



## Commentary...

**The Foreign Policy Fiasco That Wasn't** By Bret Stephens

Withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal has paid dividends.

It's been nearly a year since Donald Trump made the decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal, to loud cries that it would bring nothing but woe to the United States and our interests in the Middle East.

So far, the result has been closer to the opposite.

That much was further made clear thanks to excellent reporting this week by The Times's Ben Hubbard. "Iran's financial crisis, exacerbated by American sanctions," he writes from Lebanon, "appears to be undermining its support for militant groups and political allies who bolster Iranian influence in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and elsewhere."

Well, heavens to Betsy. When the Obama administration negotiated the nuclear deal, the president acknowledged that sanctions relief for Tehran would inevitably mean more money for groups like Hezbollah. But he also insisted it wouldn't make much of a difference in terms of Iran's capacity to make mischief in the Middle East.

Hubbard's reporting suggests otherwise. Iran can no longer finance civilian projects or credit lines in Syria. Hezbollah fighters and Palestinian militants aren't being paid, and their families are losing subsidized housing. Even Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah has complained publicly about the effects of U.S. sanctions.

Nor are those the only benefits of withdrawal. The U.S. is no longer looking the other way at Hezbollah's criminal enterprises, including drug smuggling and money laundering, the way it did during the Obama administration in order to engage Iran diplomatically. Iran's protest movement, quashed in 2009, has shown signs of renewed life, not least because of public fury that the regime spends money on foreign adventures while economic conditions worsen at home.

Most importantly, Iran has not used the US. withdrawal from the deal to restart its nuclear programs, despite its threats to do so. Part of this has to do with Tehran's belief that it can wait Trump out, especially since Democrats like Elizabeth Warren and Kamala Harris have promised to re-enter the deal if elected.

But it also suggests an edge of fear in Tehran's calculations. The U.S. can still impose a great deal more pain on the Islamic Republic if it chooses to do so.

How so? Mark Dubowitz of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies told me earlier this week that the sanctions needle now stands at around a 6. With a nod to Spiiial Tap's Nigel Tufnel, he says, "We need to get to 11."

Iran still exports about a million barrels of oil a day; the administration could bring it to zero by refusing to hand out sanctions waivers. The State Department could also designate the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps as a foreign terrorist organization, on a par with Al Qaeda or the Islamic State. Such a designation, Dubowitz says, would "make the entire Iranian economy radioactive" to foreign investment, since the I.R.G.C. is heavily involved in scores of Iranian businesses.

Even here Dubowitz is merely warming to his theme. Freeze Iran's foreign exchange reserves? Doable. Expose the immense wealth of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and sanction the companies he and other leading regime figures control? Ditto. Unleash lawsuits against companies still doing business with Iran to recover billions of dollars in outstanding terrorism judgments against the country? That, too.

The point isn't to punish Iran for punishment's sake. It's to create leverage for a better nuclear deal. Last May, Mike Pompeo set a dozen parameters for an agreement, including "unqualified access" to U.N. nuclear inspectors, permanent cessation of uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing, the end of Iran's ballistic-missile program, withdrawal of its forces from Syria, and the release of U.S. nationals held in its prisons.

Pompeo's demands have been alternatively dismissed as silly or reckless by most of Washington's foreign policy establishment. But it says something about the debasement of diplomatic expectations — both of what we have a right to demand and what we think we can achieve — that any of

## 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*

it should be controversial.

Non-nuclear states that sponsor terrorism and subscribe to millenarian ideologies should never have access to any part of the nuclear fuel cycle, ever. Any U.S. administration that abdicates the responsibility to do everything it can to prevent such access effectively

renounces America's status as a superpower as well.

Iran's G.D.P. is roughly equivalent to that of the greater Boston area, with 17 times the population. The regime may be a force to be reckoned with in the Middle East. But it is hardly a giant on the world stage, immune to any form of economic pressure.

