



Commentary...

The Right still Rules in Israel. Will it Continue? By Jonathan S. Tobin

Is Benjamin Netanyahu's dominance of Israeli politics the product of a consensus he helped build, or is he merely a convenient beneficiary of forces that were beyond his control? Like the old question about the chicken and the egg, it hardly matters. The only thing that does matter is that in the wake of Tuesday's election, the right's hold on Israeli politics remains undiminished.

This is something about which the liberal mainstream media in the United States and Israel continues to gnash its teeth. Left-wing pundits have been supplying the public with a steady diet of laments about the impending destruction of Israeli democracy ever since Netanyahu returned to the prime minister's office 10 years ago, and they increase in volume and hysteria with each of his succeeding electoral triumphs.

But the basic math of Israeli politics remains unchanged. Parties linked to the disastrous legacy of Oslo or the subsequent Gaza-withdrawal fiasco have no chance of winning an election. To the extent that a viable opposition to Netanyahu and his Likud Party emerged this year in the form of former Israel Defense Forces' Chief of Staff Benny Gantz and his Blue and White Party, it was only because it was careful to voice no opposition to the prime minister's policies.

Netanyahu's supporters still insisted that Blue and White was a "leftist" party in spite of the presence of people like former Likud defense minister Moshe Ya'alon in its ranks. But that just shows that the Israeli left, which once dominated the country's politics, has disintegrated. While American liberals cling to the myth that "land for peace" is a viable formula, most Israelis disabused themselves of that destructive fairy tale a long time ago.

Netanyahu may be triumphant today, but he also knows that the corruption charges that hang over his head won't be wished away even if he's better off facing them with a mandate from the voters. Israelis who cast their ballots for Likud and other slates that were pledged to support him, did so not merely in spite of those accusations but because many feel they are part of an effort to destroy him on the part of the country's legal and media establishment.

Yet if Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit goes ahead with indictments after another hearing later this year, Netanyahu will be cornered in spite of the good economy and consensus about security issues. At that point—and since resignation and going quietly away is not something anyone can believe he will consider—Netanyahu will have two choices. He can seek to evade the problem by having his allies pass a law giving him immunity from prosecution in office, or brazen it out and insist on staying on even while facing a trial that could lead to imprisonment.

The former tactic will not only bring down on his head even more opprobrium than he's already faced, but probably also be struck down by the Israeli Supreme Court. The latter will almost certainly bring on a coalition crisis that will inevitably lead to early elections in which Gantz and the Blue and White—assuming that he can actually mold that fractious alliance of disparate elements into a party that can sustain itself—would have a huge advantage.

That leads to two questions about the durability of the right-wing consensus that rules Israeli politics. One is whether it is strong enough to withstand the spectacle of a prime minister on trial. The other is whether it can be sustained under a different, less able and charismatic Likud leader.

Perhaps this election—conducted as it was in an unprecedented fashion in the shadow of corruption charges against Netanyahu—gives us the answer to the first question. If his followers are prepared to serenade him with the "Bibi, melech Yisrael" ("king of Israel") that Likudniks once sang for the party's founder, Menachem Begin, then perhaps they will be similarly undaunted by actual indictments.

There are no natural successors to Netanyahu within his party because he (and reportedly his wife, Sara), have chased all potential rivals out of the Likud. But that doesn't mean that some of his subordinates don't dream of

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the post-Netanyahu era, even if none of them dares to raise such a possibility in public.

In particular, Gideon Sa'ar—a once-rising star within the Likud who eventually ran afoul of the prime minister, and then withdrew from politics for a few years before

returning to run and help organize the party's victory this year—is one of the few people in the party who can be said to have a real following. He, among others, is waiting patiently for Netanyahu to leave.

But could someone like Sa'ar or any other Likud leader pose as another indispensable man who embodies the nation's hopes and fears as ably as Netanyahu does? At that, could a centrist like Gantz—whether a leftist in disguise or not—rearrange the map of Israeli politics in such a way as to not only elect a new prime minister unencumbered by scandal, but also encompass what might be a sea change about other issues? Maybe. But it's also possible that Palestinian intransigence would wind up sinking any challenger to the right the way they did to Labor Party leaders in past elections.

As long as Netanyahu is still standing, the Israeli right doesn't have to worry about this. But anyone who watched his early-morning victory speech had to notice that he was more emotional and reflective this time than at past such events. Was he wondering whether this was going to be his last time celebrating an election triumph?

