



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*

These are just a few examples, but they're critical insofar as they represent a level of commitment to Israel that should earn widespread Jewish appreciation. Trump's record isn't perfect, but he certainly doesn't deserve rabbis refusing to participate in his High Holiday call.

Commentary...

President Trump's Inspirational Words on Israel and the New Year

By Shmuley Boteach

Before the Sabbath, I participated in President Trump's conference call with Jewish leaders for the new year. The invitation said that the President would "send well wishes for the upcoming holidays" and then move on to "discuss his administration's progress on issues of interest to the Jewish community."

The president was introduced by his son-in-law and senior adviser, Jared Kushner. He told the participants that no president had been more supportive of Israel than Trump — and that Trump would always be a true friend of the Jewish people.

He also asserted that "anyone [who] knows the President understands that he takes great pride in having a Jewish daughter and Jewish grandchildren." A president with a Jewish grandchild has no precedent in our nation's history. Being told of the president's immense pride in his daughter, who converted to Judaism, and grandchildren during an official White House briefing has no precedent.

The president then took to the phone, and wished all those on the call, "Shana tova." He went on to point out how the Jewish tradition of "taking time each year to rededicate your lives to the sacred values" of Judaism, "strengthens our nation and inspires us all."

Trump expressed his "deep admiration" for the Jewish people, who had "endured unthinkable persecution." He then recognized and honored the presence of Holocaust survivors who were on the call, telling them of the "lasting inspiration" that Americans draw from their perseverance despite having "witnessed evil beyond human comprehension." He thanked them for telling their stories, which "help us to confront evil in our world."

President Trump then expressed his firm commitment to Israel, pointing out that his connection ran far deeper than our vital security-interests, but were also rooted in our shared values. He said that Israel, to him, represented "resilience in the face of oppression" and "democracy in the face of violence."

Trump referenced his support of Israel at the UN, and particularly his administration's successful campaign to have the international body rescind its latest biased report against Israel, an action that he harshly termed "horrible." He promised to help direct international attention toward the "real threats to our security, such as Iran, Hezbollah and ISIS."

On a personal level, too, he assured us: "I love Israel."

It was a deeply encouraging call, filled with statements of unambiguous and unconditional connection to Israel and the Jewish people.

This pre-Rosh Hashanah call has been a White House tradition since the Obama era. This year, some Jewish leaders decided not to participate. Graham Roth, a spokesman for the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, declared that "Reform rabbis, along with Reconstructionist and Conservative rabbis, decided to forgo hosting the annual High Holiday call with the president this year." The decision, he pointed out, had not been made "lightly," but was "necessary" following "the president's lack of moral leadership in the wake of Charlottesville..."

Here, I must disagree.

The president's response to the events in Charlottesville was, in my opinion, inadequate, and on some level, dubious. Even if there were extremist elements on "both sides," only one of those sides was promoting a white supremacist and racist ideology that led to the murder of six million Jews, among many other horrible things. The two ends of this stick simply cannot be brought together for comparison.

Still, the president's mis-step, which I publicly criticized, does not change what has been an incredibly strong record of support for the Jewish people and Israel.

From his time as a candidate, Trump has championed the Jewish state. No president fought for Israel at the UN in quite the way Trump has, with his phenomenal representative Nicky Haley. Trump was also the first president to visit the Western Wall, which had shockingly never happened before — not even during the eras of Clinton or Bush. Trump has also put pressure on countries such as Qatar to cease their financing of Hamas terror. With regard to the other major terror financiers, Mahmoud Abbas and his Palestinian Authority, Trump reportedly screamed at Mahmoud Abbas for having tricked him with false promises.

The most ironic part of all is that this comes just before Rosh Hashanah and the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. On these days, we as a people reflect on our own records. We ask repeatedly throughout the long prayer service that God acknowledge not only our misdeeds, but our acts of goodness and kindness. We ask that he understand our struggles and lend us an open ear.

This year, we'll repeat that message again. But it's not enough to say it. We have to internalize it and judge others the way that we ourselves hope to be judged.