The Trump administration has succeeded in dramatically raising the costs to Iran for its sinister behavior, at no cost to the United States or our allies. That's the definition of a foreign-policy achievement. It's time to move the needle up again. The longer Hezbollah fighters go unpaid, or the Assad regime unaided, the better off the people of the Middle East will be. (NY Times Mar 29)

**No Stone Left Unturned** By Yoav Limor

In the world of intelligence, the saying goes, reality often exceeds the imagination, and yet — the operation to return Zachary Baumel's remains to Israel, in a mission that spanned the globe, can easily be considered one of the most impressive in the country's history.

Israeli officials have long known where Baumel was buried. The matter of our missing soldiers was also raised on many occasions with foreign governments, primarily in the midst of peace talks with Syria and the Palestinians. After the Oslo Accords were signed, Yasser Arafat even transferred one of Baumel's dog tags to Israel, but nothing more ever materialized. Syria has always said it would agree to resolve the mystery, but only parallel to receiving the Golan Heights in return, as part of a peace agreement between the countries.

A little over a year ago, the issue was again raised by then-Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman. If the reports are true that Russia was involved in the operation, we can assume that Lieberman spoke with his counterpart in the Russian defense ministry, Sergei Shoigu. It appears that this time the response was different, and the Russians agreed to lend a hand. Either way, Israeli officials began working vigorously. In a series of intelligence operations, the Military Intelligence Directorate and Mossad pinpointed Baumel's exact resting place. All the information was gathered into a classified file under the codename "Bittersweet Song."

According to the reports, we can assume Israel and Russia exploited the fact that Syria was mired in a civil war. Syrian President Bashar Assad, focused almost entirely on his own survival in recent years, couldn't have prevented Russia from doing as it pleased on Syrian soil — even if he had wanted to — because Moscow had rescued his regime. We can also assume that an operation of this sort is managed at the highest levels on both sides, spearheaded by the respective army chiefs of staff (first Gadi Eizenkot and then Aviv Kochavi in Israel and Valery Gerasimov in Russia). Assuming this was the case, the operation also survived the diplomatic crisis between Israel and Russia following the downing of a Russian military plane last September — for which Russia explicitly blamed Israel.

The Russian defense ministry spokesman confirmed that Russian soldier worked on the matter for months. In retrospect, it sounds simple, but Russia did something that many countries likely wouldn't have: put its own people in harm's way for another country's humanitarian cause. If this is what happened, it means Russian soldiers were the ones to carry out, over a significant period of time, the physical search for Baumel's remains. Once the green light was given, the body was flown to a third country and from there — after an IDF team conducted DNA tests — it was flown to Israel aboard an El Al plane.

In Israel on Wednesday, officials stressed that nothing was given in exchange for Baumel's return. It's safe to assume that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, during his short visit to Moscow on Thursday, will heap praise on his Russian hosts, although it would be nice if he brought along Lieberman and Eizenkot — the two people who laid the foundations for the momentous operation. Netanyahu should also make further use of the mechanism that has been established — alongside crucial regional issues — to locate the remains of the other soldiers that went missing during the Sultan Yacoub battle, Yehuda Katz and Tzvi Feldman, and IAF navigator Ron Arad, whose remains are believed to still be in Lebanon.

Beyond the enormous operational drama and personal story that has now been closed with Baumel's return home, this chapter also provides a unique lesson about Israel: There are very few countries in the world, if any, that after 37 years would continue searching for their missing soldiers, let alone jeopardize intelligence assets in the process. Israel proves time and again that it is extraordinary, and doesn't spare any effort to solve even the most daunting mysteries. This won't bring the dead back to life, but it will give their families a burial place over which to mourn, and the soldiers currently serving the knowledge that if heaven forbid something were to happen, the country would turn over every stone for them. (Israel Hayom Apr 4)

---

### **Finally, a Resolution That Actually Condemns Anti-Semitism**

By Liel Leibovitz

Earlier this month, after Rep. Ilhan Omar accused American Jews of dual loyalty and the Israel lobby of purchasing undue influence, the House passed a resolution that did not mention Omar by name and that condemned not only anti-Semitism but every other conceivable form of bigotry. Doing his best to hide his disappointment, Rep. Eliot Engel, who chairs the Foreign Affairs Committee, said, "I wish we had had a separate resolution about anti-Semitism. It merits a close reading."