Only he knows the answer to that question. But sooner or later, the end of his political story will come. When it does, a true test of whether the right-wing political consensus can endure will follow. (JNS Apr 10)

How to Destroy Jewish and Democratic Values in One Easy Step

By Evelyn Gordon

Distorting the meaning of language is a seductive but dangerous game. It's seductive because it provides enormous short-term benefits. It's dangerous because, as two recent examples show, it can ultimately eviscerate fundamental values.

One example comes from this week's Israeli election, in which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud Party actually gained seats despite multiple corruption cases against him. A survey published in February by a Haifa University political scientist explains why: Most voters for Likud and allied parties don't believe the allegations because they don't trust the legal system. Fully 65 percent of Likud voters and 75 percent of haredi voters think law-enforcement agencies are simply trying to oust Netanyahu.

On one level, this is shocking. But on another, it's not shocking at all because the Israeli left has spent decades successfully subverting the concept of "the rule of law" for its own political benefit.

For instance, Israel's Supreme Court repeatedly overturns government policies not because they violate any law, but because the justices deem them "unreasonable." Whether or not a policy is reasonable is a question other democracies leave to the voters. But the left has successfully branded all efforts to curb such judicial policy interventions as "contrary to the rule of law," and thereby managed to stymie proposed reforms: Most legislators don't want to "sabotage the rule of law."

Moreover, in almost every Western democracy, the executive and legislative branches choose Supreme Court justices; only in Israel do sitting justices have veto power over the choice of their successors. Yet the left has branded every attempt to align Israel's judicial appointments system with this Western norm as "contrary to the rule of law," and thereby successfully staved off change.

Israel is also unique among democracies in treating the attorney general's views as binding on the government. Thanks to a 1993 Supreme Court ruling, whenever the attorney general opposes a policy, he's entitled to represent his own position in court rather than the government's, thereby leaving the government's position unrepresented and ensuring that it loses cases by default. Letting an unelected attorney general dictate to an elected government is patently undemocratic and preventing any group, even the government, from defending itself in court violates a fundamental democratic right. Yet leftists have successfully branded this, too, as "the rule of law"; consequently, attempted reforms have repeatedly failed.

Finally, there's the unequal application of laws, as epitomized by a

pre-election ruling that disqualified a Jewish Knesset candidate but nixed the disqualification of an Arab party, Balad. The law lists three grounds for disqualification: inciting to racism, rejecting Israel's character as a Jewish and democratic state, and supporting armed struggle against Israel. Balad, as the court itself has acknowledged, openly rejects Israel's Jewish character. Several of its MKs have also faced criminal proceedings for abetting anti-Israel terror. Yet the Supreme Court chose to ignore all this, thereby effectively declaring the law a dead letter except when used against Jews.

So here's how your average rightist voter understands the rule of law today: It means that unelected legal officials—justices and attorneys general—can veto any government decision, thereby making a mockery of democratic elections. It means that laws meant to apply to Jews and Arabs alike are only enforceable against Jews. It means letting justices select their own successors, keeping the court ideologically monochromatic. In short, it's just a trick for ensuring that the left can continue imposing its views no matter how many elections it loses.

That trick has successfully thwarted all legislative efforts at reform. But the price is that many rightists now distrust and despise "the rule of law" to such an extent that they dismiss pending indictments against a prime minister as just another attempt by the legal establishment to subvert democracy.

This is a tragedy because the rule of law, in its original meaning, is an essential foundation for democracy. Inter alia, it means that the bounds of legitimate action are defined not by the ruler's whims but by laws whose content is public knowledge; that those laws apply equally to all; and that disputes are settled in court according to those laws rather than by force. In short, it's a shared framework that protects the individual and enables diverse groups to live together.

The second example is last week's National Council of Young Israel gala. When a speaker mentioned "the leftist progressive tikkun olam ideology," the American Modern Orthodox audience booed.

On one level, this is shocking since tikkun olam just means "repairing the world," and Jews have always believed that Judaism is supposed to make the world better in some fashion. Indeed, the Bible itself says so repeatedly, from God's promise to Abraham that "through thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" to Isaiah's dictum that Israel should be "a light unto the nations."

