



Commentary...

What to Make of This Pro-Israel Presidency By Jonathan S. Tobin

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said something last week timed to the Jewish holiday Purim that made a lot of people snicker. He was asked by an interviewer from the Christian Broadcasting Network if U.S. President Donald Trump had been "raised for such a time as this, just like Queen Esther to help save the Jewish people from the Iranian menace?"

Pompeo's response went directly to the point: "As a Christian, I certainly believe that is possible." He went on to say that he is "confident that the Lord is at work here," when he surveyed "the work our administration has done to make sure this democracy in the Middle East, that this Jewish state, remains."

Many heard this and mocked (with good reason) the notion that Trump could possibly be compared to the heroine of the Purim story.

But so deep runs the contempt for Christian conservatives among some sectors of the chattering classes, as well as the foreign policy establishment, that Pompeo's willingness to speak of "the Lord" was enough to set eyes rolling.

Others, like Rabbi Jonah Pesner, the head of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, deplored the introduction of theology – even one that is favorable to Zionism and the Jewish people – into any discussion of foreign policy.

That was an opinion echoed in *The New Republic*. It published a scathing attack on Trump and Pompeo for seeking to carry out a "Christianization of U.S. foreign policy." The magazine blasted the administration's policies on Pompeo's own evangelical faith. TNR and other voices on the Left have often blamed Trump's tilt toward Israel on a desire to curry favor with evangelicals.

As with every discussion of Christian support for Israel, Pompeo's comments prompted some to regurgitate the familiar claims from some on the Left that avowed Christian Zionists, like the secretary of state, are only supporting Israel because they wish to set off an apocalyptic scenario that would generate the return of the Christian messiah.

The support of evangelicals like Pompeo is sincere and based on a genuine concern for Israel's well-being that is rooted firmly in biblical texts, not eschatological scenarios. The notion that Jews should be wary of Christians because of their theology is also absurd. Even if all of them were focused on what would happen after Jesus' return, the idea that Jews, who don't believe in such a possibility, should worry about what would happen then is ridiculous.

But the more important question to be asked is how Jews – the vast majority of whom purport to care about Israel and its safety – can dismiss Trump's record on this issue as being of either negligible importance or assert that his policies are actually bad for the Jewish state?

After this week's signing by Trump of a proclamation recognizing Israeli sovereignty on the Golan Heights, the debate about his attitude toward Israel should be over. The timing of the declaration was almost certainly aimed at aiding Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's re-election campaign. But the recognition of Israel's hold on the Golan sent a stronger message to Iran, whose forces and Hezbollah auxiliaries are occupying Syrian territory, than it did to Israel's voters. It at least partially offset Trump's ill-advised desire to pull U.S. troops out of eastern Syria and reinforced the administration's tough stance against the Islamist republic.

Moreover, when placed in the context of Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, his unwillingness to accept – as did previous presidents – the Palestinian Authority's intransigence and financial support for terrorism, and his pulling out of the disastrous 2015 nuclear deal with Iran brokered by his predecessor, there's no longer any room to deny the depth of the support of this administration for the Jewish state.

This isn't to argue that this one aspect of his administration must cancel out any other consideration when thinking about 2020. But it does mean that an honest discussion about Trump's policy when it comes to Israel requires us to discard our partisan lens and understand that whatever his true motivation or how he arrived at his conclusions, what he has done has greatly strengthened Israel's strategic position.

ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

Some have argued that Trump's "America First" beliefs will undermine America's position in the world and ultimately weaken Israel. But while that was a reasonable argument to make in 2016, before we knew how he would govern, it no longer makes sense in light of Trump's strong stance on Iran or his

desire to persuade NATO allies to strengthen their defenses. Indeed, with France and Germany – whose leaders are supposedly the epitome of true Western values – bent on appeasing Iran, that argument now falls flat.

Nor has his inconsistent policy toward Russia – a combination of weak talk and strong policies that are much tougher than those of our European allies – endangered Israel, given that it was then-U.S. President Barack Obama who punted Syria to Moscow, not Trump.