The congressman can take heart: A new resolution, drafted by Ted Cruz and slated to be introduced in the Senate this week, delivers everything that the Democrats' muddled manifesto did not. "Anti-Semitism," it declares in its very first sentence, "is a unique form of prejudice." It's precisely the sort of statement—factually true and morally clear—that so many American Jews hoped to hear after Omar made her inflammatory comments, and had the new resolution said nothing more it still would've been enough. But in four brief paragraphs, Cruz's initiative delivers not only a much-needed course correction but also an education on the specific historical evils of anti-Semitism and an elucidation of the real key differences between both political parties when it comes to understanding and honoring the concerns of American Jews. For these reasons, it merits a close reading.

The resolution begins, as all serious documents must, by providing historical context. Anti-Semitism, it reminds us, is not, as the Democrats' resolution argued, narrowly an obsession of white supremacists—and as such only one small part of a worldview that disdains "African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other people of color, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, the LGBTQ community, immigrants, and others." Anti-Semitism is instead an unparalleled conspiracy theory that dates back more than 2,000 years and that, when left unchecked, has paved direct paths to extermination.

And while genocide has always been and remains anti-Semitism's ultimate goal—which is why the Holocaust-denying Iranian regime, for example, invests so many resources in financing and facilitating the murder of Jews everywhere, from Jerusalem to Buenos Aires—the ancient hatred couldn't have survived without effective means of reproducing itself and presenting itself in every generation anew as something rational and respectable people might endorse. This, the Cruz resolution reminds us in its second and third paragraphs, is why "anti-Semitism has for hundreds of years included attacks on the loyalty of Jews, including the fabrication and circulation of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion by the secret police of Russia," and why it has always included attacks on the livelihood of Jews, from prohibitions of land ownership in the Middle Ages to the Nazi confiscation of Jewish property to the present-day BDS campaign designed to deny Jews the ability to sustain themselves.

If all these injustices seem like the stuff of a distant and benighted past, the resolution courageously concludes by reminding us of America's own less-than-perfect treatment of its Jewish citizens. "As recently as 50 years ago," reads its fourth and final paragraph, "it was common for Jews to suffer from systematic discrimination," which included everything from being denied admission to elite educational institutions to being kept out of law firms, medical practices, and other professional associations. And while many barriers have indeed been removed, the resolution acknowledges that Jews "continue to face false accusations and stereotypes of dual loyalty" and remain "the targets of the majority of hate crimes committed against any religious group."

It's that last paragraph that gives the resolution its beating heart. It shows an understanding, rare for the generally vapid genre of official declarations read from the Senate floor, of the actual lived experience of actual American Jews. It acknowledges that anti-Semitism isn't some opaque and abstract construct best understood by theorizing about hegemony, intersectionality, or other concepts beloved by the grievance-peddlers in college classrooms, but an all too real prejudice that continues to afflict real Jews in unique and nonreplicable ways.

This is not only an ontological distinction, but a political one as well. If you view the world exclusively through the lens of big, broad categories—race, sexual orientation, religious belief—you are likely to prefer the sort of legislation that sees people as not much more than extras in an epic drama of clashing identities. That's why reparations, for example, long opposed by the majority of Americans—including about half of all African-

Americans—and considered a nonstarter by nearly all mainstream politicians, has become a cause célèbre for several of the Democrats running for president in 2020. Benefiting not those who had suffered but their distant descendants, the policy proposal is the perfect embodiment of how progressives think about politics: A contest between warring groups that can be decided only by sweeping and symbolic gestures.

