



Photo: Yair Lapid, Reuven Rivlin, and Naftali Bennett, leaders of Israel's 36th government, in 2021.
Photo by Haim Zach via Wikimedia Commons

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

If The Opposition Wins...

[Paul Scham](#)

Time may be closing in on Bibi Netanyahu. It is very possible that at this time next year there will be a new Israeli prime minister and a completely new government. But what that government may do and how it will deal with the far-flung excesses of the current one seems impossible to decipher. Nevertheless, herewith is an attempt to peer into the next year and regard what may be around the corner for Israel and, by extension, much of the muddled Middle East.

Israeli Elections

No doubt foremost on Bibi's mind is how to influence this year's elections, which must be held by October 27. To the extent he hoped that the current Iran War would win him votes, it's been

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a bust. There was a small bump early in the war, but then a return to the “normal” polling that has prevailed for 6 months or more. To summarize what they indicate: Likud would be the largest party with about 28 seats, but the current coalition would win only about 50-52 seats, not the 61+ it needs to return to power, and certainly not the 64 it won in November 2022. The Opposition’s Jewish (or Zionist) parties would likely win about 55-58, with the remainder going to a renewed Joint List of four predominantly-Arab parties. For a longer version, see [my substack from January](#).

There comes the rub, since most of the Jewish parties - the Labor/Meretz union, “HaDemocratim” being a notable exception - have pledged “No Arabs in government”. If adhered to, this could start a new round of unsuccessful elections with no new government being formed, as happened three times in 2019-2021. The result would be: The status quo is maintained, and Bibi stays as PM, untouchable even if convicted in his corruption cases. Or, the Jewish parties could break their promises, allow [Mansour Abbas’s United Arab List](#) (Ra’am) to join the coalition with a projected 5-6 Knesset seats, and form a potentially stable government. Recall that Abbas’ party was part of the short-lived “Government of Change” (June 2021-December 2022) that briefly replaced Netanyahu.

Then What?

When the previous Government of Change (GoC) took power in June 2021, its eight diverse constituent parties agreed not to deal with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which hamstrung most efforts at fundamental change. But there were a number of areas in which it rolled up modest successes, such as making an attempt to deal with crime and improving infrastructure in Arab communities, repairing ties with the US government, reducing the budget deficit

to zero, lowering prices, and increasing competition. But its Achilles heel was its inability to deal with the conflict; and there is no indication that a government composed of the same people and parties would do any better, even if larger by a few MKs.

The Immediate Neighborhood

The GoC didn’t think of itself as taking office in a peaceful and problem-free era, but, compared to today, that time seems so. Israel is still in its post-October 7 trauma; the new government will immediately authorize a Commission of Inquiry, whose principal job will be to rake over the ashes of October 7, assign blame, and make recommendations. This will proceed while Israel is likely to still be occupying large swathes of Lebanon and attempting the destruction of Hezbollah; occupying half of Gaza with few serious plans as to dealing with two million Gazans and an angry world; and also coping with the aftermath of an ill-conceived war in Iran, one which all the Jewish parties supported to various degrees, but about which none have serious policies prepared, much less a joint approach. And, almost as an afterthought, there is a new government in Syria that Israel seems determined to treat as a likely enemy and a stalking horse for Turkey, with little latitude being given to prove itself to be what most of the world thinks it is: a promising experiment of an ex-Jihadist making a genuine new start for his ruined country.

The Region

Arguably even worse is the regional disarray. In stark contrast to 2021, when it seemed that most in the Arab world were eager to forget the Palestinians and regard Israel as their savior from Iran, Israel is now universally seen as the co-conspirator, along with President Trump, in bringing down a favorable and profitable regional and worldwide order. Israel,

unlike Trump, can be explicitly blamed by Arab leaders, and these leaders will endear themselves to their people for doing so. Israel is regarded, not unjustly, as slightly crazed, still bristling from October 7 and eager to see any minor security issue as a potential *casus belli*. Moreover, a Palestinian state is seen as a *sine qua non* in the Arab world, but a complete nonstarter for Israelis.

United States

A new government may well face a President Trump furious at the defeat of his favorite Israeli. Or not. No one can know. What is certain is that the new Prime Minister will not enjoy the unprecedented access offered to Bibi – nor the opportunity to plan wars together. Moreover, the new government will face an American public, and especially a Democratic Party, which may be unprecedentedly anti-Israel, and most will not be appeased by a change of prime ministers. Israel could well be blamed for any failures of the Iran War, even – or especially – by Trump, who has never been known to accept responsibility or blame for anything.

Domestically

The new government will face an exhausted country, the more so if the current war continues. War expenses and *miluim* (reservist) call-ups have gone through the roof, as have murders in Arab communities. The messianic far-right will not accept its loss of power with good grace – and may redouble its violence in the West Bank following an election loss. Moreover, laws have been changed to facilitate *de facto* annexation, which would be difficult to reverse – even if the new coalition were to decide to do so.

The Rest of the World

Israel will likely have to spend a generation or more bringing itself back to the good graces of much of the world, which can only be compared, perhaps unfairly, to Germany's task after World War II, as distasteful as the comparison is. However, Germany did accomplish it.

In Conclusion

Few of the leaders of a new government have apparently thought about many of these issues, with which they'll be immediately confronted. One can surmise that their answers will be very different, even opposite to those of their government colleagues from the very disparate parties comprising any new coalition.

Perhaps, deterred by the enormity of the challenges ahead, they'll duck a new government and turn the country back to Bibi?

Personally, I very much hope not.

Paul

Paul

Author's note: *Despite the pessimism of this article, I think the first task of any "change" agenda must have as a first priority bringing down the Bibi-apparatus that has pushed Israel into unimagined excesses in recent years. The change is essential, even if it doesn't immediately conform to our own priorities. I refuse to give up on or walk away from Israel - and the first step must be removing Bibi and his cohort from the government.*

Paul Scham is president of [Partners for Progressive Israel](#). He recently retired as a Professor of Israel Studies at the University of Maryland.