Trump has done more than merely reverse Obama's goal of creating more "daylight" between the United States and Israel. He has promoted policies that have discarded decades of foolish conventional wisdom about the Middle East and replaced it with stances on the conflict that are rooted in realpolitik and recognition of Israel's rights and security needs.

That doesn't mean Trump is perfect and, as whoever wins the April election in Israel may find out, his peace plan may cause more harm than good. But it's past time that his critics acknowledge that what he's done with respect to Israel places him above any other American president with respect to friendship for the Jewish state, including Harry Truman (whom many Jewish admirers also spoke of in religious terms), Ronald Reagan or George W. Bush.

That doesn't make Trump Queen Esther. But whether or not you intend to vote for him next year, it is past time to stop pretending that this administration's policies toward Israel can be depicted as anything but a historic breakthrough that should be properly noted and applauded. (JNS Mar 27)

By Recognizing the Golan, Trump Revives the Idea that Aggression Shouldn't Be Cost-Free By Evelyn Gordon

When U.S. President Donald Trump recognized Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, foreign-policy experts keened in chorus that he was destroying a fundamental principle of the world order: that territory can't be acquired through force. Let's hope they're right—because that principle, far from deterring aggression, actually rewards it.

The problem is that, as currently interpreted, the principle doesn't distinguish between offensive and defensive wars. Thus for an aggressor, starting a war becomes almost cost-free (assuming he doesn't care about getting his own people killed). If he wins, he achieves whatever goal he sought to achieve. And if he loses, the international community will pressure his victim to return any captured lands, thereby ensuring that he pays no territorial price.

This warped interpretation is the diametric opposite of the principle's original purpose, which was to deter aggression. But it's also of fairly recent vintage. After World War II, the Allies had no qualms about forcing Germany, the aggressor, to cede territory to its victims. And Western nations still recognized the distinction between offensive and defensive war as recently as 1967.

The proof is Security Council Resolution 242, which is famously interpreted today as requiring Israel to cede all territory captured in the Six-Day War of 1967. But in reality, it was explicitly worded to let Israel keep some of that territory, by demanding a withdrawal only from "territories occupied in the recent conflict," rather than "the territories" or "all the territories."

As America's then U.N. ambassador, Arthur Goldberg, later said, the omitted words "were not accidental ... the resolution speaks of withdrawal ... without defining the extent of withdrawal." Lord Caradon, the British U.N. ambassador who drafted the resolution, was even more explicit. "It would have been wrong to demand that Israel return to its positions of June 4, 1967," he said.

What's noteworthy, however, is that the clause allowing Israel to retain some captured territory was preceded by a preamble clause, "Emphasizing the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war." In other words, nobody back then saw any contradiction between emphasizing the inadmissibility of acquiring territory through war and authorizing the victim to keep some of the aggressor's territory because the ban on gaining territory through war was understood as applying to offensive wars, not defensive ones.

And the Six-Day War—in which Israel acquired the Golan Heights from Syria, the Sinai from Egypt and the West Bank, Gaza and eastern Jerusalem from their illegal Jordanian occupier—was a classic defensive war. It began when Egypt closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping (a recognized act of war), kicked U.N. peacekeepers out of Sinai, massed troops on Israel's border and publicly threatened to annihilate it.

Moreover, even after Israel opened the war's hot phase by attacking and destroying Egypt's air force, it had no interest in opening additional fronts with Syria or Jordan (famously begging the latter to stay out of the war). Nevertheless, both countries promptly launched their own attacks. In Syria's case, these included shelling civilian communities from the Golan and conducting airstrikes on them.

In other words, Syria could have sat the war out. Instead, it chose to join the anti-Israel aggression, and in the ensuing fighting, it lost the Golan.

Damascus then spent the next 52 years rejecting repeated offers to trade the Golan for peace while also launching one hot war (in 1973) and providing material support for decades of attacks on Israel from neighboring Lebanon (first by the PLO and later by Hezbollah). In contrast, Egypt made peace with Israel in 1979 (thereby recovering every inch of Sinai), while Jordan signed a formal peace treaty in 1994 after having maintained a de facto peace for the preceding 27 years.