President Trump deserves recognition and gratitude for his stalwart support for the Jewish state at a time when its enemies continue to call for its destruction. Those who disagree, which is their right, should, at the very least, give him a chance to be heard. (Algemeiner Sep 17)

Israeli Courts Shield Hamas Officials from Consequences

By Evelyn Gordon

When Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addresses the UN General Assembly on Tuesday, he'll undoubtedly devote part of his speech to the need to fight terrorist organizations. What he probably won't mention is that in Israel, the fight is often hamstrung by the Supreme Court's out-of-control judicial activism, as evidenced by last week's mind-boggling ruling denying the government the right to revoke the Israeli residency of people serving in the Palestinian legislature or cabinet on behalf of Hamas.

In 2006, three Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem were elected to the Palestinian parliament on behalf of the Hamas-affiliated Change and Reform party, while a fourth was appointed to the Palestinian cabinet on behalf of that party. Israel responded by revoking their Israeli residency rights.

To most people, this would sound like a no-brainer. Many democracies view serving in a foreign government as grounds for revocation of citizenship because holding a policy-level position in one country's government is considered to require a level of commitment to that country, which conflicts with one's loyalty to the other country. Indeed, both America and Israel have such rules for their own citizens in policy-level positions; that's why, for instance, when Michael Oren became ambassador to the U.S., he had to forfeit his American citizenship, despite the fact that America and Israel are close allies.

But these four Palestinians weren't just serving in a foreign government; they were doing so on behalf of Hamas — a terrorist organization sworn to Israel's destruction. This, as the Israeli government correctly argued in court, constituted a massive "breach of trust" toward Israel.

Yet the court, in a 6-3 ruling, decided otherwise. Although the Entry into Israel Law allows the government to revoke anyone's residency rights "at its discretion," it said the law shouldn't be used to revoke their residency for "breach of trust." Why? Because most East Jerusalem Palestinians were born in Israel and had lived there all their lives, so they deserve greater protection than migrants, who have previously lived elsewhere and whose roots in Israel are therefore shallower.

That East Jerusalem Palestinians merit greater protection than, say, labor migrants, is obviously true. Israel formally annexed East Jerusalem back in 1967 so, logically, most of them should be citizens rather than permanent residents. That they aren't is due to a unique catch-22: Israel cannot unilaterally grant them citizenship without outraging the international community, which wants them to be citizens of a future Palestinian state.

Most East Jerusalem Palestinians are reluctant to exercise their right to apply for citizenship because doing so is viewed by other Palestinians as treason against the Palestinian cause. The result is an entire class of permanent residents who, as the court rightly said, deserve to be treated more like citizens than permanent residents in many respects.

But in this particular case, the court's otherwise valid distinction is completely irrelevant. After all, the case wasn't about ordinary East Jerusalem residents, who, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, could reasonably be assumed by the court to view Israel as their primary home. It was specifically about people who chose to serve in a foreign government on behalf of a terrorist organization, and who thereby declared that their allegiance to this foreign entity supersedes their

allegiance to Israel.

If you can forfeit citizenship for serving in a foreign government, you can certainly forfeit permanent residency. After all, Hamas officials surely don't deserve more rights than Israeli ones. Yet that's exactly what the court gave them: Hamas officials can now retain dual nationality even though their other nationality is Israel's bitter enemy, while Israeli officials cannot, even when their other nationality is Israel's close ally.

Moreover, it's eminently reasonable to expect people who choose to serve in a foreign government to move to that government's jurisdiction, unless some unusual obstacle prevents them. In this case, no such obstacle existed, as evidenced by the fact that two of them did relocate to Ramallah after losing their Israeli residency (the other two were arrested by Israel on unrelated grounds).

Even the majority justices appeared to realize how irrelevant their argument actually was. In a truly stunning statement, Justice Uzi Vogelman, who wrote the main opinion, said, "Our interpretative decision didn't focus on the petitioners' case specifically, but on an interpretive question of general applicability to residents of East Jerusalem." Quite how any court can decide a case without focusing on that case specifically is beyond me.

