



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*

he and colleagues in the American progressive left have followed their playbook to a tee.

It's no surprise that many of these groups have been attracted to the BDS movement, which did get an encouraging boost in the verbiage used, saying that the party opposes "any effort to

unfairly single out and delegitimize Israel, including at the United Nations or through the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement, while protecting the constitutional right of our citizens to free speech." Zogby saw the second article as essentially annulling the previous anti-BDS language as a rejection of the state-level anti-BDS legislation that has been supported and adopted by more than 30 states.

The Trump presidency has brought clarity on many domestic and foreign-policy issues. Yet the knee-jerk automated Democratic reaction to the president, which includes anything he says or does, must be opposed in hysterical terms. Some of the reactions represent a real bursting forth of tensions that have lingered for decades. And opposition to Israel is one of them.

The Democratic generation gap is palpable; old-timers like Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.), Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), and until late, Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.) are genuinely pro-Israel, while the young guard—exemplified by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.), Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.) and Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.)—is not. Indeed, they may exemplify the new Democratic Party more than anything, where far-left identity politics meets demographic shifts, Socialist economics and an obsessive hatred of Israel. Tlaib and Omar also espouse a conspiratorial mindset and a willingness to consort with Islamists who support Hamas and Hezbollah.

But the debate over Israel also reveals something about America itself. The very fact there is a debate—with progressive Democrats at the firing line and older Democrats perplexing what hit them, and the Republicans competing to see who can defend Israel more with laws opposing BDS and endorsing Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights—all reflect the significant place that Israel has in American political and cultural life. Not only oversized, but emblematic, not the result of 'Jewish power,' or the 'third rail of American politics,' but something genuinely rooted in the American experience. (JNS Oct 5)

Commentary...

The Political Split over Israel

By Brig. Gen. (Res.) Yossi Kuperwasser And Asaf Romirowsky

With the 2020 presidential elections in high gear, and following normalization between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, a deeper look at the platforms of both parties is required. It is clear that American Jews and Israelis are called upon to exhibit "moral fiber" by using their very Jewish identity as a vehicle to question Israel and its legitimacy. More perverse are the uses of Jewishness to passionately make pleas for the Palestinian cause and the assertion that Jewishness is somehow based on pro-Palestinian beliefs as a "progressive" value. For American Jews on the far-left, as for Arab Palestinians, the events of 1948 are the evergreen ancestral sin.

Consequently, the bipartisan consensus on Israel has eroded considerably.

True, we have heard articulate strong support for Israel's security; even the liberals within the Democratic Party stood up to the progressives and managed to squash some of the harsh language against Israel. The new normalized relations with the UAE—in lieu of applying sovereignty over parts of Judea and Samaria, and the Jordan Valley—is a game-changer for Israeli-Arab relations. So while Israel failed to get the Trump administration's support for sovereignty, establishing normal relations with the UAE and other pragmatic Arab states is something the Democrats cannot avoid, which irks them given the results it produces in terms of larger regional stability, proving that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict does not drive Middle East diplomacy.

While it is also true that the Trump plan adheres to the main principle upon which Democrats base their own policy on (the "two-state solution"), there are considerable gaps between the practicalities of this principle between the two parties and the understandings of Israel's security requirements. There are also concerns regarding Iran (including the 2015 Iran nuclear deal) and the conflict between the pragmatists, who are supported by the Republicans, and the sophisticated radicals (Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood), who are supported by parts of the Democratic Party. These disagreements represent deep ideological different worldviews.

If elected, the Biden administration will likely try to resurface the two most litigious issues seen during the Obama years in its relations with Israel—namely, centering the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the so-called "occupation" and reviving the nuclear deal, both of which stand in stark contrast to regional reality. The ultimate question is to what extent does the normalization with the UAE highlight the gap, and is it enough to deter pursuing these policies given their pervasiveness on North American college campuses and in left-wing American circles.

A motto to consider is long live the status quo—both in terms of the language of the platforms and the accompanying policies.