Yet despite Syria's half-century record of aggression and peace rejectionism, the international community never stopped insisting that Israel must return the Golan to Syria. Damascus believed that it would never have to pay any price for its bad behavior—until Trump came along.

Theories about international law presumably didn't play a major role in Trump's decision. Yet by insisting that aggression and peace rejectionism shouldn't be cost-free, he is being more faithful to this law's original goal of deterring aggression than its professed devotees, who insist that aggressors should never suffer territorial consequences.

That's why all the foreign-policy experts claiming that Trump has just legitimized acts of aggression like Russia's seizure of Crimea are wrong. This claim is possible only under the warped interpretation of international law that makes no distinction between offensive and defensive wars. If all territorial acquisitions through force are equally inadmissible, then legitimizing one would legitimize them all. But under the far more plausible interpretation that prevailed as recently as 50 years ago, the Golan and Crimea are completely different cases because the former was acquired in a defensive war and the latter in an offensive one.

Incidentally, the claim that the decision undermines prospects for Israeli-Palestinian peace is also wrong; as Dr. Martin Kramer of Shalem College pointed out, the opposite is true. Until now, the Palestinians have always found peace rejectionism a profitable business; every time they rejected an Israeli peace offer, the international community rewarded them by demanding additional Israeli concessions. But now, Trump has shown that rejectionism carries a price.

By so doing, a president who scoffs at international law may ironically be saving it. International law was never meant to be a suicide pact, but in its modern interpretation, it has increasingly become one. Under this interpretation, terrorists who operate from amid civilian populations enjoy immunity from military action; countries must accept unlimited numbers of migrants fleeing danger; and aggressors can start wars with impunity. Since all this is detrimental to the well-being of ordinary law-abiding countries, if it continues, more and more countries will simply ditch international law in favor of self-preservation.

By recognizing Israeli sovereignty over the Golan, Trump is restoring the distinction that used to exist between offensive and defensive wars, and thereby restoring international law to sanity. Anyone who actually cares about international law ought to thank him. (JNS Mar 27)

Strivers, Sulkers and the State of Israel By David P. Goldman

Nothing succeeds like success, and the State of Israel's success in a range of fields has created more goodwill for the Jewish people than at any time in history, and also more enmity. The world's strivers see Israel as an example, and the world's sulkers view Israel as a humiliating reminder of their misery.

Joseph Dana argued in a March 25 opinion article on this site that “political Zionism raises the risk of anti-Semitism.” That is true only to the extent that success breeds envy. Success also elicits admiration, though, and Israel is admired by ambitious and upwardly mobile people around the world. On balance, political Zionism has brought about far more philo-Semitism than anti-Semitism.

Half a million tourists visited Israel in December 2018, twice the number of the previous December. South Korean high-school students are adopting traditional Jewish learning techniques. Books about Jewish success are best-sellers in China. Chinese students are applying to Israeli universities; 200 now attend the University of Haifa compared with just 20 in 2013, and nearly 200 are enrolled at the Technion, Israel's elite science university.

Retired Israeli ambassador Yoram Ettinger wrote in January that 2018 was “a banner year for Israel diplomacy,” marked by the move of

America's embassy to Jerusalem, soon to be followed by Brazil.

“Netanyahu's breakthrough diplomatic travels in 2018 included an official visit to the Arabian Gulf Sultanate of Oman, where he held talks with Sultan Qaboos Bin Said.... Also significant was Chadian President Idriss Déby's historic visit to Israel, with Netanyahu planning to visit the Central African country next year, at which time the two nations expected to declare a renewal of diplomatic ties.

“Other landmark meetings strengthening economic ties with leaders from China, Japan and India. Chinese Vice-President Wang Qishan visited Israel, as did Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Netanyahu met with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi in Delhi, leading to a joint declaration of the ‘dawn of a new era’ in bilateral relations.”

In related developments, British Foreign Minister Jeremy Hunt last week announced that the United Kingdom would vote against many anti-Israel resolutions at the United Nations rather than abstaining, as in the past. And Hungary opened a trade mission in Jerusalem, the first de facto recognition of the Israeli capital by a European Community member state.