Obviously, the case at least has limited application. After all, how many East Jerusalem Palestinians are going to become Hamas legislators of cabinet members? But in reality, the implications are broad, because if even swearing allegiance to a foreign government on behalf of a terrorist organization committed to Israel's destruction isn't enough to make a Palestinian lose his Israeli residency and its attendant benefits, what on earth would be? Nothing I can think of. Thus, Hamas supporters in Jerusalem will now be emboldened to step up all kinds of activity on the organization's behalf, secure in the knowledge that they need not fear expulsion from the country as a consequence.

The court's judicial activism impedes the government's ability to set policy in almost every walk of life, as I detailed in Mosaic last year, and several rulings over the past few months rightly outraged many members of Israel's ruling parties. But last week's ruling may have been a tipping point: In response, Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked and her Jewish Home party submitted legislation to curb the court's excesses. Whether it will pass remains to be seen. But this outrageous ruling in defense of Hamas legislators amply shows why it should. (CommentaryMagazine.com Sep 18)

Israel Rescues the Middle East, Again

By Sohrab Ahmari

In the months after 9/11, George W. Bush warned Americans to prepare for a long twilight conflict. The 16th anniversary of the attacks provides grim proof of just how prescient the 43rd president was—whatever else he got wrong in the following years.

The Arab world continues to radiate danger and instability; wide swaths of the Middle East and Africa are ungoverned; vicious new Islamist outfits have eclipsed al-Qaeda; the civil war in Syria continues to rage, and millions of desperate people are on the move. The successes that do come the West's way are tentative and incomplete at best. But we should still celebrate them.

Last week's apparent Israeli airstrike in Syria was one such victory. In the early hours on Thursday, Israeli warplanes targeted a Syrian military position near the town of Masyaf, in Hama province. That's according to a statement from the Syrian army, which claimed that two of its troops had been killed in the strike.

What was Bashar Assad up to in Masyaf? The generally reliable Syrian Observatory for Human Rights claimed that the targeted facility had been associated with Syria's Scientific Studies and Research Centre, the outfit that manufactures Assad's chemical weapons. You know, the ones he was supposed to have given up in the Russian-brokered deal that persuaded President Obama to back off his red line in 2013. The Masyaf site had also been used to store ground-to-ground rockets, and Iranian and Hezbollah personnel had been observed there.

The Israel Defense Forces kept mum as usual. But Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman said in a radio interview after the airstrike that "we will do everything to prevent the existence of a Shiite corridor from Iran to Damascus." He added: "We are determined to prevent our enemies from harming or even creating the possibility of harming the security of Israeli citizens."

The latest strike followed the pattern of several previous Israeli interventions in the Syrian war, nearly always aimed at preventing the transferring of strategic weapons to Hezbollah, Iran's Shiite terror proxy in Lebanon. A decade ago, Israel bombed Syria's Ali Kibar reactor, which Assad was almost certainly using to develop nuclear weapons with North Korean assistance.

Yes, Jerusalem has had its own security interests in mind in all of these instances. But in protecting itself, the Jewish state has prevented the region's various crises spiraling from the merely awful to the truly catastrophic. For an uneasy night of sleep, imagine Bashar Assad with nukes. Or imagine Hezbollah with chemical rockets.

By acting forcefully and decisively against bad actors, Israel saves Arab and Jewish (and Western) lives. Sixteen years after 9/11, it remains America's most reliable and effective ally in what used to be called the War on Terror. (CommentaryMagazine.com Sep 11)

Iran Grabs Netanyahu's Attention Once Again

By Amnon Lord

Something is different this time Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visits New York. Once again, he will meet U.S. President Donald Trump and give a speech at the U.N. General Assembly, but unlike in past years, these two events have not been causing drama. During former U.S. President Barack Obama's terms in office, Netanyahu was forced to dive deep into the shark infested waters of international politics. It was not until Jan. 20 of this year, when Trump was inaugurated as president, that Netanyahu was able to take his head out of the water to gasp for air, along with the State of Israel.

These days, however, are unique because of the increased number of both regional and international crises that directly affect the security of Israel. The Palestinian issue is not the focus of attention, and even Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas understands that there is no one waiting enthusiastically for another one of his impassioned speeches blaming the British for their alleged historic crime against humanity: allowing the Jews to resettle the land of Israel. This proves how much influence these international processes have on the Palestinians and their expectations. Now the White House has a president who wants peace, but for all he cares, the Palestinians can go look for him on social media.