Haredi Jews may believe that doing so requires scrupulously obeying Jewish law, while Reform Jews may believe it requires adopting progressive policies. But Jews across the spectrum should be able to say, "Fine, we agree on the goal of improving the world; now let's argue about the means."

Yet those boos weren't actually shocking because Jewish leftists have spent decades trying to conflate tikkun olam with a particular set of progressive policies, such that anyone opposing those policies ipso facto opposes tikkun olam. And as evidenced by that speaker's choice of words, they've succeeded: Even their Jewish opponents now view tikkun olam as a "leftist progressive ideology."

But by appropriating tikkun olam as their own exclusive property, leftists have discredited the entire concept; many Jews now see it as a stand-in for ideas that they (and many other reasonable people of goodwill) consider destructive. That's a massive own goal. But it's also a tragedy for the Jewish people, which has lost a shared moral language that could have been a unifying factor.

The left's subversion of language has thus wreaked long-lasting harm on both Israel and the Jewish people. And all of us will be paying the price for many years to come. (JNS Apr 10)

The Well-Financed War on Birthright Israel By Becca Wertman

The war on Birthright continues. IfNotNow protested outside of Birthright's New York City headquarters on April 5, demanding that Birthright make institutional changes to its programming.

These events follow weeks of threats from IfNotNow, which is bankrolled by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and dozens of news articles from activists and activist-journalists over the past few months detailing IfNotNow participants who were removed from their Birthright trips for "coordinated plans to ruin the experience for others in order to promote a specific agenda." All of these actions come after a series of well-publicized stunts (or "walk offs") attacking Birthright and claiming that the organization had failed to focus on the Palestinian narrative of the occupation.

For the uninitiated, Birthright Israel offers free 10-day trips to the Jewish state for young Jewish adults, dedicated to enabling them to explore their Jewish identity and build a connection to Israel.

Why are these groups going after Birthright? What's wrong with educating young Jews about their heritage and homeland?

Birthright Israel is a remarkable program; as a participant and staff

member of four trips, I should know. The program has managed to engage a wide spectrum of Jewish youth— attracting everyone from the secular and unaffiliated to religious, from straight to LGBTQ, from elite athletes to those with physical handicaps. Birthright has engaged more than 650,000 young Jewish adults from 67 countries, including places like Poland and Uganda.

Yet some groups are threatened by its success—and not because they run competing programs. Rather, a positive connection to Judaism and the Jewish state imperils their narrow-minded politics. They therefore seek to hijack Birthright in order to advance their own agendas—namely, to exploit Diaspora Jewry to fight Israeli policy in the West Bank.

There are various other groups behind the current "anti-Birthright" campaign, including the Israeli group Breaking the Silence, which enjoys the largesse of a variety of European governments; and the New Israel Fund, which both supports organizations involved in the campaign and whose official published an opinion piece targeting Birthright.

And while anti-Birthright activists might claim to be part of a grassroots effort, the hundreds of thousands of taxpayer funds say otherwise. For instance, late last year, the Jerusalem-based research institute NGO Monitor (of which I am the managing editor) revealed that in 2018, the Dutch government provided \$218,000 to Breaking the Silence, including for its efforts "to encourage diaspora Jewish communities to voice their opposition to the occupation." During the grant period, the group was a key partner in the war on Birthright—taking those participants who had "walked off" on politically one-sided tours of the West Bank.

It is deeply problematic that groups like Breaking the Silence and IfNotNow are trying to make Birthright about politics, something it is not. Even though the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is by definition not the focus of the trip, it not only undoubtedly comes up in a busload of 40 Americans (or Canadians, Europeans, etc.) combined with eight Israeli soldiers. It is also part of the educational curriculum—something that critics simply decide to leave out of their anti-Israel rhetoric.

But that is apparently not enough for those who are against the positivity that permeates the trip. Participants are encouraged to learn about the issues firsthand for themselves; Birthright emphasizes that the conflict is complex; and at the end of the day, the trip merely serves as a basic introduction to inspire a deeper experience of Judaism and Israel.

Anti-Birthright activists are interested in trashing the program's content. They fundamentally want to alter the core of Birthright as an apolitical program, bringing it into the realm of the conflict and making sure it echoes their preferred political positions.

In the meantime, Birthright should not bow down to the pressure. It is Birthright's prerogative to determine its own educational curriculum—one that has a proven history of success. The fact that a handful of participants are walking off or disrupting trips—with the help of funds from RBF, NIF and European governments—is minuscule in comparison.

