



ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of
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modicum of modesty and responsibility. In the complicated reality in which we live, there is no room for amateurs. Empty slogans and nods to the rest of the world cannot serve as a substitute for vision and a defined path. Gantz has zero diplomatic experience, no experience in

Commentary...

Coming Full Circle in Hebron By Ariel Kahana

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu first alluded to his plans to put an end to the Temporary International Presence in Hebron upon returning from an official visit to Chad two weeks ago. Asked about TIPH, he noted, "I have to be proactive in order to renew the mandate. I'm usually a proactive person, but I can't promise to be proactive on this issue."

According to the agreement between Israel and the observer countries, Israel's foreign minister must renew the civilian observer mission's mandate to operate in Hebron every six months. And Israel has done just that for years on end, because, as so often happens in governmental systems, a subject that should have been up for discussion quickly becomes the default. And old habits are hard to break.

But what was once automatic can eventually shift into neutral. This is precisely what happened when Netanyahu, who in 1996 signed off on the agreement and has since repeatedly renewed the missions' mandate, ordered the observers out.

There will be those who will say the decision was only made because of the upcoming elections. But anyone familiar with the deliberations inside the Israeli political system, the dozens of requests to put an end to TIPH's activity from across the Right and Netanyahu's deep emotional commitment toward the Jewish residents of Hebron – in particular because he was the one to sign off on the agreement at the time – anyone familiar with all of this, knows this about more than just the upcoming elections.

The decision to send the observers home will obviously result in some tensions with their countries of origin, but that is nothing worth losing any sleep over.

TIPH was mainly a means for employing former members of the military and political activists from Europe, who found themselves high-paying jobs financed by taxpayers back home. At a time when no country can claim a government budget surplus, it is safe to say no one will be sad to see them sent home. (Israel Hayom Jan 29)

More Empty Slogans By Haim Shine

In truth, I wasn't disappointed by Benny Gantz's debut speech, because I expected nothing of it. It was clear we'd be hearing empty slogans without any real ideological message, and that Gantz would join the delusional left-wing crowd that is dancing around the "Anyone but Netanyahu" bonfire of hatred.

Gantz had the gall to try a clear tactic of incitement by attempting to portray Netanyahu as part of a ruling family. Gantz knows how to say that Israel is wonderful, strong, and stalwart, but to satisfy the center-left, he cannot admit that to a large extent, the person responsible for these achievements is Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The Israel Resilience party (a temporary name, until it turns out that it isn't resilient) declared that Israel was facing challenges that "only leaders 1.95 meters [6'4"] tall can handle." Who will wipe the mud out of the eyes of Theodor Herzl, David Ben-Gurion, and Menachem Begin, all of whom were quite short, but managed to lead the Jewish people to great achievements? For a moment I thought that Benny Gantz was competing in a beauty pageant or a professional soccer league. Yes, Israel has major challenges, and there is often an inverse relationship between a candidate's height and his ability to lead. A leader's success is a function of how lofty his vision is and how high he holds his head, not how tall he is in feet and inches.

Democracy is the best system of government that has been found. It allows every person to run for the leadership of the people. Benny Gantz identified a crowd of citizens who want something new, and don't really care what that new thing contains. He founded a party, gave it a name, and already sees himself as someone who is capable and deserving of leading the nation. One might expect a freshman politician to demonstrate a

economics, and the fact that he has reserved three of the top 10 spots on his list for former Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon and his candidates – despite the polls predicting that Ya'alon won't win a single seat – shows that he also has no basic political skills. Based on what I've read these past few days, I'm also doubtful about his military-strategic abilities.

John Stuart Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville, two of the greatest advocates of liberal democracy in the 19th century, were worried about its populist foundations, or in other words – that the street would be in control. Democracy can provide fertile ground for tricksters, jugglers, and illusionists. They are easy to market to the masses, but when the truth becomes clear, the smashed illusions come at an unbearably high price. In his speech, Gantz threw out baseless delusions, hoping there are enough citizens who will be willing to follow his piping off a cliff.