This is how things look when Netanyahu's discussions in the U.S. — as will certainly be reflected in his speech at the assembly — once again focus on Iran. This time, he will speak not only about the nuclear deal, but also about Iran's new and dangerous position, which threatens the stability in Syria. If former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who arrived in Israel last week for a memorial service for late President Shimon Peres, would have also devoted time to speak with relevant authorities, he could have told them that it would be best to slow down the tempo in wiping out Islamic State in Syria.

The so-called War on Terror is one of the preferred escape routes for those who do not wish to confront Iran, North Korea, Russia or China. Israel sees Iran as a country that got a green light from a tolerant international community to continue forward on its path until it achieves full nuclearization, alongside international legitimacy, in another eight years. This is what the nuclear deal means, and this is the reason for Netanyahu's opposition. It is not completely clear why senior officials in the security establishment support the agreement, declaring time and time again that Iran is sticking to it. It is quite obvious that this is exactly how Iran will behave in the meantime. What is important is that Netanyahu has an opportunity to coordinate with the Americans to prevent the Iranians from going nuclear.

Some are pressing Trump to simply cancel the deal. It seems there is a middle way, however — the administration can simply refrain from affirming to Congress that Iran is adhering to the deal. In any case, Iran's Middle East rampage and North Korea's defiance and the ongoing wave of terrorism in the West are all reminders of the devastating results of conciliatory policies. Netanyahu will not pass up an opportunity to relay this particular message at the U.N. (Israel Hayom Sep 17)

Israel's Arabs and the Arab World

By Moshe Arens

The Arab world for the past decades has alternated between the ruthless rule of dictators and seemingly endless bloodshed. If there were a choice, dictatorial rule might almost seem like the preferred option. But the Arabs had little choice, they had to suffer whatever came. In recent years many have fled to Europe. Christians and other religious minorities have faced massacres.

Israel's Arabs, both Muslim and Christian, are the exception. They have had the opportunity to live in a democratic society and to enjoy the benefits of the rule of law, the opportunities that a modern nation-state offers its citizens and the norms of a Western society, including sexual equality. They would prefer to be the majority, but being a minority in a democratic state is commonplace around the world and is not a tragedy. They have complaints, many of them justified, but in light of the alternatives many admit that they are well-off. But not all of them feel that way.

Their political representatives, the Knesset members of the Joint List, have nothing but criticism for Israel and praise for its enemies, be they Iran, President Bashar Assad in Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in the Gaza Strip or Palestinian terrorists. They seem to support anyone who would like to destroy Israel. Although spanning the ideological spectrum from communism (aside from the North Koreans, the only communists still around), the Muslim Brotherhood (called the Islamic Movement in Israel here) and Baathists (the Balad party, one of the components of the Joint List), they are united in their hatred of Israel. Naturally, they do not call for Arab integration into Israeli society.

Those who oppose the polygamy rampant in the Arab community oppose Israeli measures to curb it. Those who are against the abuse of women and so-called honor killings think these are "local problems" that should be handled by the Arabs themselves. Nor do they want the Israel Police to handle the crime running wild in Israel's Arab towns. Keep Israel out of your lives is their common motto. They oppose young Arabs volunteering for either military or civilian national service. Do they really represent the views of the majority of Israel's Arab population? And if not, why do the majority of Israeli Arabs vote for them in Knesset

elections?

Many who voted for them in the last election were probably driven by a desire to identify with an "Arab" party rather than by support for the mixture of ideologies they represent. Those who hoped that they would look after their day-to-day interests were surely disappointed. Those who wanted to vote for an "Arab" party had no other choice. The 2014 law, sponsored by Yisrael Beiteinu Chairman Avigdor Lieberman, raising the electoral threshold, has made it virtually impossible for any other "Arab" party to compete. Unfortunately, it looks as if this will continue.