Of course, Palestinian activists continue to express their displeasure with the language regarding Israel in the plank of the 2020 Democratic National Committee platform, which could be seen during a webinar hosted by the Arab American Institute (AAI). In his remarks, James Zogby, AAI's president, did underscore that this year's process was more welcoming to the Palestinian narrative and their supporters than in prior election cycles, but still expressed frustration that the 2020 platform did not reference the so-called "occupation," condemning the settlement enterprise or advocating for conditioning U.S. aid to Israel.

Zogby argued that the leaders of the party caved to pressure from the pro-Israel community for political reasons. "It's not about policy, ever. It's really about politics. And it's sort of a power pull. It's a question of who can make who jump through hoops. ... We were always on the downside of that debate. In this case, they did it again; they wouldn't let those words in the platform just to show who's boss."

To his credit, Zogby has always been on message pontificating on Jordanian TV back in 1990, how a powerful Arab lobby could conquer the campuses and media by allying the Palestinians with the American left—1960s' radicals who are now tenured professors, African-American student groups, and, above all, Jewish progressives. Clearly,

תג שמה

America doesn't have to Choose Between Appeasing Turkey or Iran

By Jonathan S. Tobin

Does it matter that Turkey appears to think that it can relitigate the outcome of World War I? That's the question observers were forced to confront last week when its president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, opened that country's parliament with a speech about the status of Jerusalem.

The Islamist government Erdoğan leads is among the leading boosters of the Palestinian war against Israel's existence, as well as an ally of the Hamas terrorists in Gaza. But the Turkish leader's remarks weren't framed as a response to American recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital or the peace and normalization agreements reached between the Jewish state and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Rather, it was an argument that Jerusalem belongs to the Turks, rather than the Jews or the Arabs.

Neither Israel nor the United States is worried that Turkey will try to implement this absurd ambition. But the Erdoğan government's recent moves, coupled with its outrageous statements, do call into question the Trump administration's apparent belief that Turkey can or should be encouraged to continue on its present course. The Jerusalem speech is—like Turkey's alleged role in encouraging a renewal of fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and its aggressive attitude towards the efforts of Greece, Cyprus and Israel to work together on natural gas exploration in the Mediterranean—a signal that can't be ignored. Either Trump or former Vice President Joe Biden will need to be as focused on the threat from Turkey in the future as they are on Iran.

Erdoğan's Jerusalem claim was a reference to the fact that the Turkish Ottoman Empire governed the land of Israel for centuries. The Turks were evicted from Jerusalem and the rest of the country by Great Britain during the First World War. The Ottomans had picked the wrong side by allying itself with Germany, and at the conflict's conclusion, the British and French victors were able to carve up their vast empire. Among other things, it left Britain in possession of a

League of Nations Mandate for Palestine in which they were charged to make good their Balfour Declaration promise to assist with the building of a national home for the Jewish people.

Stripped of their imperial glory and pretensions to be the caliphate of all Muslims, the Turks were confined to the Anatolian Peninsula, where they created a secular republic. Under the initial leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Turks focused on modernizing their country. After being smart enough to stay out of World War II, Turkey aligned itself with the West in opposition to its traditional Russian foes and joined the NATO alliance. As part of that Western and secular orientation, Turkey also became the first Muslim nation to recognize the State of Israel in 1949.

But in the last two decades, under the leadership of Erdoğan and his Islamist AKP Party, Turkey has discarded both secularism and the West. Though it has never completely ruptured relations with Israel, the Turkish Islamist has become a cheerleader for Hamas and a constant source of irritation to Israel.

As a matter of practical policy, Erdoğan's speech is ludicrous. The notion that Turkey can have anything to say about Jerusalem's future is a joke.

Yet neither should it be entirely ignored. Erdoğan's focus on Jerusalem and the Temple Mount is a reminder of his decision to turn Istanbul's Hagia Sophia back into a mosque. The Hagia Sophia is a Byzantine Christian Cathedral that was converted to a mosque after the conquest of Constantinople, which the modern Turks renamed Istanbul. The point of that decision was to reinforce Erdoğan's claim to be the leader of the Muslim world—in effect, the head of a revived caliphate that would govern the whole region and its holy places in Saudi Arabia and Israel.

While no one is clamoring for a revival of the late unlamented Ottoman Empire, Erdoğan's pose as the leader of all Muslims does prop him up at home and serves as the backdrop for Turkey's increasingly aggressive foreign policy.