By any objective gauge of success, the State of Israel is uniquely successful.

Israel's 6 million Jews field the strongest armed forces in the region. Its economy has outpaced other industrial countries. In 2006, Israel's per capita gross domestic product was just 63% of the high-income average, and it is now on par.

Israel spends a higher proportion of GDP on research and development than any country in the world. A total of US\$4 billion of venture capital was invested in Israeli companies in 2017, compared with \$5.8 billion for the UK, \$2.9 billion in Germany and \$2.4 billion in France.

And most remarkably, Israel is the only industrial country with a fertility rate above break-even. Israeli Jewish women have three children on average (2.5 children excluding the very religious). In practical terms, that means that Israel's population of young people will be equal to that of Germany and Japan by the end of this present century if current fertility trends persist.

There are many reasons for Israel's success, but the most important of them in my view is political Zionism itself. The Israelis rebuilt their ancient nation against overwhelming odds with a combination of ferocious discipline and high tolerance for risk. These qualities, essential in war, are also decisive in art, as Thomas Mann wrote in his 1914 essay “Gedanken im Kriege.”

A decade ago I surveyed Israel's improbable success in classical music, one of many fields in which the small Jewish state punches far above its weight. After a week of interviewing Israeli musicians and observing musical competitions, the following idea dawned on me: “The sense of a future in Western classical music evokes the basic emotions with which human beings regard the future, namely hope and fear. When Israeli musicians speak of performing with a sense of risk, they mean the capacity to sustain hope in the presence of fear. It takes a certain kind of personality to do this on the concert stage, with all the attendant artistic and technical demands. Israel, whose existential premise is the triumph of hope over fear, incubates a disproportionately large number of musicians with this sort of personality.”

In this context, one reads with pity Joseph Dana's claim that “for American Jews, the United States is the only homeland they have ever wanted, and so the debate about dual loyalty cuts deep while raising questions about their safety and security. Since the Jewish people never elected Israel to represent them, nor have the Jewish people ever claimed that the State of Israel is their national homeland, it is safe to say that Zionism is propagating a dangerous version of dual loyalty for Jews everywhere.”

There are two canards in this statement. The first is the issue of so-called dual loyalty, raised most recently by the Somali-American US congresswoman Ilhan Omer.

The word “hypocrisy” fails to capture the mendacity of this claim. The American left (and Omer in particular) abhors the United States in principle, viewing it as a racist-misogynist-colonialist entity that forced Africans into slavery, exterminated most of the aboriginal population, invaded Vietnam and Iraq, and otherwise promoted a patriarchal-capitalist-white supremacist vision of the world. As such, leftists like Dana want America to lose power – above all military power. Israel is America's most reliable and effective military ally, as well as provider of critical weapons such as the Iron Dome, and Israel's American friends are also the biggest supporters of American military strength.

The second canard involves American Jews and Americans in general. America was conceived from its founding as a new City on the Hill, that is, a new Jerusalem, an “almost-chosen nation” (Abraham Lincoln), a new Mission in the Wilderness – that is, as an emulation of the biblical Israel.

The living presence of the biblical Israel validates the American Founding and inspires its descendants. America's DNA is philo-Semitic; by no accident the Bible-believing Christian Harry Truman was the first head of state to recognize the newly founded State of Israel in 1948. America's evangelical Christians, who comprise about 30% of voters,

continue to embrace Christian Zionism. And the influence of American evangelical Christianity has produced a shift in sentiment toward Israel in the global South, most prominently in Brazil.

Asia's fascination with Israel has more to do with material success than religion, to be sure, but Asians' philo-Semitism has something in common with that of the evangelicals: Nothing succeeds like success. Asian strivers will continue to admire Israel and emulate its path to success, while sulkers in various failed states will continue to nurse their grudge against Israeli success.