Someone who wants to be elected and lead owes it to the public to roll out a practical, responsible, wise stance, one that must rest on two things: clear and stable principles, and responsible assessments of the facts as they stand. Gantz tried to wrap up the Left and the Right in a magic package of moderation. That is how he is presenting a challenge to Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid and Labor leader Avi Gabbay. The right-wing public won't fall for it. (Israel Hayom Jan 30)

The Lost Art of Palestinian 'Protection' By Reuven Berko

An analysis of the Palestinian arena points to a terminal split and dead end. The Palestinian Authority has chosen now, of all times, to reject American aid money, while Hamas openly scoffed at Qatar's humanitarian aid yet immediately accepted it through the back door.

Throughout history, the PLO's terrorist tentacles – and the Palestinian "sumud" (steadfastness) at its core – have been funded by Arab countries and the West, in a lethal brew of fearmongering and anti-Semitism. Many of the countries were essentially paying "protection money," either willingly or through blackmail, to help resolve the "Palestinian problem" and out of concern that the PLO would do them harm. Other countries used the organization as an "attack dog," a proxy to pursue their interests.

At the same time, Palestinian terror was used against us as a "bonus" to leverage the PLO's main existence as a corrupt, parasitic and profitable economic entity (similar to the U.N. Relief and Works Agency). The reality, however, has changed. Now the Western coalition is fighting alongside the Arabs against Islamic terror. But everyone remembers that the Palestinian (and their Muslim Brotherhood) architects of terror are in essence the "mentors" for these radical Islamist terrorist groups currently perceived as a global disease.

In the meantime, the Palestinian issue has been marginalized and is threatening to "burn the house down," as the world is focused on the threat posed by Iran and its proxies in Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. As Israel's relations with the Arabs gradually improves, the Palestinians are realizing – helped by American aid cuts to UNRWA's budget – the fictitious narrative of Palestinian refugeehood is dissipating.

While Israel is viewed as a vital component in the regional alliance against terror, the Palestinian Authority is still confined in a straitjacket, drumming on about "refugees" returning to Israel in a flood and that Jerusalem – the reason for Zionism – will become their capital through international pressure.

How, then, can the PA president – who orchestrates this terror, collects the protection money and whose existence depends on donor states – dare to reject American aid money earmarked for the security apparatuses assisted by Israel to keep him in power?

The millionaire Palestinian Authority president's brazen rejection of American money stems from Hamas' accusations that he is an Israeli collaborator (which is true), and from the American demand that the PA expose itself to lawsuits by victims of terror. No crime syndicate would concede to having its extortion money return to its victims. PA President Mahmoud Abbas is struggling to internalize that without this collaboration

with Israel, Hamas would devour his government and the assets he has amassed through corruption, very similar to the situation in Gaza.

In global marketing terms, it isn't easy to sell a false story about an "imaginary country for a divided nation" whose people kill one another. According to the Arab allegory, "the Gazans are in one ditch and the residents of Judea and Samaria are in another." No magic wand can unite the hostile tribes in Gaza and Judea and Samaria. Even their murderous hatred of the Jews isn't enough.

Now Abbas is preparing to hold separatist elections in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem. The Palestinians, it seems, have never earned a shekel that wasn't "protection money." Therefore, in light of the current geopolitical conditions and dwindling "donations," the PA will become a demilitarized Palestinian-Jordanian autonomous enclave in Judea and Samaria.

In Gaza, Hamas' situation is getting worse. The organization is scrounging money through cash-filled suitcases and smuggling from Turkey and Iran, and from its fundraising operatives in Africa and Malaysia; but the people are hungry, crippled and exhausted. Hamas is still pursuing its self-declared goal of exterminating each and every Jew "hiding behind every rock and tree;" but in Gaza the only thing to be found behind the rocks and trees are unemployment, illness, drugs and despair.