The Turks have been using their military to threaten the efforts of Greece, Cyprus and Israel to work together on natural gas. They've also been throwing their weight around elsewhere, establishing a zone of control in northern Syria with U.S. acquiescence and pushing the Azeris to settle scores with the Armenians, who seized territory from them in the 1990s.

Trump was severely criticized for going along with Turkey in Syria in order to enable him to start withdrawing American troops from the region. But, contrary to my expectations, this seeming betrayal of the Kurds who had fought alongside the U.S. against ISIS terrorists didn't lead to total disaster. Still, the U.S. move has, along with Trump's seeming embrace of Erdoğan, encouraged the Turks in their other provocative behavior.

The American decision to go soft on Turkey was motivated by a desire to keep Erdoğan from forming an alliance with Russia and because the United States has been rightly focused on isolating Iran, whose own quest for regional hegemony and nuclear ambitions are the No. 1 threats to peace and stability.

The entangling alliances in the region are confusing and contradictory. Israel is friendly with the Azeris, who also look to Turkey as an ally, while the Armenians have gotten some support from Iran. Turkish intervention in Libya, which wasn't discouraged by Trump, is of concern to Israel. Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin's desire to revive the old Soviet empire looms over all these problems as a constant threat.

Even more importantly, Turkey has sought to sabotage peace deals between Gulf state Arabs and Israel, something that is one of the Trump administration's greatest achievements.

While the Trump administration has done well in focusing on stopping Iran, its Turkey policy has been a confusing mess exacerbated by the president's foolish boasts about commanding Erdoğan's respect. To the extent that Biden has a position on these issues, it involves being tougher on Turkey, but also includes a return to former President Barack Obama's feckless appeasement of Iran.

What the United States needs going forward is to realize that it's possible to continue to quarantine the dangerous Islamists of Tehran without allowing an authoritarian megalomaniac like Erdoğan to think he has America's blessing to be just as disruptive a force as the Iranians. Both Iran and Turkey have each used the rallying cry of taking Jerusalem from the Jews to justify their insane and dangerous goals.

A rational American foreign policy going forward will not involve being suckered by either Iran or Turkey. It remains to be seen if either Trump or Biden is capable of that kind of clarity. (JNS Oct 6)

Lebanon's Economic Woes May Get the Better of Hezbollah

By Prof. Eyal Zisser

Direct talks between Israel and Lebanon are slated to begin next week over the maritime border between the two countries. Finagling an agreement will allow Lebanon to explore offshore gas fields, and potentially produce and sell gas, as Israel has long done.

Negotiations on the demarcation of the offshore border could have taken place a decade ago when large gas fields were discovered in the waters of the Mediterranean. But Lebanon dragged its feet and refused any contact with Israel, as part of the notion that the very existence of negotiations between the two countries constitutes some sort of legitimization of Israel's existence.

The Lebanese government was paralyzed by the fear of being accused of nothing short of treason lest it advances such an agreement with the Jewish state. This, of course, only hurt Lebanon as Israel forged ahead with offshore explorations in the fields clearly not close to a potential Lebanese border.

But since then, Lebanon has reached the brink of complete economic collapse, both over the harsh sanctions imposed by the United States on Hezbollah and its Iranian patron, the coronation crisis, and most recently, over the catastrophic explosion in the Port of Beirut.

The massive Aug. 4 blast left hundreds dead and caused damaged estimated \$15 billion. In many ways, it was the final nail in the Lebanese economy's coffin.

With their back against the wall, Lebanon's government, where Hezbollah wields considerable power, gave in and agreed to hold negotiations with Israel, thus reluctantly giving it the recognitions they so feared in the past, ultimately admitting that the road to economic prosperity runs through talks with Israel.

The pressure is also clearly getting to Hezbollah. Israel's exposure of its missile depots in the heart of Beirut's residential areas dealt the Shiite terrorist group's image another blow and made it clear to everyone that it is leading Lebanon down the path of destruction.

If you believe Arab media reports, Syria may not be far behind. Despite the vigorous denials from Damascus, it is clear that given the chance, Syrian President Bashar Assad is more than willing to join the regional peace process of it gets his country out of the dire economic crisis it faces.