IfNotNow and the others might not like Birthright's agenda, so a logical solution would be for activists to put their money where their mouths are and develop their own alternative trips to Israel. However, the intensity of the attacks against Birthright suggests that these groups actually lack a market for their politically charged campaign. Without the ability to generate grassroots support of their own, they appear to be threatened by Birthright's progress and seek to destroy it.

For those considering going on a Birthright Israel trip, the challenge at hand is to go with the understanding of what it is and what it is not—a free 10-day trip funded by generous philanthropists, the Israeli government and the Jewish Agency.

No one is trying to hide anything except those deceiving you with well-funded divisive political campaigns cloaked in "progressive" language. (JNS Apr 10)

The writer is managing editor and Canada Liaison at NGO Monitor.

For Israel, a New EastMed Friendship — With US Support

By George N. Tzogopoulos

Cyprus, Greece, and Israel are developing a solid partnership in the Eastern Mediterranean because they share similar interests and values, and are reliable allies. They are becoming — even more than partners — friends. The sixth tripartite summit, which took place in Jerusalem only three months after the one in Beersheba, put the harmonious nature of the collaboration on display.

From the beginning, the US has favored the forging of a democratic bloc in the Eastern Mediterranean among the three countries. In recent months, that support has become official. Ambassador David Friedman attended the Beersheba meeting last December, and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo attended the summit in Jerusalem. The American role in the trilateral foreign policy scheme has been clearly institutionalized.

The Americans' interest is explained by the ongoing natural gas

discoveries in the Levantine Basin. Last month, for example, ExxonMobil found another gas-bearing reservoir, Glaucus, off the shores of Cyprus. These discoveries can provide the US with not only business opportunities but also energy security. Washington demands that its partners maintain a diversification policy. The more Western countries import from what America sees as safe sources, such as the basin, the more they will reduce their dependency on Russia.

Discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean are hampered, however, by Turkey's aggressive policy. It is not unusual for Ankara either to organize military exercises in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Cyprus or to disrupt drilling operations of foreign companies, such as Italy's ENI. That is why Pompeo's presence in Jerusalem held special meaning. The initial agreement on the potential construction of the EastMed pipeline frustrates Ankara, because Turkey will be excluded from the proposed corridor.

There is consensus in Washington that it is no longer possible to take Turkey's Western foreign policy orientation for granted. The decision by President Erdogan to buy S-400 missiles from Russia supports this reassessment. For the time being, Erdogan is insisting that Turkey will proceed with the purchase and defy American pressure. US support for the EastMed pipeline can function as a warning to Ankara to normalize its behavior.

The project will be very expensive and difficult. Indeed, Italy — contrary to its previous commitments — now appears hesitant to join it. Still, as long as the US advocates for the project's realization, obstacles will be overcome.

Irrespective of Erdogan's choices, Cyprus, Greece, and Israel will continue to deepen their cooperation. This juncture is critical. NATO is placing particular emphasis on dealing with challenges in the South, and the Mediterranean Dialogue of the Alliance is being revitalized in that context. Israel's contribution can be beneficial for all the countries involved. These include Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia.

Greece and Cyprus will have the opportunity to remind their partners in the EU why the security of Israel should be a fundamental priority. It is certainly bizarre that Brussels envisages playing an active role in the Middle East when it regularly ignores the sensitivities of the only democratic state in the region. Ironically, the terrorist attacks taking place in Europe in recent years underline the need to study the Israeli model in coping with the problem.

The three countries can benefit from the good momentum and discuss the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the progress of Chinese investments. Both Greece and Israel are of high interest to Chinese companies. The Shanghai International Port Group (SIPG), which signed an agreement with Israeli authorities to operate the Haifa Port from 2020 onward, is teaming up with China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO) to promote container shipping traffic. In a period when China is largely seen as an adversary in the West, COSCO's successful investment in the Piraeus Port challenges this view.

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Trump's Love Affair with Israel and the Jewish People

By Shmuley Boteach

As a Jew who travels extensively, I have found that being open about my Jewishness can be lonely. By refusing to make compromises on things like wearing a kippah in public in countries like France, the UK, Germany and New Zealand, more and more stares come my way in a world where antisemitism is growing and Israel is vilified. Even the American Jewish community is feeling more and more isolated, as antisemites now openly walk the halls of Congress, and parties that have previously been stalwart foes of antisemitism like the Democrats, cannot muster the moral courage to condemn Jew-hatred specifically and unequivocally.