Amid the claims and denigrations against Hamas by Palestinian Islamic Jihad that it too has collaborated to sell out the resistance against Israel of some fuel and dollars, Hamas publicly rejected Qatar's cash assistance. In actuality, the money is reaching its pockets with certain conditions attached – and Israel's agreements – through a circuitous and "humanitarian" path via banks and U.N. clerks in Gaza (who are Hamas activists anyway). Hence, everyone is happy: Hamas isn't collaborating with the enemy and Israel remains humanitarian.

The deflated and defeated Hamas, however, is trying to sell the masses a version whereby Qatar's help is actually Israeli "protection money" in exchange for peace and quiet on the border. Gazans are satisfied for now, but Hamas is convincing itself that this is what's actually happening. A grocer once told me that "back in the days" he beat the hell out of a "protection" collector. According to the grocer, the man didn't die but no one ever came back to "collect." This approach seems to work. (Israel Hayom Jan 29)

Let's Stop Playing Pretend

By Eyal Zisser

The first time Israel carried out an attack on Syrian soil was in late January 2013, when it targeted an Iranian weapons shipment earmarked for Hezbollah. A few days later, then-Defense Minister Ehud Barak said of the attack: "We gave warnings and ultimately did something about it." In other words, Israel was behind the attack.

With this direct and clear assumption of responsibility, Barak effectively lifted the thin veil of ambiguity intended to provide cover for Israel's actions in Syria. Perhaps he wanted to send the Iranians and Syrians a strong message, but it's also possible he wanted to lay the foundations for his legacy as defense minister – similar to recently retired IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot, who upon ending his tenure revealed that the IDF attacked thousands of targets in Syria under his command.

Since that admission, Israel has attacked hundreds more targets in Syria, most, if not all, of them weapons shipments from Tehran to Beirut. A few weapons warehouses and factories were also hit, some of them belonging to the Syrian army, which had housed and even manufactured sophisticated weaponry for Hezbollah.

Although Israel didn't claim responsibility the vast majority of the time, maintaining ambiguity was mostly a game of "pretend." The Syrians almost always reported an attack had occurred – even if belatedly while often omitting the true nature of the targets. Sometimes the Russians and even the Americans would beat them to the punch. The latter – not wanting any part of the Syrian war – wanted to nip in the bud any potential blame for these attacks and therefore rushed to drop the responsibility at Israel's doorstep.

More than anything, a policy of silence helps keep the enemy in the dark about how exposed and vulnerable it is to Israeli operational and intelligence-gathering capabilities. Silence is also necessary because it allows Syrian dictator Bashar Assad and Iranian Quds Force leader Qassem Soleimani to save face – as any direct Israeli claims of responsibility would force them into a corner and compel them to retaliate. Either way, in actuality, there was never much ambiguity in the true sense of the word.

Ambiguity means the other side isn't sure whether Israel was behind an action or attack against it on its soil. For example, the assassinations of Imad Mugniyeh and Mahmoud al-Mabhouh were attributed to Israel. Hezbollah and Hamas believed Israel was behind the killings, but without undeniable proof, they couldn't accuse it and retaliate.

As far as Syria is concerned, perhaps this ambiguity is of some benefit to the Israeli public, but the people on the other side of the border certainly have no doubts about what is going on. Even without official claims of responsibility, our neighbors never thought these attacks were the work of

anyone else. A long line of defense ministers and generals have a history of intimidating – and sometimes stating outright – that Israel is responsible.

It is ridiculous, ergo, to argue that the recent claims of responsibility in Israel specifically prodded the Iranians to escalate their response against Israel. After all, in Tehran and Damascus alike, policy isn't determined by headlines in Israel. The Iranians don't care about Israeli public opinion or the "boastings" of its leaders; they are only focused on the reality on the ground.