Within Israel's Arab community there is a struggle between those who insist on rejecting everything Israel stands for and supporting its enemies, and those who want to integrate into Israeli society and take advantage of the opportunities it offers. A great deal depends on who gets the upper hand in this struggle. Will Israel's Arabs join the modern world, or will they be pushed back into the medieval way of life that prevails in much of the Arab world? Can Israel's Arabs become a beacon of democracy and modernity to the Arab world, or will they provide proof that Arabs are not yet prepared to enter the 21st century? The outcome is of great importance for Israel as well. Will all Israelis, Jews and Arab alike, work to advance Israel's success story, or are Israel's Arabs to be left behind?

Many Israeli Arabs are voting with their feet. Some are professionals, who work in Israeli hospitals, in large law or accounting firms or in business. And each year, growing numbers of young Arabs volunteer for national service and join the ranks of Israel's military and police.

At the moment, the only way this trend can express itself politically is for these individuals to drop their support for the Joint List in favor of Israel's existing political parties, and for these parties to welcome Arabs into their ranks. (Haaretz Sep 17)

Facing A Challenging New Year By Isi Leibler

We enter Rosh Hashana 5778 with conflicting emotions.

Israel has never been in a stronger position, globally and domestically, thriving in every respect – economically, politically and militarily.

But we live in a world of chaos. North Korea threatens to unleash a global nuclear Armageddon and Europe, under siege from Islamic terrorists, many fresh from the killing fields of Syria, is now suffering terrorist attacks – the likes of which Israel has endured since its inception.

The Iranians and their surrogate, Hezbollah, have been emboldened and seek to move in on Israel's northern frontiers, repeatedly proclaiming an imminent war that will destroy Israel. Prospects are nonexistent for achieving a genuine peace settlement with the Palestinians and Hamas has announced a renewal of its relationship with Iran, which is supplying it with lethal weapons.

We now realize that the apparent decline of the world's most ancient hatred in the wake of the Shoah was illusionary. Globally, antisemitism – frequently expressed as extreme anti-Israelism in which Jewish behavior is obscenely bracketed with that of the Nazis – has escalated once again.

Domestically, Israel has been inundated with a stream of accusations of corruption implicating the highest personages of the land, ranging from the prime minister and leading government officials, prominent businessmen and extending to senior bureaucrats and even the IDF. Although these charges have yet to be substantiated in the courts, irresponsible leaks from lawyers and undisciplined police authorities and especially the sensationalist coverage by much of the media have caused the presumption of guilt of those accused, even before they were indicted.

Yet despite these challenges, we must give thanks to the Almighty because today the Jewish People is undoubtedly in the strongest position since the destruction of the Second Temple and banishment into exile. Israel has emerged as a regional superpower capable of deterring or defending itself against the combined forces of the barbarians dominating much of the surrounding region.

US president Barack Obama, who treated Israel politically as a rogue state and embraced the Iranian terrorist state, is no longer in office. Whatever one's views about his successor and despite some unfulfilled campaign promises, President Donald Trump does support Israel. In addition, despite the growing anti-Israel trends in the left wing of the Democratic Party and abandonment by many liberals, support for Israel in both houses of Congress and the overall American public stands at an all-time high.

While a genuine peace with the Palestinians is not even on the horizon, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas no longer has the support of the US and is becoming increasingly isolated. And although it does not provide us with comfort, no city in the world is immune from Islam ic terrorist attacks.

Our relations with Egypt have improved enormously and there is close military cooperation against terrorists operating in the Sinai.

The most dramatic change is the new covert relationship with the moderate Sunni states, headed by Saudi Arabia, which now regard the Jewish state as an ally against Iran's growing regional hegemony. They may still oppose Israel at the United Nations but in practice a strategic relationship has emerged that includes sharing of intelligence information and soft-pedaling the Palestinian issue.

Despite efforts to become a nuclear power, Iran is aware that the distance between Tel Aviv and Tehran is the same in both directions. Notwithstanding its leaders' repeated threats to annihilate us, they are

cautious and do not seek an early paradise, realizing that were they to attack us, they would be pulverized. Lebanon has also been served notice of what to expect if Hezbollah initiates hostilities.

Our status internationally has never been so good. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has succeeded in deepening our ties with a wide assortment of nations.

He developed a rapport with Russian President Vladimir Putin, the former KGB officer, who displays philosemitic attitudes domestically and retains a good working relationship with us. We must tread delicately because of Soviet-US tensions and Russia's quasi-alliance with the Iranians to retain control of Syria. But despite the frequent bombing forays against Iranian and Hezbollah weapons and bases, until now Israel has managed to retain a cordial relationship with Russia.