As it turns out, the economy is stronger than any defeat on the battlefield. The peace deals between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain is not only a political or defense agreement but one based on economic interest – meaning these countries' desire to enjoy what Israeli technology has to offer their economies.

Lebanon isn't quite there yet but if a deal is reached and it, too, will begin harvesting natural gas it will further curtail Hezbollah's leeway. The Lebanese people will not forgive Hezbollah of it drags the country into war and endangers the gas field, which many hope would be a pipeline to economic relief. (Israel Hayom Oct 5)

The 'Chemistry' of Anti-Israel Propaganda

By Ruthie Blum

When the prominent Switzerland-based chemistry journal *Molecules* recently announced that its special January 2021 issue would feature a paper from a researcher at Ariel University in Samaria, a group of scientists immediately protested.

Their response had nothing to do with the content of Mindy Levine's study, however. No, the academics—led by 2018 Nobel Chemistry Prize laureate George Smith and Royal Society of Chemistry fellow Malcolm Levitt—did not concern themselves with their colleague's work.

All that mattered to them was the mailing address of the institution of higher learning, where Levine heads a lab that engages in toxicant detection, environmental remediation and supramolecular organic chemistry.

In their letter to the editors of *Molecules*, the group—made up of academics who support Palestinian academics' non-recognition of Ariel University—demanded that Levine's article be nixed unless the location of her academic affiliation is “correctly and factually” edited.

But Levine, a new immigrant to Israel from the United States with a background from the University of Rhode Island, Columbia and MIT, had listed the school's address as “Ariel University, 65 Ramat HaGolan Street, Ariel, Israel.”

The “chemical reaction” on the part of Smith, Levitt and their followers was rage born of believing that their scientific credentials award them automatic knowledge in fields far beyond their purview. They insisted, thus, that the address be changed to read: “Ariel University, illegal Israeli settlement of Ariel, Occupied Palestinian Territory.”

This should have been sufficient cause not only to ignore their plea, but to question the validity of the “facts” in all their research. Instead, *Molecules* asked Levine to correct the error of her affiliation. When she refused to do so, its editors nixed the paper and removed the special issue in which it was to appear from the journal’s website.

This is not the first time that Ariel University—whose 16,000 students and 450 senior faculty members include all sectors of Israeli society, including many Arabs and Druze—has been targeted by left-wing academics who toe the Palestinian line.

As the Palestinian news agency Wafa proudly reported on Monday: “In 2018, more than half of the invited speakers withdrew from a scientific workshop at Ariel University following appeals from Palestinian and international scholars. Prominent scientists published a letter in *The Guardian* stating that science should not be used ‘to normalize [Israel’s] occupation of the Palestinian territories.’”

“The Israeli Sociological Society, the Israeli Anthropological Association, the European Association of Social Anthropology and the Exeter, Leeds, Open, Aberdeen, Brunel and Brighton University and College Union branches have all pledged not to collaborate with Ariel University.”

It is no wonder, then, that the Nobel Prize-winning Smith—a professor at the University of Missouri and a board member of the Palestinian initiative, “No Academic Business as Usual with Ariel University”—was delighted by his latest achievement.

“Sadly, [Levine] has refused, effectively choosing pro-occupation propaganda over her own academic freedom and the larger interest of the global science community in unfettered publication of scientific ideas and results,” he told his Palestinian buddies. “The editors of *Molecules* are to be commended for taking the only responsible course of action in the circumstances.”

Perhaps Smith should spend more time learning psychology than lapping up Palestinian efforts to delegitimize the Jewish state. Doing so might help him realize the transparency of his projection.

Ditto for Levitt, his partner in crime against academic freedom, who called the move by *Molecules* “wise and excellent” while expressing hope that “many other academic journals will follow suit.”

Indeed, it is Smith, Levitt and the editors of *Molecules*—not Levine—who are putting propaganda over academic freedom in the “larger interest of the global science community in unfettered publication of scientific ideas and results.”

Shame on them for using their probing minds to prove a hypothesis based on political slant. (JNS Oct 6)

A Lesson in Israeli Public Relations By Amnon Lord

It’s hard to compete with Saudi Arabia’s former intelligence chief and ambassador to the United States, Prince Bandar bin Sultan bin Abdulaziz, when it comes to Israeli public relations. He did a better and more convincing job than any Israeli spokesperson could have and certainly outdid any pro-Israel American mouthpiece.