And on the ground, Israel has indeed managed to delay and even block Tehran's efforts to establish a military foothold in Syria. As this is a paramount Iranian strategic interest, Tehran is determined to change the rules of the game, especially now that the war in Syria is almost over and Israeli-Russian relations aren't as warm as they used to be.

The time has come to dispense with ambiguity, which never really existed in the first place, and replace it with clear declarations that highlight Israel's red lines vis-à-vis Tehran. (Israel Hayom Jan 27)

Can a New Group Save the Democratic Party for Israel?

By Jonathan S. Tobin

There are already too many Jewish organizations. But if there was ever a need for at least one more, then the Democratic Majority for Israel (DMI) would seem to fill the bill.

The DMI seeks to promote support for Israel among Democrats at a time when the party appears to be drifting away from the pro-Israel orbit. With so many of the most prominent and popular Democrats increasingly hostile to the Jewish state—and with polls showing the party's grassroots also at odds with Israel—the time had come for an effort to retrieve a situation that presents a genuine challenge to a bipartisan pro-Israel consensus. But the question for the group, which says it is well-funded and plans to play a key role in upcoming elections, is whether it can really speak for most Democrats.

A generation or two ago, such a development would have been unimaginable, as Democrats represented the lockstep pro-Israel party. It was Republicans who were divided about support for the Jewish state, while Democrats were the ones that Israel could count on. That changed as Republicans, led by figures like President Ronald Reagan, became increasingly united behind the pro-Israel coalition.

At the same time, many Democrats defected from the pro-Israel camp. The reasons for this are complex, but essentially it boils down to the rise of a left-wing faction that sees the world through an intersectional lens that views the Palestinian war on Israel as morally equivalent to the struggle for civil rights in America. Grassroots activists identified with the Palestinians, not the Israelis.

Many liberal Zionists also began to see the conflict in the Middle East as largely Israel's fault and started to oppose the pro-Israel lobby AIPAC. That led to the creation of groups like J Street that claim to be pro-Israel, but also support pressure on Jerusalem to make concessions its democratically elected government opposes in the name of "saving it from itself."

In recent years, that debate has been supplanted by a new conflict. Openly anti-Zionist organizations like Jewish Voice for Peace and IfNotNow have begun to steal J Street's thunder on the left as those who support Israel's elimination gain visibility and undeserved respectability.

Not surprisingly, that's had a huge impact on the Democratic Party.

When President Obama engaged in a policy of more "daylight" between the United States and Israel, few Democrats protested (while the J Street crowd cheered). And when his administration engaged in appeasement of Iran via a nuclear deal that empowered and enriched a nation dedicated to Israel's destruction, most Democrats, including otherwise stalwart supporters of the Jewish state, loyally went along with him, blaming Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for a fight that Obama had picked.

Part of the problem is that Jewish Democrats have been focused more on opposing pro-Israel Republicans than on confronting the enemies of the Jewish state within their own ranks. They've disingenuously claimed that Republicans are trying to use Israel as a wedge issue and destroy the bipartisan consensus on the issue when, in fact, the problem the GOP is addressing is one created by the policies of Obama and the defection of the Democrats' left-wing from the ranks of the pro-Israel community.

Last year, large numbers of both the House and Senate Democratic caucuses signed a letter supporting an end to the blockade of Hamas-run Gaza and signaling a more "even-handed" attitude to the conflict. The recent election of people like Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.) and Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.)—members of Congress who have engaged in anti-Semitic invective, as well as support the BDS movement that is steeped in anti-Semitism—has drawn attention to the fact that a significant portion of the Democratic base is not so much indifferent to Israel as downright hostile to it. The fact that Omar and Tlaib have received prominent

committee assignments, rather than being punished for anti-Semitic statements, points to which way the wind is blowing on the left.