In addition, the bonds between Israel and the developing superpower India have never been so close, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi visiting Israel and reaffirming friendship between our countries.

China, which politically supports the Palestinians, has nevertheless invested huge sums in Israeli high-tech and has extensive and varied business interests. Likewise, relations have strengthened with Japan and Asian Muslim states Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. The ties with Australia have never been better.

Whereas the European Union remains hostile and applies double standards to Israel, many of its component countries, such as the UK, the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and the Baltic states, now either support or have strengthened relations with Israel.

The same applies to Africa and Latin America, which Netanyahu was the first Israeli prime minister to visit, paving the way for new alliances.

There has also been dramatic progress within Israel, whose population is today over 8.7 million, of which Jews make up almost 75%. This surely represents one of the greatest success stories of all time. After being in exile for 2,000 years, a nation initially comprised primarily of Jews fleeing pogroms, Shoah survivors, refugees from Arab countries and Jews seeking haven from persecution from all corners of the world ranging from Ethiopia to the Soviet Union has evolved into a thriving modern industrial state.

Our ancient sacred tongue has been transformed into a pulsating modern Hebrew which is the country's lingua franca; Israel provides an atmosphere in which the culture and festivals create a unique lifestyle for nonobservant as well as religious Jews; and more Jews are familiar with the texts and teachings of Judaism than at any time in our history.

Despite a dysfunctional and bigoted rabbinical establishment and extortion by the ultra-Orthodox parties holding the balance of power, there has been a genuine spiritual revival with greater observance and respect for tradition than in the past.

There is already evidence that economic and social pressures are beginning to have a profound impact, obliging the ultra-Orthodox to earn livelihoods and become more integrated into the nation. Hopefully, this will also lead to the breakdown of haredi political extortion and the appointment of more enlightened rabbis to bring about urgently needed reforms in relation to conversion, marriage, education and national service.

Economically, Israel continues to be a global high-tech powerhouse, with more start-ups per capita than any other country.

Israel's discovery of gas fields was an unexpected boon. The extraordinary success of its desalinization program which provides us with 80% of our water needs exceeds that of any country and is being replicated throughout the world.

There remains the problem of the radicalization among Israeli Arabs. They need to be dealt with firmly. However, the majority are law-abiding and appreciate that in Israel they enjoy freedom and a standard of living unmatched in any Arab country. They should be encouraged and nurtured to remain loyal Israeli citizens.

In assessing our situation, we must reject the prophets of doom and gloom. We should recognize that we are the blessed generation of Jews who are privileged to live in an age of miracles and who have never been as well off as we are today.

Despite our dysfunctional government, internal divisions and external challenges, decade after decade we have been blessed with prosperity and strength. Polls show Israelis as among the happiest people on earth.

This coming year, we should be joyful, give thanks to the Almighty and pray that He continues watching over His people during these turbulent times.

Those born after 1948 are the first generations of empowered Jews. It is important to convey to them, especially the younger generation, the blessings of statehood and what it means to be independent and able to determine their own future and not be reliant on the goodwill of others. They must not take what they have for granted. To ensure that, our educational system must imbue them with Jewish values and Zionism.

We also hope that in the coming years, more Diaspora Jews will join us, not merely to escape persecution and discrimination but out of a desire to ensure Jewish continuity and enable their children to grow up and enjoy a full Jewish life in their own homeland.

Shana Tova! (Jerusalem Post Sep 19)

Israel and the American Jewish Crisis By Caroline B. Glick

As the New Year 5778 begins, 88% of Israeli Jews say that they are happy and satisfied with their lives. This makes sense. Israel's relative security, its prosperity, freedom and spiritual blossoming make Israeli Jews the most successful Jewish community in 3,500 years of Jewish history.

The same cannot be said for the Jews of the Diaspora. In Western Europe, Jewish communities that just a generation ago were considered safe and prosperous are now besieged. Synagogues and Jewish schools look like army barracks. And the severe security cordons Jews need to pass through to pray and study are entirely justified. For where they are absent, as they were at the Hyper Cacher Jewish supermarket in Paris in 2015, assailants strike.