When *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman commented two months ago about a historical geopolitical earthquake in the Middle East, he was referring to things such as Bandar’s interview with *Al Arabiya* on Monday. Bandar didn’t just assail the Palestinian leadership—which has sparked the ire of the aging, it should be noted, Saudi prince—but the century-old historical narrative pertaining to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

While Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi and his counterpart from the United Arab Emirates visited the Berlin Holocaust Memorial on Tuesday, the Saudi prince said the Palestinians have “always bet on the losing side,” most prominently former Jerusalem mufti Haj Amin al-Husseini’s support for Hitler and the Nazi regime. From a diplomatic perspective, nothing could be more breathtaking in terms of Arab-Israeli relations. This is a monumental, not to mention crucial, revolution. The *Al Arabiya* interview was essentially broadcast as a 40-minute monologue. Other parts of the interview will be aired in the coming days.

Toward the end of his remarks, Bandar mentioned something interesting: “[Arafat] said, ‘Bandar, Camp David’s autonomy provisions were 10 times better than the Oslo Accord. I said, ‘Well, Mr. President, why did you not agree to it?’ He said, ‘I wanted to, but [then-Syrian dictator] Hafez al-Assad threatened to kill me and to drive a wedge among the Palestinians, turning them against me.’”

Bandar added: “I thought to myself, so he [Arafat] could have been one martyr and given his life to save millions of Palestinians, but it was as God willed it.”

This story says more about Bandar’s view of Arafat than the truth between 1978 and 1993.

In 1993, in the Oslo Accords, Arafat was given a foothold in Judea and Samaria and Gaza, along with control over the residents of these

areas. The autonomy envisioned by Menachem Begin, meanwhile, did not include Arafat’s Palestinian Liberation Organization, although it did crack open the door for exactly that. Bandar has a score to settle with Arafat—one might say a bloody one.

In the years he served as Saudi Arabia’s ambassador in Washington, he was one of the more influential figures in the United States and on certain issues pertaining to the Middle East, the energy industry and terror; he was even stronger than then-U.S. President George W. Bush. Bandar was the one who strong-armed Bush and his secretary of state, Colin Powell, to publicly declare U.S. recognition of the Palestinian right to an independent state of their own.

The Bush administration at the time went even further than the Clinton roadmap. It was Bandar who pressured Bush to allow many Saudi individuals, including those tied with Osama bin Laden and the Sept. 11 attacks, to board planes and flee the United States. For comparison’s sake, to this day one poor Jew, former spy Jonathan Pollard, cannot even leave the state of New York let alone fly to Israel.

Bandar did not become pro-Zionist overnight, but when it came to his narrative regarding the Six-Day War, he noted that it didn’t start due to wanton Israeli “aggression,” rather then-Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser’s decision to close the Straits of Tiran.

This moment in time, with the Saudis attacking the Palestinians, exposes the fact that peace with the UAE and Bahrain is essentially peace with the ancient birthmother of Arab nationalism. It was Bandar’s ancestors who rode, swords drawn, with Lawrence of Arabia to liberate most of the Middle East from the Turks during World War I.

Beyond this, the Saudi stance alongside Israel mostly indicates the Arabs’ reduced standing as a global power. They were at their apex in the 1970s and 1980s. From Israel’s vantage point, strategic patience and durability paid off. It appears that true victories aren’t achieved via lightning strikes but through dedicated commitment to a long-term process. (JNS Oct 7)

Palestinians’ Most Dangerous Enemy is ... Archaeology

By Stephen M. Flatow

Pundits will tell you that the most dangerous enemies of the Palestinian Arab cause are the Gulf kingdoms that have decided to recognize Israel, or the European countries that are moving their embassies to Jerusalem, or the American politicians who refuse to keep underwriting the Palestinian Authority’s debts.

I disagree. I say that the Palestinians’ most formidable foe is ... archaeology.

A 2,000-years-old mikvah (ritual bath) was recently uncovered in the Lower Galilee. Most people probably would never have heard about the discovery if not for the dramatic photos of the entire structure being carried by truck to a nearby kibbutz for preservation.