Polls continue to reveal the way growing numbers of Democrats have abandoned Israel. The latest from the Pew Research Center shows the growing gap between the parties, with 79 percent of Republicans saying they back Israel against the Palestinians versus only 27 percent of Democrats who feel that way.

While Democrats blame U.S. President Donald Trump's historic support for Israel and devotion of white evangelicals to the Jewish state for alienating members of their party, the real problem is the influence of intersectional forces like those who head the Women's March, which is saturated with anti-Semitism, on the left wing of their party.

That's why the new pro-Israel group is desperately needed. Still, there is plenty of reason to worry that opponents of Israel may be more popular among younger Democrats than veteran Democratic strategists like Mark Mellman and Ann Lewis, who has signed up to lead the DMI.

Just as interesting is the fact that J Street has made it clear that it opposes this new group because they view it as an ally of AIPAC and the mainstream pro-Israel community.

The willingness of so many Democrats to buy into false arguments about a bill to ban compliance with discriminatory BDS boycotts of Israel shows that DMI will have its work cut out for it. Yet as long as it can count on the backing of major pro-Israel donors, as well as leading members of the Democratic leadership like House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) and House Foreign Affairs Committee chairman Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.), they can have an impact.

For years, Jewish Democrats were too busy blaming pro-Israel Republicans for their problems to face up to the challenge from anti-Zionists on the left. While their opponents are growing in strength and significance, the creation of the DMI shows that pro-Israel Democrats have started to fight for the soul of their party. Whether or not you support the Democrats, everyone who cares about the U.S.-Israel alliance should be praying for their success. (JNS Jan 29)

The Pessimists Among Us By Berel Wein

Purely on an anecdotal basis, I believe that the diehard secular leftists amongst us are really pessimistic people. In a recent article written by the Israeli historian Benny Morris and published in the Haaretz newspaper – where else but there could this be published – he posited that the Jewish state here in the land of Israel is doomed to disappear within the next half century.

He based this dire prediction on the fact that there will be hundreds of millions of Muslims here in the Middle East and, at best, there will only be seven or eight million of us. This is exactly what all the experts said over 70 years ago when the possibility of creating a Jewish state here in the land of Israel appeared to be possible. Even when the state was declared, and the War of Independence was won, there were many great and knowledgeable people who stated that the state could not survive for even half a century.

Benny Morris and many others like him, no matter how great their scholarship, their knowledge lacks a spiritual perspective. They look at this world and think they understand it.

The reason I feel that this pessimistic outlook was present and persists is the belief that somehow the state was founded illegitimately and without moral right. In order to defend this higher moral ground, that the left always assumes it is in charge of, must be that this state, founded unfairly and unjustly, must somehow disappear. That it must do so becomes a moral certitude for the true believers. No facts or circumstances can alter this belief or counter this completely unjustified pessimism. Since it should not have happened, then we must come to believe that in the future it will not exist.

Ideologues, from the full spectrum of beliefs and movements, are by nature pessimistic people. No one is happy with the present situation since it does not live up to his or her ideal expectations. And they become frustrated when events do not go their way and the utopia they seek, whether religious, social or political, is not achieved. The rabbis attributed this attitude to the basic weakness of man, that he or she lacks gratitude. The rabbis stated it in a pithy manner in the Talmud: "is it not sufficient that one is alive?"

Benny Morris and many others like him, no matter how great their scholarship, their knowledge lacks a spiritual perspective. They look at this world and think they understand it. They are super rational to the point of seemingly becoming irrational. And since the world does not conform to their view and does not really make coherent sense, they doom society to oblivion and destruction. Historians usually deal with facts and overlay those facts with their own opinions and worldview. This serves to obfuscate the facts and distort conclusions and true understanding. And, it creates false illusions, dire predictions and general despondency.