It was for that reason that I sat in awe this weekend and watched as the president of the United States — and just two hours later the vice president — spoke at the Republican Jewish Coalition and vowed their unalloyed support of the Jewish people and Israel, and their determination to fight enemies of the Jewish people to the bone.

Hearing the most powerful man on Earth acknowledge the rise of Jew-hatred all over the globe, and his declaration of war against it, helped to greatly assuage Jewish feelings of isolation and abandonment. US President Donald Trump told us that we're not in this fight alone. There will be no modern Masada. There is no Fortress Israel. The most powerful nation on Earth is by Israel's side.

Much has been made of Trump's failure to fully condemn neo-Nazis in Charlottesville. Far less has been mentioned of how the president has made up for it in spades, becoming easily the most pro-Israel president in history — and someone who brought the America-Israel relationship to unimaginable heights.

Trump fulfilled his campaign promises to pull the US out of the Iran nuclear deal, to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and to move our embassy. Now he has also recognized Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. Israelis and many Orthodox Jews recognize his contributions to the safety and security of Israel, yet most American Jews remain hostile toward him. I have seen Jews liken him to Hitler, and refer to him as an uncommon racist and an abomination to values.

These are often the same people who supported president Obama's catastrophic Iranian nuclear deal, where \$150 billion was given to Ayatollah Khomeini — a real Hitler aspirant. They are so desperate for peace agreements that they are prepared to sacrifice Jerusalem to the Palestinians and the Golan Heights to the Syrians.

There is little I can say to those who still fail to recognize how disastrous the nuclear deal was, given our knowledge of Iran's continued steps toward developing a nuclear bomb, their ongoing sponsorship of terrorism, their development of ballistic missiles, and their destabilizing actions in the Middle East that threaten the US and Israel. Obama assured us that making a deal with Iran and paying them tens of billions of dollars would suddenly cause the mullahs to reverse their hatred of the West and genocidal intentions toward Israel. Proponents of the agreement still won't admit that Obama's calculations on this issue wouldn't have passed a first-grade math test.

Many of these Jews are also mired in the fantasies created by the Oslo agreements: that a two-state solution is possible and that there is a Palestinian peace partner. Even Yitzhak Rabin was not prepared to give the Palestinians a state — and that was at a time when there was still some hope the Palestinians would agree to a settlement which would recognize the existence of a Jewish state beside a Palestinian one. Now, most Israelis recognize that this is impossible in the near future, if ever. The never-ending barrage of rockets from Gaza following Israel's evacuation has shown the folly of the land-for-peace formula, as well as those Jewish leaders who humiliated themselves and betrayed Israel by cozying up to Hamas's foremost funder, the emir of Qatar.

But while the world turns virulently against Israel, and a tsunami of antisemitism is unleashed around the globe, America has a president who will not feed Palestinian fantasies of dividing Jerusalem. America has a president who has made clear that the US will not subsidize Palestinian terrorism and obstructionism. America has a president who recognizes that the route to peace is not one-sided pressure on Israel, and that the Palestinians must agree to recognize and live in peace beside the Jewish state. And America has a president who understands that radical Islam is a threat to Western civilization and is unafraid to say so, unlike Obama's comical "violent extremism," which was an affront to both its victims and common sense.

The critics of Trump on grounds of character forget that public achievement always trumps private action.

In Christianity, character is what matters most — that is, whether a person is righteous and will be saved. Judaism, however, takes an action-based approach to leadership — you look at what a man or woman does as opposed to how they comport themselves in their personal life. Christianity focuses on personal salvation and whether sinners are going to heaven; Jews are concerned about world redemption and perfecting the world, even on the part of imperfect actors.

It is not that character is unimportant, but Jews focus on themselves and character refinement exclusively for 10 days out of 365 — during the Days of Awe between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The rest of the year, perfecting the world around us — even as we ourselves remain highly flawed — is the focus.

Bill Clinton's failure as president was not the Monica Lewinsky affair, but rather a refusal to intervene in the Rwandan genocide, where 900,000 poor Africans were hacked to death while the president refused to meet even once with his senior staff to prevent it. Likewise, Obama's shame in never once attacking Assad for gassing Arab Muslim children will haunt his legacy forever, even as he himself remains a man whose personal life may be beyond reproach.