Western European Jewry's crisis is exogenous to the Jewish communities. It isn't the Jews who caused the crisis, which may in time cause the wholesale exodus of the Jews from Europe. The crisis is a function of growing levels of popular antisemitism spurred by mass immigration from the Islamic world and the resurgence of indigenous European Jew-hatred, particularly on the far Left.

The same cannot be said of the American Jewish community, which at the dawn of 5778 also finds itself steeped in an ever deepening crisis. And while antisemitism is a growing problem in America, particularly on university campuses, unlike their European counterparts, American Jews could mount and win a battle against the growing anti-Jewish forces. But in large part, they have chosen not to. And they have chosen not to fight the antisemites because they are in the midst of a self-induced identity crisis.

First, there is the problem of demographic collapse.

According to the Pew Research Center's 2013 study of American Jewry, nearly 60% of American Jews intermarry. Based on the Pew data, the Jewish People Policy Institute published a report in June that noted that not only are 60% of American Jews who get married marrying non-Jews, only half of American Jews are getting married at all. And among those who are getting married, less than a third are raising their children as Jewish in some way.

Earlier this month, a study of American Jews was published by the Public Religion Research Institute. It found that not only hasn't the situation improved since the Pew survey was published, the trend toward assimilation and loss of Jewish identity among American Jews has accelerated.

In 2013, 32% of American Jews under 30 said that they were not Jews by religion. Today the proportion of Jews under 30 who say they have no relation to the Jewish faith has ballooned to 47%.

Not surprisingly, the wholesale abandonment of Jewish faith by nearly half of young American Jews has taken a toll on the two liberal streams of American Judaism. According to the study, the percentage of American Jews who identify as Reform or Conservative Jews is in free fall.

Whereas in 2013, 35% of American Jews identified as Reform, today, a mere four years later, only 28% identify as Reform. The situation among Conservatives is even worse. In 2013, 18% of American Jews identified as Conservatives. Today, only 14% do. Among Jews under 30 the situation is even starker. Only 20% of American Jews under 30 identify as Reform. Only 8% identify as Conservative.

To be sure, the trend toward secularism and assimilation among US Jewry is not new. And over the years, Reform and Conservative leaders have adopted varying strategies to deal with it.

In 1999 the Reform movement tried to deal with the problem by strengthening the movement's religious practices. Although the effort failed, the impulse that drove the strategy was rational. American Jews who seek spiritual and religious meaning likely want more than a sermon about tikkun olam.

The problem is that they also want more than a rabbi donning a kippa and a synagogue choosing to keep kosher.

This is why, as the number of Reform and Conservative Jews is contracting, the number of American Jews who associate with the Orthodox movement is growing. Between 2013 and 2017, the proportion of young American Jews who identify as Orthodox grew from 10% to 15%.

Moreover, more and more American Jews are finding their spiritual home with Chabad. Today there are more Chabad houses in the US than Reform synagogues.

Unable to compete for Jews seeking religious fulfillment, the Reform and Conservative movements have struck out for new means of rallying their bases and attracting members. Over the past year, two new strategies are dominating the public actions of both movements.

First, there is a selective fight against antisemitism. While antisemitism is experiencing a growth spurt in the US progressive movement, and antisemitism is becoming increasingly overt in US Muslim communities, neither the Reform nor Conservative movements has taken significant institutional steps to fight them.

Instead, both movements, and a large swath of the Jewish institutional world, led in large part by Reform and Conservative Jews, have either turned a blind eye to this antisemitism or supported it.

Take for instance the case of Davis, California, imam Amman Shahin.

On July 21 Shahin gave a sermon calling for the Jewish people to be annihilated. His Jewish neighbors in the progressive Jewish communities of Davis and Sacramento didn't call the police and demand that he be investigated for terrorist ties. They didn't demand that his mosque fire him.

Instead, led by the Oakland Jewish Federation, local rabbi Seth

Castleman and the JCRC, they embraced Shahin. They appeared with him at a public "apology" ceremony, where he failed to apologize for calling for his Jewish colleagues, and every other Jew, to be murdered.