Cruz's resolution, on the other hand, shows a dramatically different way of thinking. Rather than treating Jews as a metaphor—an amorphous group whose suffering can be distilled into some politically valuable and intoxicating elixir—it is careful to enumerate the ways in which individuals have suffered. It's a useful vantage point from which to approach legislation, as previous efforts by the senator had shown. Last year, for example, he spearheaded an amendment that called on the Defense and State Departments to issue a report on the use of human shields by terrorist groups murdering Israelis, a highly specific and concrete step to alleviate the particular suffering of real-life Jews. We should expect and accept no other approach. (Tablet Mar 26)

---

### **The City of David and the Problem with Dividing Jerusalem**

By Jonathan S. Tobin

Those who continue to deny the historical facts about Jewish Jerusalem got more bad news this week. Archeologists working at the City of David site in Jerusalem revealed some of their latest finds, among them was a bulla or small seal that can be dated to the sixth century B.C.E. and before the Babylonian destruction of the First Temple.

This particular item was found this past fall in the City of David, an area just outside the current Old City walls of Jerusalem, but which was the site of the biblical capital of the Kingdom of Judea. The seal bears an inscription that notes that it "belonged to Natan-Melech, eved haMelech" ("servant of the king").

The significance of the small seal lies in the fact that its owner is mentioned in the Second Book of Kings as an official who worked in the service of King Josiah, who lived and died some 2,600 years ago. As such, it is one more in a growing list of evidence found in excavations at the City of David that offers proof that the stories told in the Bible of the Davidic kingdom are rooted in historical fact, not religious fiction.

This is important for two reasons.

One is that it debunks claims by Palestinians to deny Jewish history and the ties of the Jewish people to the country, and in particular, to Jerusalem.

Second, it puts into context the ongoing controversy over the excavations at the City of David and the right of Jews to move into the area.

As Bari Weiss noted in an even-handed feature published in the Sunday New York Times this past weekend, as far as the Palestinian Authority and local Arab residents are concerned, the archeologists are as unwelcome as the Jews who have come to live in this section of the ancient city.

While the significance of the treasures found there are undeniable, Israel's critics consider the dig to be more about politics than history. By developing the site into a historical park, the City of David Foundation has been blasted as a settler group more intent on solidifying Israel's hold on a section of the city that is not recognized as part of Israel by most of the world.

Like the Old City and the West Bank, Jordan illegally occupied the City of David site from 1948 to 1967. The Palestinian Arabs who live in the vicinity of the site consider Jews foreign interlopers, even though almost all of the property in the area is or was owned by Jews prior to the founding of the State of Israel. Though no one is chasing them out of their homes, they feel increasingly threatened by an influx of Jews into the neighborhood, now making up one-sixth of the local population, according to the Times. More than that, they bitterly resent the development of the archeological park, and consider the discoveries made there to be an insult to their belief that Jerusalem and all of its sacred sites are exclusively Arab.

Their fables about that attempt to treat the physical evidence of Jewish Jerusalem—like the Temple Mount itself and the Western Wall—as either fake or Islamic in nature have been encouraged by Palestinian leaders like Yasser Arafat and his successor, Mahmoud Abbas, the head of the Palestinian Authority.

Critics of the City of David Foundation are against its activities because they believe that the area should be part of a future Palestinian state. They say that the development of the site and the digs are part of an effort to prevent the redivision of Jerusalem that will enable the Palestinian Authority to put its capital in the city.

Many Israelis still believe in principle in the idea of a two-state solution, though not nearly as many as in the past because of the lack of a credible Palestinian peace partner. But the effort to delegitimize the work at the City of David points to a basic problem with the concept when applied to a sensitive site. If you're going to deny Jewish rights to the place where King David and his descendants ruled their ancient kingdom,

then you can deny them anyplace in the country. And that is what Palestinians have continued to do. Their effort to treat the City of David or even the Western Wall as linked to Jewish myths rather than the beginning of Jewish civilization is inextricably linked to their refusal to recognize the legitimacy of a Jewish state, no matter where its borders might be drawn.

Nor can it be argued that in a two-state solution, the Palestinians could be trusted to safeguard historical sites such as these.

Just this week, evidence surfaced of ancient tombs in the Jericho area—territory that is governed by the Palestinian Authority—being looted by local Arabs. This is a commonplace occurrence throughout the territories; the region's ancient Jewish heritage is being systematically destroyed by those out to make a profit or whose main goal is to eradicate the abundant evidence of the ancient Jewish ties to this land.