As an American Jew, I see the matter differently than Joseph Dana. I am grateful that Israel enjoys the admiration of striving Asians, and am resigned to the fact that Israel will be hated by sulkers like Representative Omer and Mr Dana himself. (Asia Times Mar 27)

J Street Uncovers a Secret about Netanyahu and Trump

By Vic Rosenthal

I think my interest in J Street could once have been called "obsessive." I wrote numerous blog posts a few years ago, pointing out that the supposedly "pro-Israel, pro-peace" organization received financing from George Soros, mysterious billionaires in Hong Kong, and people associated with Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab-American Institute. I noted – along with then Ambassador Michael Oren – that it consistently (one could say always) took positions opposed to almost any reasonable interpretation of Israel's interests. I objected to its guiding principle, which seemed to be that it knew what was good for Israel far better than Israelis did, especially since following its recommendations would negatively impact Israel's security. I wondered at the close coordination between J Street and the Obama Administration, which tried to anoint it as the voice of American Jewry toward Israel. And more.

Since I moved back to Israel in 2014, I've been less concerned with J Street, which is, after all, an American phenomenon. We have plenty of "interesting" politics right here. But recently I became aware of a new J Street initiative, targeting PM Netanyahu, just before the election:

"The pro-Israel, pro-peace group J Street launched a new series of videos today highlighting the dangerously similar rhetoric and ideology shared by President Trump and Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu. Released as targeted digital ads just a week before the two leaders are expected to meet in Washington, DC on the sidelines of the AIPAC conference, the videos urge pro-Israel Americans who are opposed to Trump to also speak out against Netanyahu's similar bigotry and anti-democratic tendencies.

"By attacking democratic institutions and targeting vulnerable minorities, Trump and Netanyahu are borrowing from the same far-right playbook — undermining the core values and interests of both the US and Israel," said J Street's president Jeremy Ben-Ami. "Patriotic Americans have mobilized impressively against Trump here at home. Those of us who care about Israel's future need to speak out against Netanyahu's destructive leadership as well."

"Over the past two years, both the president and the prime minister have incited against vulnerable minorities, attacked the free press and delegitimized the judiciary and the rule of law. Both face serious investigations into alleged criminal conduct..."

There's no doubt that liberal and progressive American Jews hate Trump passionately, and there's no better way to attack Netanyahu among that group than by associating him with their *bête noire*. The first J Street video is here: <https://jstreet.org/trump-and-netanyahu-closer-than-you-think/#.XJwMb8BKg5v>. It's very professional and probably didn't come cheap. The question is, why did J Street spend a considerable sum of money on such a campaign? Americans don't vote in Israeli elections (although J Street probably wishes they did). Why attack Netanyahu in the USA?

It's not a simple question and I don't have a simple answer. Unfortunately, the position papers of J Street's psychological warfare experts aren't public. But I have some ideas.

J Street's primary goal, like that of the numerous other anti-Israel organizations in the US, including the nominally "Jewish" If Not Now and Jewish Voice for Peace, as well as explicitly anti-Semitic ones like If America Knew, is to create antipathy and distrust for Israel, so that Americans will oppose pro-Israel actions by the US government – for example, the recognition of Israel's possession of the Golan Heights that is rumored to be on the table now.

In the event of war, they want to prime Americans to believe Palestinian atrocity propaganda against Israel, to make it more difficult for a pro-Israel administration to support Israel, or easier for an anti-Israel one to criticize her or even cut off critical supplies – as Obama did during the 2014 Gaza war.

How does attacking PM Netanyahu accomplish this? The answer has several parts.

First, J Street presents Netanyahu as anti-democratic and dictatorial, as if he is entirely responsible for Israeli policy; so it becomes possible for an American Jew who still feels some loyalty to Israel to separate the country from its Prime Minister, and blame him for supposedly anti-democratic or

racist policies, without being forced to make the jump to disliking Israel the nation.

Second, and conversely, Netanyahu has been PM since 2009 and – at least as of today – it is likely that he will receive yet another term. He is Israel in the minds of many Americans. An attack on Netanyahu as racist and anti-minority, and in other ways that particularly resonate in America, also creates negative perceptions of the state of Israel herself.