For Such A Time As This: J Street Convention 2026 Amidst Escalating War and Waning Democracy

INSIGHTS 1

By Rabbi Ariel Naveh



Partners Executive Director Rabbi Margo Hughes-Robinson moderates a panel featuring Evan Wolfson of Freedom to Marry, Shifra Sered of JFREJ, Prof. Shaul Magid, and Nancy K. Kaufman of New York Jewish Agenda, at the J Street 2026 Convention. Photo by Gili Getz

The holiday of Purim is a strange one. While broadly it adheres to the colloquial heuristic of Jewish holidays - “they tried to kill us, we won, let’s eat” - the holiday’s celebratory joy stands in contrast with the near-obsessive final verses of the Megillah, focused on the downfall not only of Haman but of his entire lineage. No doubt it’s always been one of my favorite holidays to celebrate, but the question must be raised: when does conquest over an imminent threat to your livelihood and your people turn into outright bloodlust? At what point is vengeance sanctioned, and what happens when it is driven to excess?

I had the opportunity to grapple with these big questions at this year’s February 28-March 2 J Street

Convention. Just the evening before the Convention was to start, President Trump, in concert with Bibi Netanyahu, launched an all-out military assault on Iran. They claimed, with little evidence, that an attack on Israel was imminent and it was in the interest of Americans and Israelis alike to annihilate the country and its leadership.

The Convention’s theme of “Regional Peace and Resilient Democracy” took on even greater meaning, and became even more fraught as the first thing one saw on the Convention app was J Street’s full-throated [statement](#) opposing the war in Iran. Partners for Progressive Israel released its [statement](#) soon thereafter. J Street’s statement called the war “reckless,” and condemned the Trump and

Netanyahu administrations for forgoing numerous attempts at diplomatic strategies and resolutions, including abandoning the JCPOA, the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, signed by Iran, the European Union, and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. Sadly, three weeks into this needless war, we are witnessing exactly how reckless this war has become, with Iranian families fleeing constant bombardment, Israelis attempting to recreate normalcy in bomb shelters, and Palestinians facing even further elevated levels of state-sanctioned violence by settlers.

Yet I knew that representing Partners for Progressive Israel at our table in the exhibition hall, engaging in so many holy conversations with so many participants about our work and our mission, while listening to their own stories about and struggles with Israel and Palestine, was all the more necessary because of this war, and the damage it would inflict throughout the entire region. This was also the first opportunity we had to hand out palm cards with a QR code that links to Partners' recent publication, "[Discussing Genocide: A Guide for Reflection and Discernment](#)." This was - perhaps counterintuitively - probably the best conversation starter I've ever had in all my years of tabling. It was clear that people really do want to talk about genocide, whether they agree with the usage of the term in this particular context or not. But more importantly, people - rabbis, educators, lay leaders - want the opportunity to ask the big questions they are struggling with right now about what it means to be a Jew who has a relationship of any kind with Israel and Palestine.

As we have seen, the war in Iran has only given further cover for the heinous actions the Israeli government has taken against Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and now in Lebanon as well. Speaking on these issues as a rabbi, lay leader, or educator can

be challenging, especially as antisemitic rhetoric attempting to conflate these actions with the entirety of the Jewish people is on the rise. The fact that these conversations came with a discussion guide *and* free chocolate meant that the PPI table was buzzing throughout the Convention.

That, to me, is what made the Convention space feel so vital. To listen to, engage with, and be in relationship with so many of the smartest and most empathetic leaders in our community and beyond meant that we were equipped with frameworks for these difficult questions about how we advocate for democracy here and in Israel/Palestine, especially when we are witnessing its calculated demolition in real time.

The message we heard from so many at the Convention about maintaining democracy was to keep being in relationship with each other. Over and over, through plenary discussions like the [incredible conversation](#) between Rabbi/Ambassador David Saperstein, Maya Wiley, Amy Spitalnick, and Reverend Malcolm Byrd, we were reminded how our struggles for democracy and safety in the Jewish community have for generations been bound up in the safety of the Black diaspora here in America. Leaders from Standing Together and New Israel Fund, and activists like Maoz Inon and Aziz Abu Sarah, showed us that the only way forward for Israelis and Palestinians is together. While these sentiments were echoed by Israeli politicians like Yair Golan and Ehud Olmert, it's very clear that real change will continue to come from the ground up. Standing Together in particular has been at the vanguard of mobilizing, educating, and training Israelis and Palestinians on a supremely local, grassroots level, often surpassing the efforts of the opposition leaders. That they have managed to gain municipal electoral success is a significant testament to this hyperlocal work.

Everyone present at the Convention understood that a democracy can only function when the people living within it see themselves as equally responsible for maintaining it, while also reckoning with what happens when the ties that bind us fray. We must ensure that the last verses of the story of Purim are used as a bulwark, a warning about the dangers of weaponizing our own victory over persecution, and not as a call for overwhelming violence towards future generations of our enemies, real or imagined.

One of the real highlights of the Convention was watching “Coexistence My Ass!”, comedian and activist Noam Schuster-Eliasi’s hilarious and deeply moving documentary, which grapples with exactly those questions. Noam was raised on an Israeli kibbutz devoted entirely to coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians, and she describes her struggles with how the values she was taught stand up to the trauma of October 7th, and the continued onslaught of terror and pain that Palestinians have faced since. There are no easy answers from this film, and at times, Noam looks on the verge of despair, as she navigates her relationships with Israeli and Palestinian friends and family. She is also very, very funny, and is able to show how mordant humor is necessary in advocating for real structural change. And while Noam was unable to join us in person as she just had her very first child, the film’s distributor, Libby Lenkinski, and one of Noam’s friends and fellow comedians, Yossi Zabari, described how necessary and how revolutionary art is in standing up against fascist governments.

It was a strange and surreal coincidence that this war in Iran happened upon the holiday of Purim. Unfortunately, this coincidental timing has been used by many both to justify the war, and to dehumanize the Iranian people by linking them to the Biblical Amalek, the perpetual enemy of the

Jewish people. This is an intentionally despicable misinterpretation of the text and its themes. In the Megillah, Mordecai tells Esther that perhaps for such a time as this she was put into a position to influence the men in power against the destruction of the Jews of Persia. But, unlike the Purim story, this war was in no way inevitable, and the people who are caught in its crosshairs are not our enemy. I see Mordecai’s words, rather, as a call to action, telling us that, especially in times as fraught and troubling as now, we have a responsibility to speak truth to power. The J Street Convention reminded us that none of us are exempt from keeping democracy afloat here and in Israel/Palestine.

