulling out of the deal?

Brian Katulis: The stakes are very high, especially at a time when we see President Trump in Asia and the crisis with North Korea escalating. The JCPOA, the deal with Iran on its nuclear program actually, cut off all viable pathways for Iran to get a nuclear weapon. It was the best mechanism available and still is, to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. If the US pulled out of this deal, I would highlight maybe four or five main consequences...Number one, such a move would isolate America globally. As a result, we would have less leverage to get a so-called "better deal" that President Trump said we could get in negotiation...Second, even in the hypothetical that negotiations are reopened, Iran would want more concessions...

Third, stepping out of the deal would actually make the North Korea crisis worse in large part, because it would send this message to not just the North Koreans but our allies in Asia that we're not reliable... Fourth I think it would actually make it more difficult if we pulled out of the deal to push back against Iran and compete with Iran in terms of its influence in places like Iraq and Syria which. It would divert a lot of senior-level US attention to trying to re-negotiate a deal that's working and away from ways to counter Iran effectively in the region....Then lastly, and I'll close, the consequence of the US effectively stepping out of this Iran nuclear deal would actually reduce America's credibility and its sanctions on multiple fronts globally.

Maya: Thank you, Brian. Avishay, I can ask you roughly the same question. What are the consequences of pulling out of the deal for Israel's security?

Avishay Ben Sasson-Gordis: If you break out now with no alternative plan, then, the best-case scenario is the deal stands because everybody but the US stays in....Worst-case scenario: Congress reinforces some of the sanctions— so these are bilateral sanctions but they would affect European companies and European companies will withdraw which will cause the Iranians to retaliate.

Maya: Avishay, I am struck by the silence of Israeli politicians on this issue.

Avishay: One of the reasons is that Netanyahu has very successfully owned the Iranian subject in the Israeli psyche. ... They didn't say Netanyahu put us on the wrong path strategically. ...It takes some level of nuance to say, "Yes, I'm trouble by Iranian involvement with Hezbollah, Iranian contribution to Hamas and Islamic Jihad, but no, I think that diplomatic solutions may be helpful sometimes...Also Israeli politicians say they don't know the details.

David Abraham: Given what the speakers are telling us, is the real danger here the temptation of "Democrat moderates" to appear pro-Israel and tough by suggesting that we can be tougher on Iran?

Brian: It depends on what measures we're talking about.. If there are moderate Democrats who are moving towards some sort of measures that would be viewed as undercutting the Iran nuclear deal, then yes, they should be targeted.

John Helpen; Why do you think US opinion has steadily improved on Iran deal over the past year given how little people know about the deal and Trump's nonstop bashing it? Is Trump making it more popular by targeting it?

Brian: It could be the case. ...Given that he's such an erratic and mercurial leader, he lacks a certain credibility and a certain steadiness on security questions. ...And second, the deal itself is providing benefits to us and to our allies like Israel.

Maya: Paul Scham is asking Avishay...Is there an impact on ordinary Israelis of the statements by the many retired security heads who have spoken outwardly and publicly for the deal?

Avishay: My sense of it is that, by and large, Israelis are not very affected by it.... I think most Israelis, if you grab an Israeli off the street, ask them what they think of the deal, they'll say, "It's horrible. It needs to be canceled. It's acquiescence to Iranian whatever and that's where we stand." That's part of again, why I'm so dismayed by the silence of the Israeli opposition. Leadership has a role in swaying public opinion. ... Tzipi Livni went so far out of her way to make sure that nobody thinks she thinks anything good about Iran.

Maya: How likely is it that Congress will reimpose sanctions on Iran?

Brian: At this point I think it's hard to predict anything. Based on the discussions I have had as of late last week, it seems like there's very little appetite in Congress overall to really follow this plan that Trump has tried to outline.

Maya: What about AIPAC?

Avishay: From what I know, AIPAC is really hoping not to get mobilized on this issue again....APAC paid a significant price for having to align itself on this issue with Netanyahu's position in 2015.

Brian: The practical thing you can do on the Iran nuclear deal to make sure your support about it, is to write your senators and congressmen and essentially say, "This has made America safer. I'm your constituent and though there was a lot of political noise about it, there's objective fact that we're safer. Israel is safer, our partners in the region are safer." ■

Peter Eisenstadt, Board Member, PPI

Upcoming Conversation

Wednesday, December 20, 1.00pm EST

A Webinar in partnership with the Alliance for Israel's Future

Rethinking the US/Israel Partnership: Community, Identity, Politics

SPEAKERS:



Rabbi Jill Jacobs

Executive Director

T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call
for Human Rights



Mikhael Manekin

Director

Israel Tomorrow
The Alliance for Israel's Future

The U.S./Israel relationship has undergone an enormous transformation over the past two decades, one that has impacted the progressive community in a particularly complicated way, with new alliances and cleavages formed within the Jewish community and outside it. Changing the nature of this trans-Atlantic partnership, and strengthening progressive policies and camps in both the U.S. and Israel, requires a fundamental rethinking of the way the two communities interact. With both countries facing a dramatic rise in conservative and reactionary forces, progressives across the ocean have found promise and optimism in a renewed--and sometime difficult--set of conversations that have emerged in these challenging times.