Third, attitudes in America, as expressed in the media, do have some influence on Israeli elections. There is no doubt that the forces behind J Street would like to see Netanyahu defeated in the coming election. Netanyahu's political opponents can point to anti-Netanyahu expressions in the US and say, "look, Netanyahu has wrecked our relationship with the US." J Street's theme that Netanyahu and Trump are both corrupt, anti-democratic racists will find a fertile field in the progressive media such as NPR and the NY Times that are favored by J Street's constituency. Because the campaign bashes both Trump and Netanyahu, it will certainly be amplified in those media, which are always ready to take a swipe at Trump.

Fourth, closely associating Trump with Netanyahu minimizes the significance of Trump's pro-Israel actions like moving the US Embassy to Jerusalem, cutting funds to the Palestinian Authority, downgrading the East Jerusalem consulate, and – I devoutly hope – recognizing Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights.

J Street's attack on both Trump and Netanyahu is couched in the universalist, anti-nationalistic (and therefore anti-Zionist) language that finds favor with the progressive Left:

"The politics of these two leaders is part of a broader global challenge to liberal democracies rooted in respect for civil society and tolerance of ethnic diversity. Now, the world faces a wave of rising right-wing ethno-nationalism with anti-democratic tendencies.

"The xenophobia and authoritarianism that the two leaders are fanning is anathema to millions of Americans and American Jews. "While Netanyahu, Trump and their allies may get standing ovations at AIPAC, their views and actions couldn't be more out of touch with most of the American Jewish community," Ben-Ami said.

This exposes the true agenda behind J Street, which is actually only one piece of a much larger enterprise opposing nationalism and ethnic particularism, favoring open borders and multiculturalism, and proudly trumpeting extreme cultural relativism. If you think that agenda is a positive one for civilization, look at the ongoing destruction of native European societies like Sweden, for example.

Netanyahu – and Israel, an ethnic nation-state – represent the precise opposite of the agenda, and as such have drawn down upon themselves the wrath of J Street and other such groups, which tentatively accuse them of being "undemocratic," "authoritarian," "racist," and more. But in fact the "ethno-nationalism" that J Street so decries stands opposed to a non-ethnic but much more vicious Islamo-fascism, which is far less democratic, more authoritarian, and viciously bigoted along religious lines.

The "global challenge to liberal democracies" does not come from nationalism, either in Israel or Eastern Europe, or from Americans who support Trump. It comes from Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the Muslim Brotherhood, and so on. Netanyahu has a sense of history, and understands all this. And I think that Trump, for all his flaws, does too.

(Jewish Press Mar 27)

Israel's Blessings and Curses By Ruthie Blum

When Israelis awoke on Monday morning to the news that a house in Moshav Mishmeret, in the centrally located Sharon region, had been reduced to rubble by a long-range Hamas rocket from Gaza, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had just arrived in Washington, D.C., to attend the annual AIPAC conference and meet with U.S. President Donald Trump.

In a repeat performance from 11 days earlier, after two Iranian-made rockets landed in Tel Aviv, Hamas claimed that the launch had been unintentional. It was the fault of clumsy maintenance crews. Or the weather.

Representatives of Islamic Jihad and other so-called "Palestinian factions" in Gaza had a slightly different version of events. The rocket fire, they reportedly said, was "in retaliation" for the treatment of their brethren at the hands of the Israel Prison Service.

On Sunday evening, Hamas terrorists at the Ketziot prison in the Negev stabbed two guards who were conducting searches to locate and confiscate mobile phones. The crackdown – crucial to put a stop to communication between incarcerated terrorists and their counterparts outside plotting the slaughter of innocent Israelis – sparked a riot in which several terrorists were injured. It was a continuation of the violence the previous week at the Ramon prison, where Hamas inmates set fire to 14 beds, causing a blaze in their wing.

Hours after insisting that the rocket attack on the house in Mishmeret had been accidental, Hamas released a statement against the "continuing

policies of suppression" towards its operatives in the Ketziot prison.

"Our struggling Palestinian people, its forces and resistance stand behind [the prisoners] and will not give up on their duty in defending them and supporting them until they are liberated," the statement read. "The movement calls on our people, its factions, and elites to immediately support [our prisoners] in a large way with all means and tools and to quickly take action with all parties and institutions to protect them."