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By Raluca Ganea



Zazim at antiwar protest in Israel_ 4-24-25. Photo by Oren Ziv

In the first days of Israel's war with Iran, a missile hit the Tel Aviv building where Zazim's small office is located. The office was completely destroyed. Since then, we have been working from home — meeting online every morning, and, in between rushes to bomb shelters, searching for new ways to turn despair into action.

One of our first initiatives was a webinar bringing together Israelis and Iranian diaspora members — to show that the two peoples are not born enemies, to refuse the logic of war, and to rehumanize. We also

joined a coalition of organizations calling to end Israel's "forever war" and reach an immediate ceasefire.

Zazim is the largest political campaigning community in Israel, promoting active civic engagement in issues across the progressive spectrum: from peace and democracy to gender rights and the environment. Recent years have taught us that, even at times of national emergency, our work mustn't stop.

The morning of September 11, 2023, offers a glimpse into where we come from. That day, our members stood



Say Yes to a Palestinian State - Zazim sign (and members) at 30th anniversary of Rabin assassination rally_ 11-1-25. Photo by Oren Ziv

at the forefront of a massive protest outside the Supreme Court, joining tens of thousands gathered to stop the “judicial overhaul” (the Netanyahu government’s effort to expand political control over courts and limit their ability to check executive power). An incredible 175,000 people—nearly two percent of Israel’s entire population—had signed Zazim’s petition in support of the court, calling for the reversal of legislation that threatened to strip away its powers.

It was a day that felt like the ultimate expression of civic energy. But just one year later, the world had changed completely. We found ourselves navigating a much darker, fractured landscape. Against the backdrop of the October 7th trauma and then a war of annihilation in Gaza, we initiated campaigns that challenged even our own community. Zazim members spoke out against the policy of starvation, demanded accountability for war crimes, fought settler violence, and helped sustain the ongoing protest to end the war and secure a hostage deal.

This work represented the core of Zazim’s identity: a movement built around mobilizing the masses while simultaneously leading and challenging the Israeli political discourse.

Zazim (“moving” in Hebrew) is not your typical social change NGO. While traditional organizations often rely on the specialized work of a small professional staff, Zazim, at its heart, is a mobilization operation. Our strength lies in being an inclusive home for anyone—not just “professional activists”—who want to reclaim their agency during times of crisis. Our unique value lies in our ability to turn the passive concern of individuals into active, collective power. We do this by blending advanced digital campaigning with traditional “boots-on-the-ground” activism.

Our community now exceeds 400,000 members, Jews and Arabs, and some supporters from abroad. They sign petitions, write to elected officials, take to the streets, and fund our work. Because 90 percent of our



NYC - Truck calling for recognition of Palestinian statehood_ ahead of 2025 UN General Assembly

budget comes from micro-donations, a campaign only takes off if enough members are willing to chip in. This simple fact alone makes our agenda a direct reflection of our members' will.

Zazim's model is inspired by MoveOn.org, and we are part of an international network of similar movements, called NODE, the Network of Democratic Entities. The battle against right-wing populism is global; we often find ourselves facing the same authoritarian tendencies as our counterparts in Serbia or Hungary, while our friends in Germany look to our experience in fighting the rise of openly racist parties.

The past year alone can demonstrate the scope of our work. As 2025 brought some of the darkest moments of the Gaza war, we hung posters across Israel protesting the government's policy of starvation and distributed half a million leaflets urging reservists to refuse war crimes and disobey illegal orders. When diplomacy finally took center stage, we supported the international initiative to recognize a Palestinian State. Our members

funded a massive billboard in support of the initiative on a central Tel Aviv highway, and we hand-delivered 10,000 signatures to French President Macron during the UN General Assembly last fall. If you were in New York City, you might have even seen our mobile billboards calling for peace and recognition.

It was later reported that this Saudi-French-led initiative played a role in nudging the Trump administration to unveil its own peace plan, fearing that international forces would otherwise take the lead. Grassroots Israeli support is crucial for legitimizing such efforts, and we take pride in doing our share to bring about a lasting ceasefire. Still, this was only a first step, and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza remains dire. As I write these words, millions are freezing in tents; so, our latest petition is demanding a humanitarian corridor to allow those in Gaza seeking urgent medical treatment to receive it abroad.

Zazim is also a leading member of [“It's Time”](#), a coalition of over 60 peacebuilding and shared society organizations, working together to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a political agreement that will ensure both peoples' right to self-determination and secure lives.

There are other urgent fronts, too. Each month, a busload of Zazim members travels to the West Bank to support Palestinian farmers facing IDF restrictions and settler violence. Early this year, we planted 200 olive saplings in Nahalin, the West Bank. Beyond supporting communities on the ground, such activities expose more Israelis to the reality of the occupation, often turning first-time volunteers into lifelong activists.

The fight for Israeli democracy remains our bedrock. Following President Trump's interference in the Israeli legal system—demanding a pardon for the currently-on-trial Prime Minister Netanyahu, and even threatening retribution—we collected 20,000 formal objections, which we submitted to the Israeli

President's Office in Jerusalem. Under Israeli law, President Herzog must consider these statements by Israeli citizens before making a decision on pardoning the prime minister. Meanwhile, our most successful petition this year called for a State Commission of Inquiry into the events of October 7th, joining the families of victims and hostages in demanding real accountability.

Netanyahu's government is also engaged in a systematic pushback against women's rights, and in suppressing the political rights of Palestinian citizens. We recently launched a campaign against legislation that would allow gender segregation in academia and public spaces, such as libraries—a move that threatened to unravel decades of progress toward equality. (The public outcry led the government to scale down some of the most outrageous aspects of the new law.) Additionally, we are supporting Israel's Attorney General, Gali Baharav-Miara, in demanding Itamar Ben-Gvir, Minister of National Security, be fired from the government immediately for abusing the powers of his post.

Amidst the heavy news cycle of 2025, there were also real moments of joy. We saw heartwarming successes against inhumane anti-immigration efforts: A petition for 15-year-old Louie, born to Filipino migrant workers in Israel, succeeded in reversing her deportation and granting her permanent residency. Even more incredible was our campaign for the African Hebrew Israelites. After decades of living in Israel, this community faced the threat of immediate expulsion. Zazim members supported the Israelites in public rallies, signed petitions for their cause, and even financed legal proceedings. Just recently we learned that the collective mobilization won the Hebrew Israelites the right to stay.