All Shahin did was express regret that his call for genocide caused offense.

On the other hand, the same leaders stand as one against allegations of antisemitic violence stemming from the political Right. In the face of an utter lack of evidence, when Jewish institutions were subjected to a rash of bomb threats last winter, Reform and Conservative leaders led the charge insisting that far-right antisemites were behind them and insinuated that the perpetrators supported President Donald Trump. When it worked out that all of the threats were carried out by a mentally ill Israeli Jew, they never issued an apology.

So, too, the Reform and Conservative movements, like the rest of the American Jewish community, treated the Charlottesville riot last month like a new Reichstag fire. They entirely ignored the violence of the far-left, antisemitic Antifa protesters and behaved as though tomorrow neo-Nazis would take control of the federal government. They jumped on the bandwagon insisting that Trump's initial condemnation of both groups was proof that he has a soft spot for neo-Nazis.

The problem with the strategy of selective outrage over antisemitism is that it isn't at all clear who the target audience is. Survey data shows that the more active Jews are in the synagogue, the less politically radical they are and the more devoted to Jewish causes they are. So it is hard to see how turning a blind eye to leftist and Muslim antisemitism will rally their current membership more than they already have been rallied. Moreover, the more radicalized Jews become politically, the more outlets they have for their political activism both as Jews and as leftists. No matter how anti-Trump Conservative and Reform leaders become, they can never rival the progressive forces in the Democratic Party.

Prospects for success of the second strategy are arguably even lower. The second strategy involves cultivating animosity toward Israel over the issue of egalitarian prayer at the Kotel.

Last June, the government overturned an earlier decision to build a passageway connecting the Western Wall Plaza with Robinson's Arch, along the Southern Wall, where egalitarian prayer services are held. The government also rescinded a previous decision to have representatives of the Conservative and Reform movements receive membership in the committee that manages the Western Wall Plaza.

The government's first decision was non-political. The Antiquities Authority nixed the construction of the passage due to the adverse impact construction would have on the antiquities below the surface.

As to the second decision, it is far from a matter of life and death. The committee has no power to influence egalitarian prayers for better or for worse.

And yet, rather than acknowledge that the decision was a setback but it didn't harm the status of egalitarian prayer at the Wall, the Reform and Conservative movements declared war against the government and dragged much of the organized Jewish establishment behind them.

The Reform leadership canceled a scheduled meeting with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, and the Jewish Agency Board followed suit.

Six hundred Conservative rabbis signed a letter to Netanyahu accusing him of betraying Diaspora Jewry and announcing they would be forced to reconsider their support for Israel.

Ambassador David Friedman, who had just taken residence in Israel a month before the explosion, used his first public remarks as ambassador to call his fellow American Jews to order. Friedman said, "Yesterday, I heard something that I thought I'd never hear before. And I understand the source of the frustration and the source of the anger. But I heard a major Jewish organization say that they needed to rethink their support for the State of Israel. "That's something unthinkable in my lifetime, up until yesterday. We have to do better. We must do better," he said.

But in the intervening months, the Conservative and Reform movements have not relented in their attacks. They have ratcheted them up. The thinking appears to be that if they can make this problem look like a life or death struggle between Israel and progressive Jewry, they can both keep their dwindling bases engaged and attract members of the increasingly anti-Israel Jewish far Left.

The problem with this is that just as they cannot outdo the Democratic Party in their hostility toward Trump, so the Conservative and Reform movements cannot be more anti-Israel than Jewish Voices for Peace and other anti-Israel Jewish groups.

The question for Israelis is what this failure of the mainstream American Jewish leadership means for the future of Israel's relationship with American Jewry. Jewish survival and continuity through the ages has been predicated and dependent on our ability as Jews to uphold the commandment of the sages that all Jews are responsible for one another. As the most successful Jewish community in history, Israel has a special responsibility for our brethren in the Diaspora.

The first step toward fulfilling our duty is to recognize the basic fact that while it is true that the American Jewish community is in crisis, the leaders of that community are in an even deeper crisis. And the key to strengthening and supporting the community is to bypass its failed leadership and speak and interact directly with American Jews. (Jerusalem Post Sep 19)