The relative importance of character is reflected in the Bible, where flawed human beings engaged in questionable behavior, and yet they are remembered for their actions that influenced the future of the Jewish people. We do not ignore that Jacob favored Joseph, bringing rank dysfunction into his family; or that David had a relationship with Bathsheba; or that Moses disobeyed God and was denied entrance to the Holy Land. However, without Jacob, there would be no Jewish people. Without Moses, there would be no Jewish liberation and no Jewish faith. And without David, there would be no Jerusalem, no Jewish sovereignty, and no Jewish state.

America's leaders have all been flawed, but we remember them more for their deeds than their character. Think about Thomas Jefferson and his relationship with Sally Hemings. Our third president fathered at least six children with his slave, yet we remember him as the author, quite literally,

of our independence. Similarly, we do not think of Franklin D. Roosevelt as the man who died in Warm Springs, Georgia, with his mistress, Lucy Mercer Rutherford by his side in a rendezvous arranged by his daughter, Anna – but as the man who defeated Hitler. We do not remember Kennedy’s infidelities canceling out his courage in staring down the Soviets in the Cuban Missile Crisis, starting us on our path to the moon, and giving voice to America as a beacon of democracy.

This is not to say that Donald Trump should be immune from criticism. But he must be given credit for striking the tyrant Assad, pushing back against Iranian genocidal aspirations and, most of all, standing with the Jewish people while the rest of the world once again falls prey to the world’s oldest hatred. (Jerusalem Post Apr 10)

Recognition of the Golan Is a Practical and Moral Imperative

By Martin Sherman

In issuing his recent presidential decree recognizing Israel’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights, Donald Trump followed the commendable policy pattern he has set of breaking the patterns of his predecessors.

Much like his decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, Trump’s decision was, on the face of it, little more than a recognition of long-standing realities. After all, the disputed Golan Heights have been under Israeli control for far longer than they have ever been under the control of Syria. Indeed, more than double the years.

But the decision was more than that. It was a moral and practical imperative.

Readers will recall that Israel took control of the Golan Heights, which tower above virtually the whole of the north of the country, in the 1967 Six-Day War, when a combined force of several Arab armies, including Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, attempted to obliterate the Jewish state. Until then, the Syrians had used their topographical superiority to regularly harass rural Israeli communities in the low-lying regions around the shores of the Sea of Galilee, frequently inflicting casualties among farmers and damage to agriculture and infrastructure.

After bitter fighting, the 1967 Israeli victory put an end to the Syrian attacks. It also ended Damascus’ 21-year control of the Golan, which it had held since Syrian independence (1946).

Disturbingly, despite the critical strategic value of the Golan, successive Israel leaders, including Benjamin Netanyahu, fell prey to the allure of the perilous “land-for-peace” formula, and have been tempted to enter into negotiations over their return to Syria.

Fortunately, it was only obdurate Syrian rejectionism that prevented Israel from committing a strategic error of epic proportions. Indeed, just how grievous a mistake that would have been was revealed with the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011.

It was then that all illusions were dispelled as to the true nature of the Assad regime and its utter dependence on Iran. Until then, many thought of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, a Western-educated ophthalmologist, as a moderate reformer who could be a genuine partner in forging a viable peace with Israel in exchange for relinquishing the Golan Heights to him.

The civil war laid bare not only the unspeakable brutality of Assad and his regime, but also the no less vicious forces opposing him.

Thus, had Israel relinquished the Golan to Assad prior to 2011, it would have faced grim prospects, no matter who won. If, on the one hand, Assad and his Iranian masters prevailed (as they seem to have done), Israel would have had to contend with not only the specter of regular Syrian military forces being deployed in this critically sensitive area, but Iranian proxies (such as Hezbollah-like units) and even detachments of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps themselves.

Accordingly, the Trump decree not only reflected a sound commonsense acknowledgement of a half-century long reality, but also recognition that post-2011 events have made any notion of relinquishing the Golan to Assad — and therefore, to his Iranian patrons — unthinkable.

Despite this, the decision immediately provoked a shocked response in corners of the West, as well as outrage across the Arab and Muslim world. Dire warnings were made as to how detrimental and destabilizing it would be, and how it would spark renewed violence in the region — very reminiscent of similar warnings following Trump’s decisions to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, to move the US embassy to the city, and to pull out of the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran.