The coming year will demand even more from us. With the Israeli elections approaching, we anticipate a political

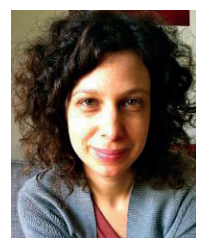
climate unlike anything we have ever experienced. Prime Minister Netanyahu's fight for political survival, compounded by his ongoing trial and the hard-right's tightening grip on law enforcement under Minister Ben-Gvir, sets the stage for a high-stakes battle over the very soul of our country. We are anticipating government efforts to disqualify Palestinian-Israeli candidates and systemic attempts at voter suppression. Already we are strategizing on the most effective ways to push back, for example through physical presence at polling stations, or by pressuring the Jewish opposition to stand by the Palestinian-led parties.

Yet we are under no illusions: our work won't end even if the current government falls. In a post-Netanyahu era, the voices of progressives in Israel must be louder than ever to ensure that a change in leadership translates into a change in reality. We will continue to stand with disenfranchised communities, combat the deep-seated authoritarian tendencies that have taken root, and remain the most consistent advocates for peace and an immediate end to the Occupation.

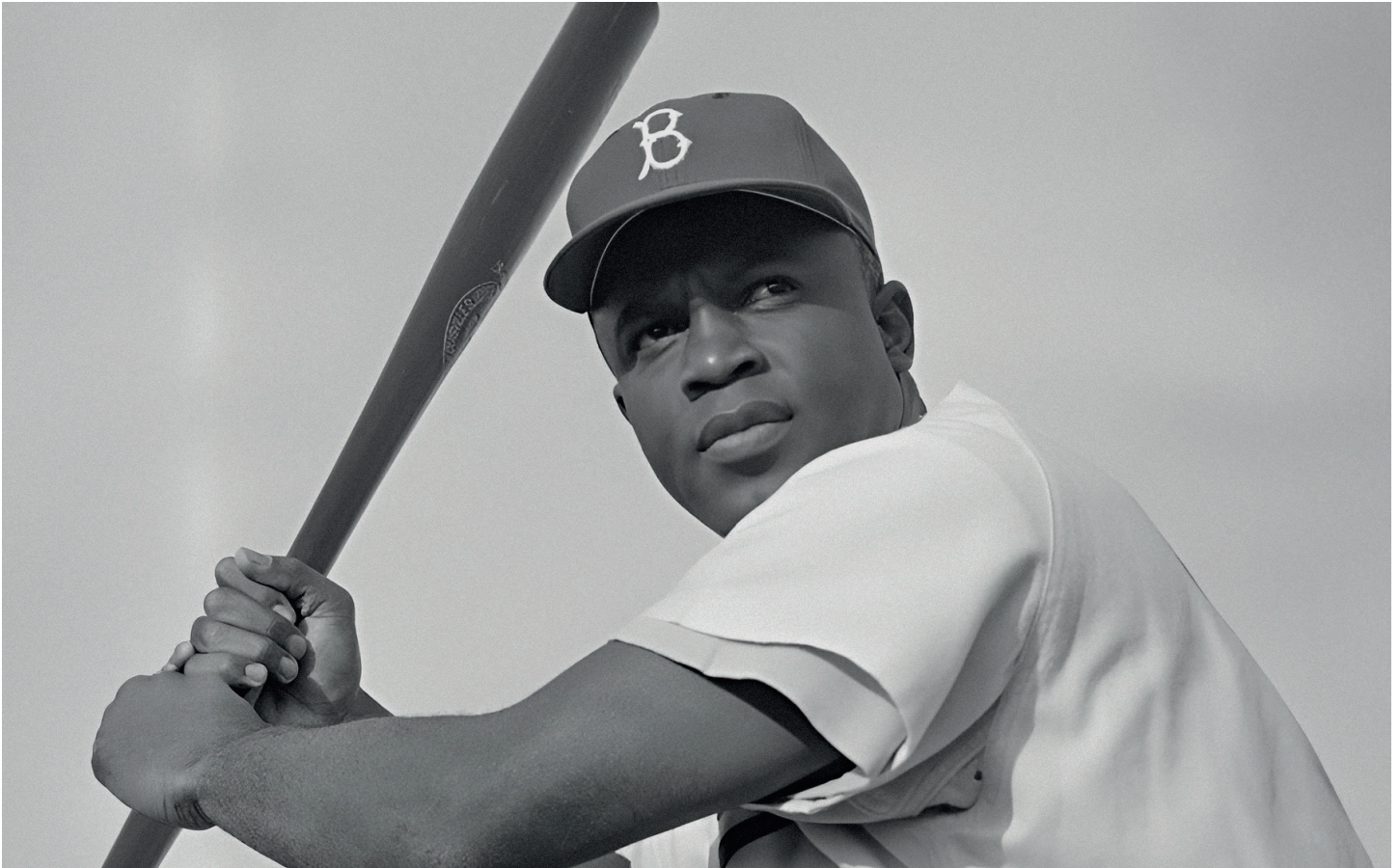
We will soon reopen our office. Despite the headwinds we are facing, we feel incredibly lucky to have the opportunity to do this work. When the news cycle feels designed to paralyze us with despair, at Zazim we reach out to our community, organize, and do something about it.

To learn more about Zazim, please follow us on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#), or visit our [website](#), where you can also support any of the campaigns mentioned in this piece.

*Raluca Ganea is the
co-founder and executive
director of Zazim*



By Peter Eisenstadt



Jackie Robinson, 1954. Photo by Bob Sandburg, now public domain via Wikimedia Commons

I was recently chatting, via email, with Hillel Schenker, longtime Israeli peace activist and longtime friend of Partners for Progressive Israel. The conversation came around, as they often do for me nowadays, to the topic of Jackie Robinson. Hillel told me that he was once interviewed and asked who was his inspiration for his decades of work on Israel-Palestine peace efforts. A Jewish peace activist perhaps, like Martin Buber or Judah Magnes? No. Growing up in Brooklyn in the 1950s, his childhood role model and inspiration for a life dedicated to Jewish-Palestinian understanding and rapprochement was Jackie Robinson. Hillel was not alone. I have collected other stories of

young men, primarily young Jewish men, growing up in the baseball-mad, half-Jewish borough that was Brooklyn in the early 1950s who cited Jackie Robinson as the inspiration for a life dedicated to the pursuit of social justice.