The Jewish people have lived for millennia on a large diet of faith and

belief. If the Jewish people would have made a rational reckoning of its situation in this hostile and inimical world, it would long ago have disappeared from the face of world civilization. However because of faith and belief, the Jewish people have weathered and survived enormous storms and crises over its long and bitter history. This is not to say that we should not be realistic about our future and about the problems that face us. Blind faith alone without human action and wisdom will not carry the day.

However, Judaism is not a religion of pessimism. It has a strong positive vote for the future. It encourages family life, children and a long-term perspective on personal and national life and events. The Jewish future is based upon facts and reality, but just as importantly, it is also based upon hope and faith. It always aspires to a better world without denigrating the world that exists currently.

According to opinions in the Talmud and of Maimonides, even the messianic era will not be that different from the times and world that we live in. It will be our task to raise human civilization to realize that peace achieves more than war and goodness is greater than evil. Today this is a constant struggle and will remain so for the future of humanity on this planet. But the struggle must be conducted with optimism and confidence that we will not only survive but that we will triumph and that all of humankind will be better because of our accomplishments. (IsraelNationalNews.com Jan 31)

How Should Jewish Leaders Confront the Challenge of BDS Groups Within Their Own Communities? By Sean Savage

The decision last week by the Boston Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) to pass a resolution declaring that any member organization supporting the BDS movement could be expelled from the council has generated a wider discussion among Jewish leaders as to where to draw red lines when it comes to Israel.

The resolution, adopted overwhelmingly by a vote of 62-13 with eight abstentions, resolves that no member of the JCRC "shall partner with — in particular by co-sponsoring events primarily led or co-led by, or by signing on to statements primarily organized or co-organized by — a self-identified Jewish organization that declares itself to be anti-Zionist."

The resolution was primarily in response to a move by one of its members, the Boston Workmen's Circle, which has aligned itself with the anti-Israel Jewish Voice for Peace group.

David Bernstein, president and CEO of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) — an umbrella group made up of 125 community relations councils and 17 national Jewish agencies — told JNS that his organization fully supports the move by the Boston JCRC.

"[It] is very in line with what JCPA would do as well. We would not support an organization that openly embraces BDS or denies Israel's right to exist," he said.

Ron Halber, executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington, applauded the work of Boston JCRC and its executive director, Jeremy Burton, for navigating such a loaded issue.

"I have tremendous respect for Jeremy and the Boston Jewish community — one of the leading and most innovative JCRCs in the country. Over the years, they have tackled very difficult issues, and I'm sure the decision was done in an inclusive manner and a thoughtful manner," he told JNS.

Barry Shrage, who served for more than 30 years as president of Boston's Combined Jewish Philanthropies and is now a professor at Brandeis University, told JNS that he was "very proud" of the decision made by the JCRC.

Calls to remove the Boston Workmen's Circle from JCRC began to mount last summer when the group signed a petition organized by the anti-Zionist Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP).

The JVP-led petition criticized efforts by supporters of Israel to "target organizations that support Palestinian rights, particularly the nonviolent Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions [BDS] movement."

A statement released by Burton noted that the Boston Workmen's Circle's decision to align with the global BDS movement "triggered questions and concerns within our coalition, given our long-established view that support for BDS is contrary to our mission."

As such, that alignment led to a months-long investigation by JCRC's membership committee involving its large network and member organizations, which culminated in the vote on Thursday.

For its part, the Boston Workmen's Circle slammed the resolution, saying in a statement by its board of directors that the decision "conflicts with traditional Jewish values that respect diversity of opinion and encourage robust, honest and inclusive dialogue. ... It sets a dangerous precedent of condemnation by association by placing a political litmus test on Council membership based on partnerships."

Shrage believes that the decision by the Boston JCRC may set a

precedent for the wider Jewish community on how to handle decisions by member organizations that may partner or align with groups that are deemed anti-Israel, anti-Zionist, or antisemitic.

"It allows for everyone to take a look at the issues in a serious way," he said. "I think it should set a precedent; I don't think many communities would have a problem with it."