Netanyahu reacted to the hit on Mishmeret as he had to the March 14 rockets on Tel Aviv, by greenlighting a strike by the Israel Defense Forces on strategic targets in the terrorist enclave. This time, however, he took the additional step of deploying the reserves along Israel's southern border to prepare for a potential ground incursion into Gaza. He also gave an interview in which he said that it would be a big mistake for Hamas to imagine that the looming Knesset elections are going to keep him from taking whatever drastic measures he sees fit.

Then he announced that he was cutting his U.S. trip short and returning home to deal with the escalating situation. This meant having to forfeit a private dinner at the White House with Trump on Tuesday and deliver his speech to AIPAC via video call from Tel Aviv.

But he rightly stayed in D.C. long enough to take part in the ceremonial signing of Trump's proclamation recognizing Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. After all, the historic act provides a critical boost for Israel in the face of Iranian presence along the Syrian and Lebanese borders and serves as yet another signal to the Tehran-backed terrorists in Gaza that Washington will give Netanyahu free rein when it comes to the use of military force against Israel's enemies.

And therein lies the rub.

Netanyahu must answer the security needs of Israel's Gaza-border communities, which have been bearing the brunt of Hamas and Islamic Jihad rockets, firebombs, terror tunnels, incendiary balloons and riots. Many of these war-weary residents say that they are sick and tired of hearing that the government's way of "restoring deterrence" is to "bomb a bunch of empty buildings while allowing Qatari cash to flow into Gaza."

Ironically, this is also a slogan that is being used by Netanyahu's electoral rivals from the Left, who vehemently oppose Israel's reoccupying of Gaza, on one hand, and assert that they would do a better job of achieving peace, on the other.

Then there are those Israelis who react to every new attack by calling on the government to blitz the Hamas-controlled enclave "into oblivion."

The IDF certainly has the capability to do this, but no Israeli leader – neither Netanyahu nor any potential replacement – is going to approve what would amount to the indiscriminate mass murder of Gazans. If the Israel Prison Service refrains from eliminating the terrorists in its jails, even when they revolt and stab guards with makeshift daggers, there is no way that the Israeli government would give the go-ahead to kill women and children. This is why, ahead of each Israeli airstrike in Gaza, the IDF warns residents to move out of the line of fire. Such is the blessing and curse of being a democracy.

Most of the Israeli public is aware that Netanyahu is not to blame for the asymmetric warfare imposed on the Jewish state by immoral forces bent on its destruction. Whether this is reflected at the ballot box on April 9 remains to be seen.

What is certain, however, is that when his key challenger, Blue and White party chairman Benny Gantz, was asked on Monday by Channel 12's Yonit Levi how he would confront the Gaza problem differently from Netanyahu, he stammered incomprehensibly. This is because the only policies he has been promoting are ones that Netanyahu has already adopted and implemented. You know, such as forging friendships with regional and international powers.

Which brings us to Egypt – one of a growing number of former enemy states with which Netanyahu has developed a strong working relationship.

Hamas knows full well that, unlike Israel, Egypt is not governed or constrained by democratic principles, and its military does not proudly aim for "purity of arms." Its leadership understands that if a Palestinian rocket were to land near Cairo, Gaza would be pummeled to a heap.

At the moment, then, the best hope for quiet along the Gaza-Israel border – aside from a necessary new round of IDF airstrikes on Gaza, hopefully against key Hamas leaders – is Egyptian intervention.

Recently, Cairo not only has been pressuring Hamas to cease all of its anti-Israel activities, but earlier this month expressed a loss of patience with the terrorist organization's "double game."

A temporary truce is not a long-term solution, of course. But as Netanyahu has shown, buying time in a Middle East beset with shifting alliances has been the wisest course of Israeli action. (JNS Mar 26)

The National Interest in the Upcoming Election By Isi Leibler

Despite the high-pitched abuse being exchanged between Likud and Blue and White, paradoxically, this election highlights the nation's unity. Blue and White's platform barely differs from the current government's policies.

This election is about whether we are willing to accept Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu for another term.