Why Jackie Robinson? Jackie Robinson was the first African American to play major league baseball in the twentieth century when he joined the Brooklyn Dodgers on April 15, 1947. (And let me point out that exactly one month later on May 15, 1947, in a building in Flushing Meadows Park, in Queens, not far from where the New York Mets have played baseball since 1964, and in the area where

Robert Moses offered to build a stadium for Walter O'Malley, the president of the eager-to-relocate Brooklyn Dodgers, though O'Malley, seeking his fortune elsewhere, spurned Moses's offer, the General Assembly of the United Nations formed the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, i.e. UNSCOP.) Jackie Robinson's career would track the birth and early years of Israel. He played his last major league baseball game on October 10, 1956, about two weeks before Israel invaded the Sinai Peninsula to start the Suez War.

There were many reasons for the specific Jewish identification with Jackie Robinson. (The only film Hillel remembers his grandfather taking him to see, at his insistence, was *The Jackie Robinson Story*, a 1950 potboiler in which the role of Jackie Robinson was played, fairly creditably, by Jackie Robinson.) Jackie Robinson cracked the color line in baseball with a superabundance of athletic talent, along with matchless courage. He was an outspoken advocate for civil rights and other political causes during his years with the Dodgers, and after his retirement until his much-too-early death in 1972.

For Robinson, the fight against racism and the fight against antisemitism were deeply entangled. As early as 1949 he supported Jewish causes, when a "food train" of 80 trucks with a million pounds of foodstuffs intended for Israel motorcaded before City Hall in Manhattan with a reviewing stand that included Robinson and master of ceremonies Ed Sullivan. More substantially, he became a spokesman for the Anti-Defamation League, an organization whose savvy and smarts he much admired. He continued to call out antisemitism, particularly Black antisemitism, his entire life. Besides which, many of Jackie Robinson's most supportive sportswriters and most ardent fans (such as Hillel) were Jewish. And as they say, many of his best friends were Jewish, including many of his most welcoming neighbors. The Robinson family's favorite vacation spot was

Grossinger's, in the heart of the Borscht Belt. Many of his business partners were Jewish, such as the Lithuanian-born William Black, né Schwartz, president of the Chock Full o' Nuts coffee and luncheonette chain, where Robinson was a VP from 1957 to 1964. One of the foundations of his politics was his oft-stated belief that "very frankly the Jew has been our [Black folks'] greatest ally. We go back even before the Negro started pressure in civil rights, and the Jew was there working with their organizations."

The literature on (or exposing the myth of) this supposed golden age of Black-Jewish political harmony is voluminous. To the extent this era existed, Jackie Robinson was perhaps its avatar. He appreciated Jewish power and Jewish economic success, and Jewish organizations always liked his claims that anti-Black racism and antisemitism were deeply entangled. He approached racism and antisemitism as most liberal Jews wished to cast the issue, not as parochial grievances, but as the expression of a universal cause. In 1957 he told a Chicago audience that "in our struggle for civil rights we must not be motivated by color but by our love of God and for freedom. I would resign as head of the campaign [for the Freedom Fund of the NAACP] if I thought the NAACP was fighting for the rights for Negroes alone." He exploded the dilemma of mixed or dual loyalties, maintaining that there was no conflict needing resolution. Black first or American first? He answered in 1964 that "I am a Negro first, because down through the centuries, we have proven that we are the most loyal Americans." Many American Jews felt the same way about their Jewishness, that they were proud to be Jewish precisely because it was uncontaminated by ethnic or religious particularism, and in that way they were the purest Americans, believers in an America where, as King put it at the March on Washington, every person shall be judged not by any extraneous criterion, but "by the content of their character." In early 1960, in a column

about antisemitism in Europe and the specter of the “revival of Hitlerism,” Robinson penned as eloquent a statement of civil rights universalism as one could imagine: “Since every last one of us is a member of some vulnerable minority—whether it be by race, religion, national origin, political party, education, occupation or other differences—none of us is safe once group-hate is unleashed against any other.”

But by the 1960s the Black-Jewish alliance was foundering on the basis of class differences, Jewish shopkeepers and business people in Black neighborhoods, Jewish suburbanization, and Black ghettoization. (Israel, before 1967, was only a minor irritant.) Black people had concluded, to greatly simplify, that the Jewish model for advancement in American society was not working for them. And Jews became afraid that the different paths that Black communities were pursuing would endanger Jewish success. And despite Robinson’s deep support for Jews and Jewish causes, in that great parting of the ways between Black and Jewish organizing that was the New York City Teachers Strike of 1968, Robinson’s sympathies were with the Black decentralizers, not with the largely Jewish teachers’ union. Still, even in its aftermath he continued to support Jewish causes, writing in 1970 that “Blacks should be just like ‘the Jews who support Israel strongly...Whenever any other ethnic group is threatened they protest. That is what Blacks must do.” However, it is true that Robinson really never had much to say or do about Israel and the Middle East. (Unlike his close friend, fellow supporter of integration, fellow athletic star at UCLA [basketball in the 1920s], and fellow and often twinned exemplar of ultra-high African American achievement, Ralph Bunche, but that is another story.)

However, the question remains. Could or should Jackie Robinson inspire peace activists in 2026, the way he inspired Hillel Schenker in the 1950s? I think

his breaking of the color line in major league baseball and his all-around athletic excellence are too far in the past to inspire similar adulation. But his post-Dodgers career as a civil rights advocate just might.

He was always outspoken, never afraid to speak his mind, never afraid to offend. He knew what he wanted: full citizenship for African Americans and all racial minorities and all minorities. But he was unsure about the best way to achieve it. He would work with the powerful, presidents and would-be presidents, and rally and inspire the powerless, and he was someone who knew the necessity, the advantages, and the pitfalls of both. He was always willing to call out Black leaders, including those he usually agreed with. There was no organization he was more associated with than the NAACP, though he regularly criticized it and its head, Roy Wilkins, for their standpattism. In general, as a civil rights activist, he often found the Black liberals too accommodating, too willing to be satisfied with what amounted to superficial changes, and the Black radicals too impractical, too demanding of what he deemed impossible.