Nevertheless, Halber contends that each Jewish community and its representative organizations are unique — both geographically and demographically — and what occurred in Boston may be different from what other communities face.

"I think that often when a certain JCRC takes an action, that question [of precedent] naturally comes up. The reality is that JCRCs — whether part of a federation or on their own — are autonomous and represent their own communities," he said.

He added that the Boston move does "provide guidance if this situation replicates itself in the future. Does that necessarily mean if Boston went one way that every other JCRC would follow suit? Not necessarily."

Halber, who noted that his own community hasn't really had to contend with one of its own members aligning or partnering with an anti-Zionist group, said that this could indeed be a future challenge. "This is all very new, and the situation they dealt with was rather unique. Time will tell whether it really is a local issue that Boston had to deal with or whether it's something other JCRCs could extrapolate from."

The Jewish community has always wrestled with its place in American society. Like many other religious groups in the country over the decades, those in the Jewish community have become increasingly secular and assimilated into the broader American culture. Leaders have attempted to grapple with how to maintain a Jewish identity amid this trend.

This has had a polarizing effect on the community, especially when it comes to younger generations who shy away from religious practice for a more universal approach to the world. While Orthodox Judaism has maintained its ranks in tight neighborhoods and clustered communities, more liberal streams of Judaism — Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Humanistic — and unaffiliated secular Jews have gravitated towards social justice and progressive politics under a general umbrella of tikkun olam, the healing or repair of the world.

Shrage explained that while it's important for the Jewish community to be particularistic and universalistic in its approach, that doesn't mean that the Jewish community should give up on its own identity.

"The Jewish community can be particularistic with a concern about Israel, Jewish identity, and Jewish education, but at the same time, universalistic and express concern about immigrants, human rights, and related issues," he said. "Our credentials as a community that cares deeply about tikkun olam and the world are clear, but that doesn't mean giving up our own claim on our own identity and our claim on Israel. Those things are not to be sacrificed."

"The bottom line is we are a community that is Zionist," he said. "And we are happy to welcome anyone in our tent that is straightforwardly Zionist. We are here to fight for its [Israel's] existence; we believe in its existence and we believe in what Israel means to the Jewish people and our struggle over thousands of years. That is not negotiable."

Nevertheless, in recent years there has been growing concern regarding how Jewish communities should handle both Jewish individuals and organizations that are avowedly anti-Zionist. In 2018, the Jewish community in Durham, North Carolina, came under scrutiny for employing activists with Jewish Voice for Peace.

Additionally, groups such as IfNotNow — an anti-Israel group that has drawn headlines for pushing the Palestinian narrative at Jewish summer camps, as well as accosting Birthright Israel groups at airports — have many members who are graduates of very same Jewish institutions they now seek to question, undermine, or even abolish.

Similarly, the Boston Workmen's Circle, which has deep roots in the socialism that was prevalent among early Jewish immigrants from Europe, has now taken on this mantle of extreme progressive politics that has become a bridge too far for most of the mainstream Jewish community.

"I think this is most painful for JCRC because in a way, the Workmen's Circle is a storied organization with their focus on the disappearing secular Yiddish culture and their outreach to individuals who may not have chosen other forms of Jewish education," noted Shrage. "But on the other hand, when they choose to align themselves with inherently anti-Israel or anti-Zionist or non-Zionist groups, it means that they chose not to be part of what is virtually a wall-to-wall Zionist commitment of the Jewish people."

Halber said the goal of the groups such as the JCRC is not to be the thought police of the Jewish community.

"We are here to broaden the table — to bring people into the community and provide a space for them. I deal with everyone from the Americans for Peace Now to CUFI [Christians United for Israel]. And I have no problem working with both groups. That's a testament to both the broad table and nuance we are able to bring," he said.

"We are interested in expanding the tent, not closing the tent. One event doesn't make a relationship, but it would definitely create internal debate in the JCRC if one of our member organizations were involved in a consistent relationship with an anti-Zionist group," he said.