The remarkable sight of a truck-borne mikvah, however, also makes one pause and reflect on the remarkable implications of the archeological find.

It means that 2,000 years ago, the residents of the Lower Galilee were practicing the exact same religious rituals that Orthodox Jews throughout the world practice today. Those Galileans, in other words, were Jews. They weren’t “Palestinians.” The word “Palestine” had not yet been invented. They weren’t Arabs or Muslims—the invasion of the Land of Israel by Muslim fundamentalists from the Arabian Peninsula was still 600 years in the future.

The news of the ancient mikvah must have been quite a disappointment to Palestinian Authority head Mahmoud Abbas. On Sept. 25, he told the U.N. General Assembly: “The Palestinian people have been present in their homeland, Palestine, the land of their ancestors, for over 6,000 years.”

Those meddling archaeologists and their discoveries keep getting in the way of Palestinian propaganda!

To make matters worse for Abbas, the directors of the excavation were Walid Atrash and Abd Elghani Ibrahim. You can tell by their names that they are not exactly Orthodox Jews. The P.A. will have a hard time getting anybody to believe that Atrash and Ibrahim are agents of a Zionist conspiracy.

The mikvah discovery was just the latest in a series of archaeological finds in Israel during the past year, each of which contradicted the Palestinian Arab propaganda narrative.

In the Givati Parking Lot excavation in Jerusalem, archaeologists discovered Hebrew-language inscriptions dating back 2,600 years. One was a stone seal with the words “belonging to Ikkar son of Matanyahu.” The other was a clay seal impression that read “belonging to Nathan-Melech, servant of the king.” They weren’t in

Arabic. And the names weren't Yasser or Mahmoud.

Elsewhere in Jerusalem, archaeologists uncovered a 2,000-year-old paved road that was used by Jews who made the annual pilgrimage to the capital at the time of the festivals of Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot. It wasn't used by Arabs, or Muslims or "Palestinians"—because there weren't any of them around in those days.

Meanwhile, excavators from the University of North Carolina discovered two stunning mosaics at the site of a 1,600-year-old synagogue near Huqoq in northern Israel. One depicts a scene from the exodus of the Jews from ancient Egypt. The other shows images based on verses in the Torah's book of Daniel.

Note that the mosaics do not show scenes from the Koran. There is nothing Arabic or Islamic or "Palestinian" about them. They are Jewish, they are situated in Israel, and they are 1,600 years old.

Every new archaeological discovery about the ancient Jews constitutes another stick in the spokes of the wheels of the Palestinian Arab propaganda machine. Every physical fact in the soil of the country shatters the P.A.'s lies. Every stone or seal or shard of pottery reminds us who are the real indigenous people of the Land of Israel. (JNS Oct 6)

Blue and White Could be Imploding Before our Very Eyes

By Mati Tuchfeld

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, having decided a few weeks ago not to use the exit point for another round of elections, is now considering using the next exit point – Dec. 23, which is the last date to pass the state budget. However, after recent events in the Blue and White party, Netanyahu may not have to do anything. His partners will do the work for him – and leave.

Looking at the reactions from the Likud over the past day, it seems there is a reason they are fanning the flames and pushing Blue and White out of the coalition. But it won't be simple. Benny Gantz and his buddies have a lot to lose if they leave now.

The vote over limiting public protests during the pandemic was the watershed moment for the fad party that sucked unparalleled amounts of left-wing votes from the electorate compared to previous bellwether parties. Benny Gantz, who while creating his party tried to prepare the most beautiful political mosaic possible, now sees that the sum is not greater than the whole and that the various forces in the factions are beginning to each pull in their own way.

Most notably, Blue and White's dovish wing is going crazy with calls to resign the unity government, while the faction's hawkish wing is calling on Gantz to sit tight and bide his time. Gantz is clearly leaning towards the latter, but with his other hand is trying to somehow placate the former.

For Gantz, resignation would be a disaster. He will be seen as the reason for going to a fourth election – and during a pandemic no less – while in the meantime all the centers of power, from the justice to communication ministries, will return to Netanyahu.