He was not perfect. His political judgment was sometimes off. I can understand why he was an anti-Communist in the 1940s and 1950s. He thought that unless white people thought supporting civil rights would help defeat the Soviet Union they wouldn’t be interested, and he was probably correct. And there were of course plenty of legitimate criticisms to be made of the Soviet Union and American Communism. Still, that did not justify his testimony against Paul Robeson before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1949, or his support for Richard Nixon’s presidential bid in 1960, a misstep for which he subsequently repented. But political perfection is neither possible nor desirable. Fight the Mt. Rushmore-ization of our heroes. We do not need to measure ourselves against an impossible-to-meet

standard. We must take our stands on controversial issues amid the fray.

He was combative, but usually generous to his allies in disagreement. He believed in Black unity, but not at any cost or price. He defended the War in Vietnam much longer than he should have. When Martin Luther King Jr in 1967 sharply criticized the war in Vietnam, Robinson thought King was “utterly wrong” but he insisted that King was “still my leader... because I would not want bigots and those who secretly disagree with him to find comfort in my disagreeing with him.” But by the fall of 1968, with King in a freshly dug grave, he sounded more like Black radicals such as Stokely Carmichael than King: “Black people are not afraid to die and there are hundreds of thousands of young Black people who would rather make a last- ditch stand for freedom in the ghettos of their cities than in the jungles of Vietnam.”

He knew what it felt like to become bitterly disillusioned with something he had formerly deeply believed in. Always a patriot, by 1971 he could tell the *New York Times* that he “wouldn’t fly the flag on the Fourth of July or any other day. When I see a car with a flag pasted on it, I figure the guy behind the wheel isn’t my friend.” He hoped that the pendulum would swing back to a better America. I hear you Jackie. And I feel the same way about the American flag. And the Israeli flag, too. And about the desperate hope that the American and Israeli pendulums will once again swing in our direction.

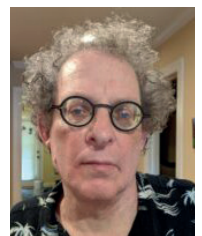
Whatever else he was or was not, Jackie Robinson was definitely a philosemite. There has been a lot of talk recently about defining antisemitism. But philosemitism is probably even more difficult to define. If antisemitism is on the rise, philosemitism definitely is not. Jews are a tough people to love these days. But if, as Jews, we must love the Jews, let us love our fellow Jews in the way Jackie

Robinson loved his fellow African Americans, with a scorching, lacerating love, while seeking the largest possible community of support for what we believe in. I have never cared for the phrase, “two Jews, three opinions,” since Jews are as susceptible to group-think as any other people, and when it comes to Israel, until recently, the attitude of American Jews has often been “three Jews, one opinion,” with anything beyond the mildest criticism of Israel likely to get one exiled to the Pale of Forbidden Sentiments. I love the way many too-long suppressed Jewish voices are now loudly being heard, and that many American Jews are undergoing long overdue agonizing reappraisals of their former unswerving support for Israel.

What will happen next in Israel and Palestine ? Only God knows. As often is the case, practical ways forward seem insufficient and unlikely to solve the underlying problems, while directly addressing those underlying problems seems impossibly utopian and quixotic. And as we go forward, those of us on the Jewish left will err, make mistakes, miscalculate, be too suspicious or too gullible.

If Jackie Robinson was around today, what advice would he give American Jews? Keep your eyes on the prize. Ally yourself with people who broadly share your goals, knowing that there are many potential paths to get there. Be outspoken. And he might say that the lesson of Black history is that to love your own people, to be really true to them, you have to be willing, sometimes, to loathe them as well.

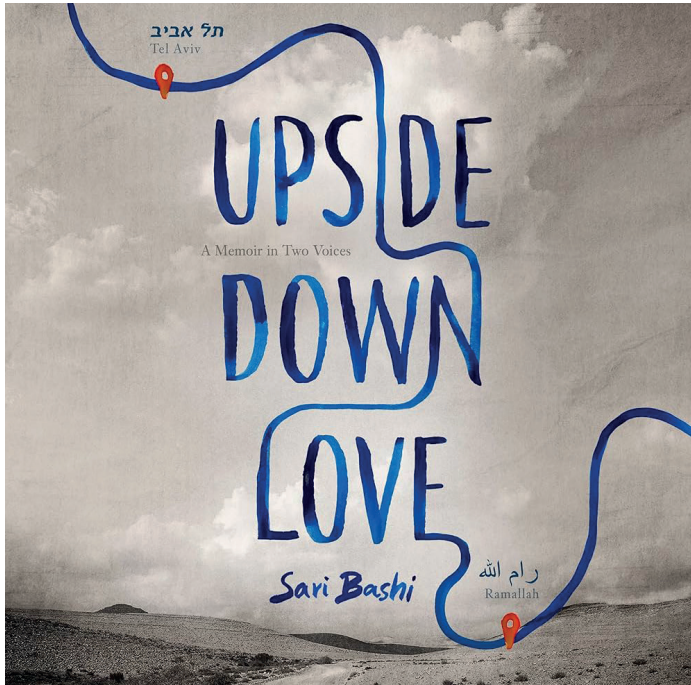
*Peter Eisenstadt is the author and editor of many books, most recently, *Integration at Second Base: Jackie Robinson and the Quest for Black Citizenship*, just published by University of Virginia Press. He serves on the board of Partners for Progressive Israel*



Sari Bashi, *Upside-Down Love: A Memoir in Two Voices*. (Blackstone, 2026)

BOOK REVIEW

By Margo Hughes-Robinson



“Could you write me a sign in Arabic that says, ‘My name is Sari Bashi, and I’m an Israeli-American Jewish woman in love with a Palestinian man named Osama Fahed. The two of us are just people, and I would be grateful if you could please respect that.’”

This line comes near the end of “Upside-Down Love: A Memoir in Two Voices,” recently published in English translation by Sari Bashi and her husband Osama Fahed (a pseudonym), but it serves as a wonderful introduction to the relationship at the center of the book. Alternating chapters written by Bashi and Fahed over the course of their relationship track the evolution of their unlikely connection: first as lawyer and client, then as friends, lovers, and eventually building a family together.