Indeed, there is no better example of such vandalism than the Temple Mount itself, where the Muslim Waqf, which administers the site, has trashed archeological evidence on a massive scale. We know the extent of the damage because of the volunteers who sift through the detritus from their work on the site and have discovered many important archeological finds that point to the Mount's Jewish origins wantonly thrown out as trash.

The only way to protect the heritage of the City of David is to ensure that it and the rest of Jerusalem remains under undivided Israeli authority with the right of Jews to live in their ancient capital undiminished. Any other solution isn't a path to peace, but something that will only further encourage the history deniers of the Palestinian Authority to keep fighting their war on Jewish history. (JNS Apr 3)

---

### **A New Era in Israel-Gulf State Relations** By Edy Cohen

United Arab Emirates Foreign Minister Anwar Gargash was quoted by the English-language Abu Dhabi newspaper *The National* last week as saying, "Many, many years ago, when there was an Arab decision not to have contact with Israel, that was a very, very wrong decision looking back." He predicted increased contacts between Israel and Arab states, as well as a "strategic shift" in ties he said should focus on "progress on the peace front" between Israel and the Palestinians.

There is no doubt that Gargash's remarks were made with the encouragement and guidance of Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan. In Arab states, it is not customary to make statements in support of Israel without the knowledge and approval of those in command.

This is not the first time senior Arab Gulf state officials have expressed support for Israel. Bahrain's foreign minister has been known to take to Twitter to issue pro-Israel and anti-Iran statements. Last fall, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was given the royal treatment when he visited Oman together with the head of the Mossad, Yossi Cohen. In recent months, dozens of Israeli athletes have competed in sporting events in Qatar and Abu Dhabi, and Israel's national anthem was played numerous times in Doha, the Qatari capital. Likud Party members and government ministers Yisrael Katz, Ayoub Kara and Miri Regev have also visited the Gulf.

What has changed in the Gulf? How has support for the Palestinians been replaced by support for Israel? It appears that the people of the Gulf have adopted a new stance, having opened their eyes to the illusion of opposition to and war against Israel. They understood that their support for the Palestinians is detrimental to them, including from a financial perspective. The fact that the Palestinians have grown closer to Iran has sparked ire in many Gulf states, which see the ayatollah regime as an enemy and the Palestinians' increasingly closer ties with Tehran as betrayal.

No matter the reason, Israel's warming ties with the Gulf are a significant achievement that can be attributed to Netanyahu. The Gulf Arab states are interested in being part of the Western world—not necessarily out of a love of Zion, but because they understand that the path to warmer ties with the West and the United States runs through Israel. In the Gulf, they recall how America liberated Kuwait from Iraqi occupation in the early 1990s, and they are interested in maintaining these ties. It is not for nothing that there are over 10 American and British military bases operating in six Gulf states: Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE.

A majority of Gulf leaders decided to align with U.S. President Donald Trump's policy on Iran, as well as on his stance on the Palestinian issue, albeit not publicly. Ties with Israel are aimed at deterring the Iranians and providing a means of entry to the United States. As is the case with other Arab states, genuine peace is not the object of the Gulf states aspirations, but rather the outcome of interests, as well as the need to maintain security and stability and maintain U.S. aid.

The Arab street is interested in nothing more than an "agreement" and certainly not warm relations. Only those unfamiliar with the mentality of the region could be surprised when a Jordanian parliamentarian speaks out against Israel or when Egypt votes against Israel at the United Nations.

Gargash's pro-Israel remark, then, constitutes a challenge to Israeli diplomacy. Is this a change for the better? Will the relationship float freely to the surface? One must hope that this is the beginning of a new era in relations with Gulf states, one of open and overt ties. (Israel Hayom Apr 3)

*The writer is a researcher at the BESA Center and author of the book "The Holocaust in the Eyes of Mahmoud Abbas" (Hebrew).*

---

### **Diplomacy Remains Netanyahu's Strong Suit** By Jonathan S. Tobin

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has never hesitated to get into the trenches and fight dirty with his political life on the line. But foreign policy, not retail politics, remains his strong suit.