None of these past warnings proved true. And it is unlikely that any of the new ones will either. Among other things, this is due to one other highly-controversial and fiercely condemned component of Trump’s “maverick” conduct of foreign policy: the decision to reinstate sanctions against Tehran. More than anything, this has debilitated the capacity of the Iranian regime to propagate (and certainly to proliferate) its destabilizing mischief across the globe.

In light of growing domestic disaffection at the deteriorating economic conditions and increasing criticism of its military adventurism abroad, it

seems unlikely that Tehran will be eager to devote dwindling resources to a retaliatory initiative that almost certainly will provoke a costly punitive response.

So, perhaps once again, Trump’s decisive initiative on the Golan is likely to validate the well-known dictum: “Fortune favors the bold.” (Algemeiner Apr 10)

We Need Another Reagan Plan for Israel By Stephen M. Flatow

Since Ronald Reagan is by far the president most admired by Republicans in modern times, perhaps GOP leaders and members of Congress should remind the current president of Reagan’s long-forgotten proposal for Israeli-Arab peace.

I’m not talking about the awful plan that was foisted upon Reagan in 1982 by U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz and other senior officials, whose attitude towards Israel was lukewarm at best.

No, I’m referring to the amazing speech that then-presidential nominee Reagan delivered to the B’nai B’rith International convention in Washington, D.C., on Sept. 3, 1980.

Reagan denounced U.S. President Jimmy Carter for undermining Israel’s control of Jerusalem (Carter had supported a U.N. resolution calling it “occupied territory”). He criticized Carter for providing advanced weapons to Arab dictators. He accused Carter of “weakening Israel” by trying to “force” Israel back to the precarious pre-1967 lines. Reagan also accused Carter of committing yet another “major foreign-policy blunder” by inviting the Soviet Union to participate in Arab-Israeli negotiations.

Reagan also strongly challenged Carter for “refusing to brand the PLO a terrorist organization.” The Republican nominee said he had “no hesitation” in calling the PLO terrorists.

“We live in a world in which any band of thugs clever enough to get the word ‘liberation’ into its name can thereupon murder school children and have its deeds considered glamorous and glorious,” said Reagan. “Terrorists are not guerrillas, or commandos, or freedom-fighters or anything else. They are terrorists and they should be identified as such. If others wish to deal with them, establish diplomatic relations with them, let it be on their heads. And let them be willing to pay the price of appeasement.”

Then came what I would argue was the most significant part of the speech.

“Israel and Jordan are the two Palestinian states envisioned and authorized by the United States,” Reagan said. “Jordan is now recognized as sovereign in some 80 percent of the old territory of Palestine.”

Therefore, he suggested, the Palestinian Arab refugee issue could be solved through “assimilation in Jordan, designated by the U.N. as the Arab-Palestinian state.”

What Reagan was saying was something that every historian of the Middle East and every so-called “expert” on Israel knows but is afraid to say: Throughout history, the Land of Israel always included the areas on both sides of the Jordan River. The British Mandate for Palestine, as decreed by the League of Nations in 1920 (and subsequently endorsed by the United States), likewise treated the entire territory as a single, indivisible unit.

In other words, Reagan was pointing out that the claim by the Palestinian Arabs that they are stateless—and therefore, in need of a state—is a fraud. An Arab state was already established in almost 80 percent (to be precise, it was 78 percent) of Palestine when the British created the Kingdom of Trans-Jordan in 1922. They conjured up the name “Trans-Jordan” out of thin air. No such kingdom had ever previously existed. They could just as easily have called it East Palestine. Or Atlantis.

Reagan understood that the demand to create a Palestinian state in Judea and Samaria is a demand for creating a second Palestinian state. And Reagan opposed doing that—because the Palestinian Arabs already have a state in most of the territory, and because creating a second state in Israel’s backyard would reduce the Jewish state to just nine miles wide. That’s not even as wide as the Bronx.

Reagan’s audience at the B’nai B’rith convention that evening interrupted him with applause more than 30 times that evening and gave him three standing ovations. They were listening to words of unparalleled truth and power, and they knew it.

So please, Mr. Trump, before you unveil your much discussed Mideast peace plan, take a moment to consider what your most illustrious and beloved predecessor had to say on the subject. Nearly 40 years have passed since Reagan’s truly historic speech, but his words still ring as true as ever. (JNS Apr 11)