Shrage added that Judaism has many different components — religious, spiritual, social — but that it also has a deep commitment to the idea of a Jewish people.

"There are seven million Jews living in Israel. Anything that endangers them really endangers every part of the Jewish identity."

The writer is the news editor of JNS.

Continue the Temple Mount Revolution By Nadav Shragai

The quiet revolution on the Temple Mount, one of the most volatile places in the Middle East, has been taking place far from the spotlights for a few years. It was brought about gradually, with wisdom and determination, and was good for the Jews. Within a few years, the number of Jewish visitors increased sevenfold, from about 5,000 per year to over 35,000 per year in 2018. That is very few compared to the millions of Muslims and hundreds of thousands of tourists who visit the Jewish people's holiest site each year, but it's a modest beginning to fixing the historic and religious wrong that kept Jews off the Mount. Previous governments, and especially Jerusalem police commanders, took care to perpetuate that wrong for almost 50 years.

The architect of the change in the police's attitude toward Jews visiting the Temple Mount was Jerusalem District Police Chief Yoram Halevy. The one who gave him political backing was Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan. Many of their predecessors saw Jews visiting the holy site as a nuisance and a danger, and curtailed those visits as much as possible. They stuck to their side of the status quo, which prevented Jews from praying on the Mount, and ignored the other part of it — that Jews were allowed to visit.

History called in Halevy and Erdan, both of whom received religious Zionist educations in Jerusalem, and had the courage to challenge the rigid thinking that saw any Jewish presence on the Temple Mount as a danger. Their predecessors saw any expansion of the rabbinical ruling that allow Jews to visit the Mount as a threat; Erdan and Halevy saw it as an opportunity. When Halevy said over a year ago that "the number of visitors to the Temple Mount is doubling," and even called on Jews to "come to the Temple Mount," he expressed a Zionist, sovereign worldview of a place where Zionism and Israeli sovereignty have been backtracking since the 1967 Six-Day War.

The change in outlook led to us having some hold on the Temple Mount — a practical one, not just slogans. The renewed Jewish presence at a place that was nearly free of Jews for almost 50 years, has far-reaching implications. Since 1967, the Muslims have been using the absence of Jews on the Mount as a basis for their claims that it belongs to them alone. Today, the factual basis for that claim has shrunk, and there is hope that it will continue to shrink — that Halevy and Erdan's successors will understand the importance of the change in policy and continue it.

Halevy was the first to give Jewish visitors the sense that they were neither foreign nor dangerous on the Mount. A liaison framework between the Israel Police and the Temple Mount organizations was set up. The police on the Temple Mount, who had made things difficult for Jewish visitors, started to welcome them and transformed visits from a nightmare to a reasonable experience. Not all of the restrictions have been lifted, but Jews are freer on the Mount now than they have been since the Six-Day War.

Erdan and Halevy also led the process of removing — and eventually outlawing entirely — members of the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement from the Temple Mount, as well as the movement's auxiliaries: the Murabitun and the Murabitat, groups of Muslim "guards" who would harass Jews. They would try to block the path of Jewish visitors and subjected them to endless goading and provocations. Thousands would be bussed in from the Triangle area in northern Israel and the Galilee, and they were paid — each murabitun or murabitat activist earned thousands of shekels a month. A few, it eventually turned out, even planned terrorist acts that were designed to disrupt the routine of visits to the Temple Mount.

The officials who will succeed Halevy and Erdan must continue the revolution. The ban on Jews praying on the Temple Mount is milk spilled by Moshe Dayan after the Six-Day War — it's a crime against God, but it's unlikely to be rectified now. The sop of comfort that remains to Jews on the Temple Mount — free visits at their people's holiest site — is the bare minimum. Halevy and Erdan realized that the time was ripe and that they had to push for the historic change. (Israel Hayom Jan 31)