In an announcement that had to shock his opponents, especially the Blue and White Party's Benny Gantz, whose chances of being able to form a governing coalition appear to be shrinking along with the once-healthy lead he had over the Likud, the government announced that Netanyahu would be traveling to Moscow for a brief working visit with Russian President Vladimir Putin only five days before Israelis go to the polls.

The initial reaction to the news from some on the left was to claim that Putin was intervening in the election. But while those trying to argue that the prime minister is a puppet of the Russian autocrat are peddling conspiracy theories, those who think Putin would prefer Netanyahu remain in office are not wrong.

As much as there is a lot for Netanyahu and Putin to talk about, the timing of the meeting is politically motivated. The Russians are providing the prime minister with an opportunity to showcase his command of the world stage at a moment when that can only help him with the voters. The only plausible explanation for this is that Putin wants to do Netanyahu a favor.

But the reason for this preference doesn't have anything to do with crackpot theories that assert that Netanyahu is part of an international league of authoritarians in which he and U.S. President Donald Trump, operating under the supervision of Putin, are plotting against democracy. Rather, it is an acknowledgement that the situation in Syria is so dangerous that the Russians are afraid about Israeli policy being directed by an inexperienced leader.

In Netanyahu, they have an adversary who advocates for policies with which they don't agree—such as trying to force Putin's Iranian allies out of Syria, and a commitment to Israel carrying out strikes on Syrian territory aimed at stopping both Tehran and its Hezbollah auxiliaries from accumulating too much power—but whom they trust won't go too far. They worry that Gantz might overreact in a crisis because of the need to answer criticisms from right-wing parties that would be in opposition rather than junior partners in the government as they might be with Netanyahu.

In contrast to the close relations that Netanyahu has with Trump, whose actions have also made it abundantly clear that he favors the prime minister's re-election, Putin doesn't have common goals or interests with Israel except one: avoiding an escalation of the war in Syria. With so much invested there in terms of troop deployments and prestige, the stakes are so high that they think they are better off dealing with the tough customer they already know than having to worry about what a diplomatic novice would do, even one as thoroughly versed in security issues like former Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Gantz. Above all, Putin has come to trust in Netanyahu's innate caution when it comes to deploying Israel's considerable military strength.

Rather than being an example of collusion with Russia—a specious charge that some of those who resent the American efforts to bolster Netanyahu have also raised with respect to current U.S. foreign policy—the fact that both Washington and Moscow agree about their desired outcome in the April 9 elections says a lot more about Netanyahu's deft handling of Israel's foreign policy than anything else.

Although he is routinely blasted in liberal American circles as a hard-liner bent only avoiding peace with the Palestinians, Netanyahu should be acknowledged as the most skillful diplomat ever to lead his country.

One of the most underreported stories in the past 10 years has been the progress made on Netanyahu's watch with respect to foiling efforts to isolate Israel. The prime minister has helped his country achieve breakthroughs with Third World nations in Africa, as well as in Eastern Europe and South America. His achievements also include creating close working relations with Arab nations who were virulent enemies, but now look to the Jewish state as an ally against Iran and Islamist terror groups—something that cannot be underestimated.

A number of these developments are the result of actions that were beyond Israel's power to control, such as President Barack Obama's appeasement of Iran or the Arab Spring protests in 2011 that led to chaos and war in Syria. But there is no doubt that Netanyahu took advantage of the opportunities offered to Israel by events that otherwise presented a clear threat to the country's security.

Many still focus on Netanyahu's terrible relationship with Obama and point to his decision to address U.S. Congress about the dangers of the nuclear deal with Iran at the invitation of the Republicans. But while that speech did more harm than good in terms of persuading Congress to reject the agreement, the breakdown of relations with America during the last administration was the fault of Obama, not Netanyahu's efforts to push

back against a president who wanted more daylight between the two allies and thought he had to “save Israel from itself.”