Bashi founded Gisha, an Israeli non-profit dedicated to protecting the freedom of movement of Palestinians, and initially met Gaza-born Fahed when he was living and working in the West Bank. He was attempting to travel to London to pursue his doctoral studies when he connected with Gisha to legally represent him in his case. Four years later, the two met again in Ramallah and began to fall in love, subsequently drafting early chapters of the book that would be published ten years later in Hebrew, in 2020 (originally titled “*Maqluba*,” a nod to the overturned pan in the traditional Palestinian dish).

In many ways, their relationship is like that of so many other couples around the world: Sari and Osama meet, experience attraction, decide to pursue a relationship. They navigate their work commitments, their hobbies, go on vacation together, consider getting to know each other’s families. They break up and reunite, sharpen their mutual understanding, make space for each other and move in together, and exchange doubt and determination about whether to have children. What is unique is not their trajectory, but the circumstances under which it evolves.

Perhaps Bashi and Fahed’s strongest suit as a literary couple is their sense of ironic contrast, which is woven throughout the book. Bashi is a competitive long-distance runner, and especially after she moves in with Fahed in the West Bank, her on-foot travels through different areas of Palestinian civil and Israeli military administration provide a kind of punctuation to her growing intimacy with her partner. As she runs and alternately processes the relationship’s ups and downs (or immerses herself in running so completely as to momentarily ignore them) she encounters – or rather,

is encountered by Palestinian villagers and city-dwellers, Jewish settlers, and Israeli soldiers, all of whom alternately call out the irregularity of encountering her on roads between checkpoints and unmarked towns, or who see whoever is most convenient for them. Depending on the interaction, Bashi is observed as a Jewish Tel Avivian, a Palestinian, a secular settlement-dweller, or an American tourist. Fahed, by contrast, is *always* Palestinian— and often not able to accompany his partner as she transgresses boundaries both cartographically and socially.

Often, the two authors deftly weave together the moments where their personal life, Sari's professional work, and Osama's legal status overlap acutely. It is these flashpoints where the impact of the Occupation feels sharpest: no longer the background against which they fall in love, but almost a third party in their relationship. When Sari and Osama decide to move in together, Sari reviews all of the Israeli laws that impact their lives: the 1954 legal decisions that keep Osama's mother in Gaza, despite the fact that she was born in a Palestinian village near what is today Ashkelon in Israel; the 1967 law that kept Osama's father in Egypt, apart from his family in the Jabaliya refugee camp in Gaza; the host of post-Oslo statutes that forbid Osama to live in Tel Aviv with Sari, and Sari to move to Ramallah with Osama.

Years later, when their daughter Forat is born in an Israeli hospital and requires a NICU stay, a Jewish family friend registers as Forat's father in order to visit a convalescing Sari and Forat, and Osama must wait a month until his partner and daughter can come home. Poignantly, this is not the first time Osama has experienced this kind of delay: his ex-wife and his teenage son are also Israeli citizens (although as Palestinians, they could move to Ramallah legally), and Osama could not be present at his birth, either.

As Bashi and Fahed narrate the building of their Jewish-Muslim-Israeli-Palestinian family in the West Bank, they also turn their narrative gaze back to their

own family histories, encouraging the reader to reckon with the historical instability of their identities. Less than a century before they met, both the Bashi and Fahed families were subjects of the Ottoman Empire, in Iraq and in Palestine. Both families spoke Arabic, albeit in different dialects. Bashi and Fahed explore how the legal designations and papers that complicate their family's existence in the present are recent inventions, not immutable categories of existence and identity in the ways the Occupation attempts to concretize. Bashi notes the tensions present at her family's own mixed Ashkenazi and Iraqi gatherings with new eyes, seeing her family through Osama's label of "Arab Jews;" while Osama observes his own family's increasing religiosity and social conservatism in Gaza (alongside, he notes, a growing penchant for lewd humor as a distraction throughout the enclave as conditions degrade).

While *Maqluba* was published in Hebrew in 2020, this English edition arrives two years after the devastating Hamas terror attacks of October 7th, 2023, and the subsequent Israeli war of retaliation and destruction – even annihilation – in Gaza. The book is dedicated in part "to the beloved people of Gaza, with hope and apology," and the new English language epilogue ends with an emotional insistence that, "there are good, loving people here [in Israel-Palestine] who are working for a better future." Throughout the war, Bashi has published op-eds in the *New York Times* about her Gazan mother-in-law's [forced displacement](#), and how it informs her own thinking about the Palestinian right of return. Ahead of the publication of "Upside-Down Love," she retold the story of her relationship with Osama [in another Times piece](#), sharing how their now-family of four had navigated the destruction of Gaza, fearful for their relatives.

In [my own conversation with Bashi](#) last February, I drew a connection between her partner's practice of wearing a ribbon on his lapel that counts the days since the war in Gaza began, and the practice of many

Israeli hostage family members and their supporters of wearing a piece of tape on their shirts with the same count, innovated by Rachel Goldberg-Polin. Under very different circumstances, but at the same time, I had realized, these practices were an outward manifestation of fear and hope for one's beloved family members, trapped in the enclave. "I'm so glad that you see them as similar," Bashi replied, "[empathy and love cannot be selective](#)".

It's tempting to read "Upside Down Love," through a kind of "love conquers all" lens, but to do so would be a disservice to the lived reality of its authors and to

the very necessary work that they do professionally. Instead, to quote Bashi's [op-ed](#) last summer, we have to acknowledge, "Love isn't enough to protect us — or anyone — but we plan to use it as a shield for as long as we can."

Rabbi Margo Hughes-Robinson is the Executive Director of Partners for Progressive Israel.



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Ralph Bunche, the UN's Forgotten Champion

By Joseph Hillyard



Ralph Bunche at the 1963 Civil Rights March on Washington . Photo: public domain via Wikimedia Commons

In January of this year, the United Nations celebrated a [major milestone](#): Eighty years earlier, in Blitz-scarred London, representatives of 51 nations had gathered for the first ever United Nations General Assembly to discuss plans for the postwar world. Advocates hoped that the UNGA could be a forum for diplomacy between nations, and prevent future conflict. The United States was an active participant in the gathering, with former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, a member of the US delegation, [addressing](#) the assembly and appealing for gender equality.