Netanyahu's principal assets are his opponents' inexperience and reputation as political lightweights.

Meanwhile, the biggest obstacle to Netanyahu's re-election appears to be the mandates lost by right-wing parties not passing the electoral threshold. Netanyahu's role in convincing Habayit Hayehudi to merge with the extremist Otzma Yehudit – to avoid both parties falling below the threshold – disgusted many. That Netanyahu was forced to promote such an unholy union is the result of a dysfunctional political system. The solution would be to adopt a second party preference system whereby voters elect a second party if their first choice did not pass the threshold, but also to raise the threshold to 5% or even 10%, preventing sectarian parties from holding the balance of power.

It is noteworthy that the High Court overturned the Central Elections Committee's decision to disqualify the Arab parties that justify terrorism and oppose a Jewish state but barred Otzma Yehudit head Michael Ben-Ari. The clear bias of this ruling provides ammunition to those seeking to undermine the High Court's standing.

Netanyahu sparked an upheaval when he warned that if the Right does not obtain a clear majority, a Blue and White government could only be formed with tacit support from the Arab parties. He described this as a catastrophe – for which he was accused of racism.

All the Arab parties support the elimination of Zionism. Some wish for Israel's transformation into a binational state. Others are even more radical, excusing terrorism and identifying with our adversaries in what could be considered treason.

It is totally legitimate for Netanyahu to say that voters face a choice: either a Netanyahu government that does not rely on support from extremist Arab parties or a Gantz government that does necessitate the tacit support of at least one extremist Arab party.

Blue and White's initial surge in the polls, subsequent to the announcement of the state attorney's intention to indict Netanyahu, came as no surprise. But over the last week, support for Likud and its right-wing allies seemed to be increasing.

So long as there are confused messages, Blue and White's popularity will likely continue to slip. Given the contradictory and irreconcilable positions of key personalities in the party, it is difficult to see how it will retain any coherent policy. The hysterical response to the embarrassing exposure of Iran's hacking of Gantz's phone also did not improve his public standing.

The latest effort to cast aspersions on Netanyahu regarding the submarine issue may have found favorable short-term coverage in the media desperately seeking to demonize him but it is doubtful this can be sustained. If anything, it points to the lack of any real substance in the Blue and White campaign. Despite facing a confrontational interviewer, Netanyahu's performance at a surprise visit to the Channel 12 TV studio on Saturday night was calm and measured and he successfully presented his strong case. His mistake, however, was the failure to realize that the subsequent media reports would grossly distort the interview.

Many are demanding that Netanyahu step down if he is indicted. Yet, noted Democrat and civil liberties lawyer Alan Dershowitz surmises that none of the charges will likely be upheld in court.

That these indictments were released on the eve of the election, following years of endless investigations and leaks, may have the reverse effect of rallying his base.

Ultimately, the election will be a referendum on whether the public supports Netanyahu despite the massive "just not Bibi" campaign.

There are many reasons to reject him. There is a widespread feeling that it is time for change after 10 years. And how can the prime minister apply himself to his task when his focus is constantly diverted to defend corruption allegations?

I have never written a column suggesting how readers should vote. Today is an exception. While there is a consensus on the basic direction for this country, the leader's selection is nevertheless crucial. And currently, not one of the other candidates has qualifications even remotely matching those of Netanyahu.

In a country not facing existential threats, voters should display their disdain of a candidate if they are offended by his behavior. And yes, nobody is irreplaceable and there is a time to retire.

But Israel's amazing position on the world stage today is the achievement of a diplomatically skilled leader of international standing and superior intellect. Just as Netanyahu skillfully confronted the pressures of U.S. President Barack Obama, so he has interfaced effectively with President Donald Trump. In addition, he has created an unprecedented diplomatic relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin and has developed strategic ties with India, China, Latin America, Africa and even Gulf Arab states.

It would thus be an awesome gamble now to replace Netanyahu with an inexperienced leader.

Israelis should set aside their personal feelings about Netanyahu and even those who despise him should recognize that his re-election is in the national interest. (Israel Hayom Mar 27)