It remains to be seen what either Trump or Putin will ask in return for these favors if Netanyahu is re-elected. But the prime minister trusts in his ability to talk his way out of those dilemmas once he gets there.

After so many foreign efforts in past elections aimed at defeating him, Netanyahu welcomes international support. He has done his best to cultivate the myth that he is his country’s indispensable man, and his ability to get Trump to recognize Israeli sovereignty on the Golan Heights and Putin to acquiesce to military strikes in Syria reinforces that somewhat fanciful claim. It won’t decide Israel’s election, but both Washington and Moscow prefer Netanyahu’s experience to Gantz’s learning curve.

Netanyahu might not be the only person who can cope with dangerous foes on Israel’s borders and a not-so-friendly power like Russia firmly ensconced in Syria. Still, there’s no denying the value of having someone both Washington and Moscow trust leading the Jewish state. (JNS Apr 2)

---

## **The Challenge of Communication and Presenting the Case for Israel**

By Ben Hecht

In some situations, we aim to do more than convey information; we also hope to motivate others to react as we would. But it’s not so simple.

We forget that often there are often two aspects to communication. One concerns the simple facts, the objective information, which one wishes to transmit. The other concerns the reactions one wishes to generate in those receiving this transmission.

In conveying information, a desire exists that this new knowledge will affect the one receiving this communication. In such situations, we actually do not want to just convey information; we want to also motivate individuals to think, feel and act, in a certain manner, as would be expected in response to this information. What we often do not consider, though, is the depth of distinction that exists between these two objectives.

Simply put, what we often find is that once a person has ensured that certain information has been presented accurately, he or she will feel confident that the desired reaction which he/she expects to occur will flow naturally. There is little or no consideration of the possibility of a different reaction. As such, there is little thought given to whether a further message touching upon the reaction to the information is even necessary.

Our basic assumption and natural inclination are that if we have a specific response to a matter, others, of like mind, will have a similar response. If the information is conveyed correctly, the desired response will be forthcoming. The challenge, however, is that this is not necessarily so.

This, I find, to be a real problem in communication regarding Israel. There are, unfortunately, constant reports reflecting the dire situation facing Israelis as a result of the intentions and actions of terrorist organizations and individual terrorists. Sustained reactions of horror towards these murders and other crimes, as we would expect, do not, however, necessarily follow.

We wonder: Why aren’t there the same reactions that exist in response to terrorist actions in other locales? Yet, we see that the response is different – from people whose reaction we would expect to be otherwise. The reason lies in how this communication is actually being heard.

The further issue lies in that this incongruence is not being properly addressed in our communication.

Upon hearing about acts of terrorism, we expect thoughtful and good people to respond in a certain manner; in this case, with sorrow for this extreme violence being perpetrated against Israeli civilians. It is how we feel and how we expect all decent human beings to respond.

The problem is that we are encountering responses different from that which we would expect, even from otherwise respectable individuals. Rather, their focus is often on how oppressed these agents of violence must be to undertake such acts. Rather than being critical of the terrorist, we find people voicing sympathy for the terrorist and, furthermore, blaming the victim.

It cannot be that all these individuals have simply lost their moral senses. The challenge is actually upon us. We must also communicate the basis for the proper response.

The answer does not lie in simply declaring these people to be inherently against Israel or the Jewish People. What we must first recognize is that such counter-intuitive responses do not come out of nowhere. The realm of criminal psychology does present arguments for a connection between criminal activity and difficult sociological and psychological surroundings. This was the basis, for example, for the development of rehabilitative programs within various penal systems, flowing from a view that criminals can be victims too, and so we must undertake to assist them as well.

Our argument, as such, cannot be to simply ignore, dismiss and/or challenge the theory itself. Decent people do see merit in this theory. The theory, as theory, actually has some basis. Our goal must be to communicate how misapplied this theory is within the context of Israel – which it is!!!

A further, underlying problem is that we now live in a world of sound bites and, with the use of such minimal presentations, any reality can be

skewed. It is, as such, that inappropriate, simplistic and improper explanations which evoke sympathy for the terrorist could gain traction. They can be easily drawn and fabricated.