Over the eight decades since, the UN has expanded

in both membership and mandates - yet the future of the organization's role in international affairs seems more unclear than ever. The inability of the UN to diplomatically resolve conflicts in Ukraine, Israel-Palestine, Haiti, Sudan, and now Iran has increased skepticism of the organization's efficacy. And the US under Donald Trump has embraced a transactional approach to foreign policy, eschewing international law and institutions, and possibly even angling to [replace](#) the UN entirely with a "Board of Peace". These mounting crises have led human rights advocates to fear a "[new age of impunity](#)", in which political and military leaders are no longer held accountable for the atrocities they commit.

But while the UN, since its inception, has become a household name, the individuals who have contributed to the institution are lesser known.

Kal Raustiala, director of the Ronald W. Burkle Center for International Relations at UCLA, aims to correct this oversight with his biography of UN diplomat and civil rights activist, Ralph Bunche. Bunche, the first Black man to win the Nobel Peace Prize for negotiating the end of the first Arab-Israeli war, has long been treated as a historical footnote. Published in 2022 by Oxford University Press, *The Absolutely Indispensable Man: Ralph Bunche, the United Nations, and the Fight to End Empire* rectifies this, tracing the life of the man and of the organization he helped shape.

Born at the start of the Great Migration, Bunche would grow up amidst a time of significant transition for African Americans, as many left the Jim Crow South for economic opportunities in Northern cities. Born in Detroit, he would primarily grow up in Los Angeles, raised by his maternal grandmother, Lucy Taylor

Johnson, after his mother died; his father had deserted the family years earlier. Bunche would [credit](#) his grandmother with encouraging his academic pursuits and instilling him with a strong sense of racial pride.

Recognized for his academic prowess at a young age, Bunche would graduate valedictorian of his high school and at UCLA. He would later become the first African American to get a PhD in political science from Harvard. He received his masters from Howard University, where he taught for many years. Through his education, Bunche would become drawn to international affairs, emerging as a major scholar on colonialism.

In his 1934 dissertation, "French Administration in Togoland and Dahomey," Bunche criticized the Mandate system of the League of Nations as indistinguishable from formal colonial rule. He would get to develop his ideas further during the Second World War, when his knowledge of African and colonial affairs was sought out by the federal government. In the later stages of the war, he would find himself working alongside Eleanor Roosevelt, who became a lifelong friend and ally, developing plans for what would become the United Nations. Raustiala notes that Bunche pushed for Black civil rights groups to take an active role in the UN, drawing connections between the struggle against Jim Crow and the struggle against empire.

To replace the Mandate system, Bunche developed the idea of UN trusteeship, which aimed to promote self-determination and weaken the hold of colonial powers. It was this role that would bring him to the Middle East, where the UN-backed partition of the British Mandate for Palestine had resulted in the first Arab-Israeli war.

Bunche was not supposed to be the UN's chief mediator in the Middle East. Sweden's Count Folke Bernadotte was appointed to that role. Bunche served as his chief aide and supported Bernadotte in his tense negotiations with Israeli and Arab leaders. When Bernadotte was assassinated by the Jewish terrorist

group, Lehi (led by future prime minister Yitzhak Shamir), which opposed the negotiations, Bunche was immediately appointed in his stead.

Bunche regarded these negotiations as among the hardest of his diplomatic career, and many of his observations about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would prove prophetic. While he would be chastised by Arab leaders as too close to the Jewish community during negotiations, Bunche was vocal about the plight of Palestinian refugees and later supported the 1949 creation of UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Although his longtime professional foe, W.E.B. DuBois - a passionate supporter of Israel's establishment - publicly suggested that he was antisemitic, Bunche in practice was outspoken against antisemitism throughout his life and never disputed the right of Jews to a homeland after the horrors of the Holocaust.

Bunche believed that a solution to the Palestinian refugee question and granting self-determination to both Jews and Palestinians were necessary to achieve a lasting peace. For the rest of his life, he would not shrink from criticizing all parties for actions that undermined this vision. Despite the criticisms, when the armistice was reached in 1949 there was almost unanimous praise for his efforts, on account of which Bunche would become the first Black person to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace.

This achievement would grant Bunche a rare status within a segregated society. In the 1950s, he would be held up as a symbol of Black patriotism and success despite the indignities of Jim Crow. Like his friend and contemporary Jackie Robinson, this would later make Bunche seem out of touch to sixties radicals, who eschewed respectability politics. Yet he would also embrace the new generation, joining Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at the March on Washington and in Selma.

In 1957, Bunche would be appointed United Nations

Under-Secretary for Special Political Affairs and would oversee UN peacekeeping missions in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Conscious of the UN being a relatively new institution, he would work to build up credibility and emphasized partnership with member states. In this role, Bunche would put his longtime advocacy for decolonialism into action, navigating often fraught political dynamics. The Congo crisis, where the UN struggled to mediate between the warring factions, would be an especially harrowing episode for the aging diplomat.

Decolonization would also heighten tensions between the UN General Assembly and the Security Council, dominated, as it was and is, by former colonial powers. Despite this, Bunche would remain a firm believer in the UN and ending colonialism, rebuking critics like Richard Nixon, who had accused the organization of anti-American sentiment due to growing opposition to the war in Vietnam. Mounting health problems would force Bunche to step back from the UN, and he would pass away on December 9, 1971, from complications related to heart disease and diabetes.

The strength of Raustiala's biography lies not just in its ability to rehabilitate Bunche after years of neglect, but in capturing the world he occupied. He came of age during Jim Crow and empire, joining an institution that represented a potential path to democratization. The book imparts the reader with warnings about the risk of now returning to an age of impunity. As Bunche's colleague, UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, said in 1954: "The United Nations was not created in order to bring us to heaven, but in order to save us from hell." Eight decades after its founding, that mission remains more essential than ever.

Joseph Hillyard is a Dramatic Writing Major and History Minor studying at NYU (2026). He is currently serving as VP for the Mid-Atlantic on the national board of J Street U, and was proud to be a member of the Hatikvah Slate for the 2025 World Zionist Congress Elections.



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