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An Open Letter to Benjamin Netanyahu

ADVOCACY

Partners for Progressive Israel is one of 26 organizations to sign the following letter:

Dear Prime Minister Netanyahu,

As North American Jews and as friends of Israel, we are deeply concerned about your recent announcement of plans to deport tens of thousands of Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers from Israel.

We are concerned that while in most of the western world, refugee acceptance rates for Sudanese and Eritrean asylum seekers average as high as 56-84%, in Israel acceptance rates remain below 1%.

We are disturbed by reports from numerous sources that have shown that asylum seekers who have thus far “self-deported” from Israel have not found safety and protection in the countries to which they self-deported, be they their countries of origin - Eritrea or Sudan - or the third-party countries of Uganda and Rwanda. We know that many such individuals are no longer among the living.

We are concerned that if you move forward with these plans, the lives of thousands of individuals will be put in jeopardy, and the name of the Jewish State and the Jewish People will be irreparably stained.

As a people who were once refugees, and were once strangers in a strange land, we believe we have a special obligation toward refugees, whatever their religion or race. As a leading signatory to the International Convention on the Status of Refugees (1951), and moreover as a Jewish State founded by Jewish refugees, we believe Israel should be a model for the positive treatment of refugees.

We therefore call upon you to reconsider your plans to deport tens of thousands of Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers. We urge you to respect the rights of asylum seekers and refugees as enshrined in the International Refugee Convention and in Jewish law and values, and to allow those asylum seekers already residing in Israel to live in dignity until it is truly safe for them to return. We further commit ourselves and offer our hand in support in any way that we can help in coping with the challenges of the refugee crisis.

Please do not deport these individuals who have sought refuge among the Jewish People, but rather let us work together in addressing the burdens and challenges of our moral obligations.

“You shall not hand over to their master a slave who has sought refuge with you from their master. They shall live with you in your midst, in the place which they shall choose in one of your towns where it is good for them; you shall not mistreat them.” (Deuteronomy 23:16-17)

Sincerely,

November 30, 2017

[Click here for a list of signatory organizations](#)

A New NGO Promoting a Progressive Agenda in Israel's Municipal Elections



On November 10th, PPI co-sponsored a talk by two young Israeli activists on a movement they recently founded to empower local leadership in advocating for a progressive political platform in municipal elections. Bar Gissin, National Chair of Young Meretz, and Ido Stossel, former Chair of Young Labor, established Mekomi (“My Place”) just six months ago.

Those gathered at PPI’s office complex to hear Gissin and Stossel learned of the need for a grassroots organization designed to assist municipal leadership in focusing on concerns often not given their due by political parties on the left, such as affordable housing, education, the environment, urban planning, community building, and transportation. The speakers emphasized the need to change Israeli society from the bottom up, encouraging and providing the means for activism to flourish at the local level. Such leadership would promote a wide range of progressive values, ultimately leading to a national network of civic activity promoting equality, justice and freedom. Local politics would be the base from which values of social justice would be fostered throughout Israel.

Partners for Progressive Israel, along with The Alliance for the Future of Israel, share Mekomi’s vision of the importance of focusing on social and economic issues of concern to Israelis hailing from both the center of the country and from its periphery. We will continue to provide a forum for organizations, old and new, working for a just and shared society in Israel. ■

President’s Message (Cont.)

issue, which is being used as a litmus test to differentiate purportedly “pro -” and “anti-” Israel organizations and institutions. PPI opposes BDS but abhors how the issue has been abused and misrepresented both by its supporters and its opponents, as shown in the article by David Abraham.

This process began in earnest while Obama was president, received a major boost in 2015 when PM Netanyahu urged Americans to oppose the Iran nuclear deal, and has accelerated since then. Of course, the situation has been seriously exacerbated with the election of Donald Trump; paradoxically, right wing elements in the Jewish community are making common cause with some of the most unsavory elements among Trump’s supporters to systematically demonize the majority of American Jews who support both liberal domestic policies and the two-state solution, presumably with the goal of silencing us and splitting the community, principally over Israel-related issues.

By now the list of examples is endless, including (almost at random), the highly orchestrated campaign against Professor David Myers, the ZOA—Bannon—alt-right love fest, and the continuing incitement by Sheldon Adelson. It also is going on in Israel with the renunciation of the former Kotel agreement by the Prime Minister, the demonization of “Breaking the Silence, and many other examples.. As Jews, as liberal Americans, as supporters of progressive forces in Israel, and in other ways as well, we are under attack as never before.

It Is our duty – along with our partner organizations – to make sure that peace, pluralism, and progressive policies are upheld here and in Israel and to realize that, more than ever before, these are all the same struggle.

I hope all those reading this will support PPI with money, your own efforts, and especially on social media, whatever platforms you are on. Please, right now: forward Israel Horizons to friends and family; go to Facebook to like and, especially share IH and other material from PPI; tweet IH, and do anything else you can to spread our message. As Rabbi Tarfon said, ““You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it (Pirke Avot 2:21).” This has never been truer or more necessary.

Paul Scham, PPI President

Israel *Horizons*

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