That there are forces which also spin everything in a manner to indicate the ‘oppression’, the hypothetical cause of the violence, only adds to the frustration.

What needs to be done lies in the world of education. A knowledge of unbiased history, on many levels, would show how ridiculous an assertion it is that this violence against Jews is a product of Israeli oppression. The difficulty is that the proper teaching of the truth demands more than sound bites. It calls for study, time and thought, and a more thorough and broader consideration of what is occurring and what are its roots.

The challenge is determining what we can do, though, within this constraint of sound bites.

It is becoming problematic just to report on the terrorism being perpetrated against Israelis. Rather than dampening the fire, we may actually be flaming it. Our enemies even want us to continue our reports as they can then spin the information as they wish.

Our goal and focus in our communications, therefore, must also include challenges to these improper responses and, especially, the spins. As part of our goal, we have no choice but to enunciate a call for people to go beyond the sound bite. We, however, must also find some way to relay our message within the world of the sound bite.

We must also communicate the basis for an educated response. One well-placed fact can reroute a train of thought or, at least, create a pause, a re-consideration of response. This must be included in our objective. (Nishma Mar 31)

---

## **The Israeli Left is Scared of Democracy** By Doron Nehemia

In November 2018, it was revealed that Labor leader Avi Gabbay’s campaign headquarters was behind fake Facebook accounts, supposedly unaffiliated with the party, that disseminated aggressive propaganda against Yesh Atid Chairman Yair Lapid. Gabbay initially claimed that he had nothing to do with the online slander, but eventually, he confessed his party’s culpability. There was no outcry within the leftist camp, the media turned a blind eye to the entire matter, and Lapid didn’t file a complaint with the police.

Yet, lo and behold, we were hit over the head with headlines about “research” pointing to a comprehensive “conspiracy” aimed at swaying public opinion via online “bots.” The amateur nature of this journalism was quickly exposed, yet despite the proof that some of these alleged “bots” were, in fact, actual people, their accounts were closed without any discernible justification. A direct line links the bot report and banning right-wing Twitter users, the efforts to erase right-wing voices on Facebook, the so-called Israel Hayom bill, and the cries of incitement every time legitimate criticism is voiced against the High Court of Justice. It’s always the same attempt by the Left to prevent a pluralistic debate through the silencing and demonization of others.

In the past, it was easy to silence people. Right-wing media outlets were few and far between and vulnerable, and the court even helped the Left shut them down. For example, Channel 7 was shuttered by the High Court. It was never a problem, therefore, to create a false impression of consensus, which was the case for instance during the Gaza disengagement.

Today, however, as social media platforms have risen to prominence and information bubbles to the surface, McCarthyism is more difficult and complex to execute. The effervescent nature of Israeli democracy is a nuisance to those who until recently monopolized public opinion. In the past, the media elites were able to suffocate pluralism of thought and deflect criticism from the desired views. Today they must cope with other opinions. Consequently, traditional hegemonic forces sense that they are losing their grip on public opinion and that the “wrong” people who think “wrongly” are gaining a hold.

So how do they proceed? They transition from attempts to silence entire entities (the Israel Hayom bill) to silencing private individuals; behold the age of micro-McCarthyism. We are thus witnessing more individual initiatives to silence voices (reporting others on Facebook) or more institutionalized initiatives, such as the disgraceful bot report. Instead of contending with the arguments, they stigmatize an entire camp, which is presented as a herd of absent-minded “bots,” in an attempt to emphasize who controls the public discourse and who is allowed to direct it.

The bots report is a direct continuation of the efforts to deny the Right any significant inroads into the media and other systems that shape opinion, in the fear that the wrong ideas will resonate. The bottom line is that the Israeli Left isn’t really afraid of fake online profiles, or “bots” for that matter. It is afraid of democracy. Like any good Bolshevik, it doesn’t want to hear what the public has to say, it wants to tell the public what to do. (Israel Hayom Apr 4)

---