He understands that, and so do most of his allies, but on the left things are reaching a boiling point. The gut, the base, the neighbors, the friends, the relatives can no longer stand being part of this government. Gantz's situation is impossible. One or more resignations like that of Asaf Zamir, and the whole house of cards he built will come crashing down on his head. If up until today he knew how to placate his party members with hollow videos and tweets – as of this week, all that is no longer relevant. Gantz needs an impressive and resounding left wing achievement, but that, at the moment, is nowhere to be found. (Israel Hayom Oct 5)

Lift the US Ban on Journalist Jonathan Spyer

By Ben Cohen

There is no role in journalism that is more mentally and physically punishing than that of a war correspondent.

Reporters and writers who cover wars are, in my experience, a special breed. Insofar as generalizations are possible, they tend to be individuals with an extraordinary mastery of detail, possessed by a mission to shine a light upon the human suffering that wars necessarily entail, as well as the shadowy geopolitics that underlie them. They are ruthless in pursuit of a story, highly skilled at developing off-the-record sources, and astute when it comes to getting face-time with the key actors—from vicious warlords to smooth-talking diplomats. They stoically cope with all the hardships of being in the field, like contaminated food (or no food at all); lack of washing facilities; and exposure to the extremes of heat and cold. The mental stresses are no less torturous—they risk their lives much of the time and scarcely sleep—but again, they cope.

The best war correspondents of all are those whose writings are forged from their expertise and their quiet dedication to the task at

hand, rather than those who push their personal experiences of war to the front of a story. A good example of the former is Jonathan Spyer, a British-Israeli journalist and author who has spent at least a decade reporting from the killing fields of Iraq and Syria. His dispatches—in publications like *Foreign Policy* and *The Wall Street Journal*, as well as Israeli media outlets—have invariably been first-rate, packed with color, a command of critical facts, and concise analysis.

Up until this week, the most critical adjective I'd heard applied to Spyer (whom I know personally) was "crazy"—and that was the affectionate observation of someone who spoke admiringly of his writing and incredulously of his willingness to travel in the heart of the Arab world, despite being an Israeli citizen. If you ask Spyer about this, as *The Times of Israel* did, he responds, "Who wants to think that because of your citizenship, you can't cover what you regard as the most important story of the 21st century?"

But I never conceived that Jonathan Spyer would be labeled as a "terrorist"—and by the U.S. State Department to boot. I can't imagine that anyone else familiar with his work dreamed that such a thing was possible either.

Yet here we are.

Last Tuesday, Spyer published an op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal* under the headline, "U.S. Bans Me for Committing Journalism."

"I am banned for life from entering America," he wrote. "According to the document I received in August 2019 at the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem, the State Department made this decision based on a provision of the Immigration and Nationality Act that 'prohibits issuance of a visa to a person who at any time engaged in terrorist activities or was associated with a terrorist organization. This is a permanent ineligibility.'"

Spyer kept the news private for more than a year as he embarked on efforts to rescind the ban that were, unfortunately, fruitless. Now he is going public.

How on earth did a journalist like Spyer—a citizen of two close American allies and a resident of Israel who has frequently traveled to this country for professional and family reasons—end up on the same blacklist as members of Hezbollah, the Population Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Russian Imperial Movement? In his *Journal* article, Spyer noted that his work had brought him into close contact with a range of Middle Eastern terrorist organizations, including Hamas and ISIS. But he suspects that his contact with one group in particular caused the problem: the PKK, or Kurdistan Workers Party, which has waged war against Turkey since the 1970s.

"Although the specific basis of my exclusion from the U.S. ... hasn't been revealed to me, I suspect it may be my acquaintance with senior PKK officials, and that Turkish influence may be behind it," Spyer wrote. "This is speculation, but Ankara's mistreatment of journalists and hostility to free media are well documented."

The PKK is proscribed as a terrorist organization by both the United States and the European Union, though it is worth recalling that the Kurdish YPG militia in Syria, which retains links with the PKK, has been an important American ally during that country's horrendous civil war. In any case, Spyer stated that while he sympathizes with Kurdish national aspirations, he is "not a partisan" of the PKK. He is a journalist first of all.

At a time when the craft of journalism is widely pilloried as an exercise in muck-raking and rumor-mongering, there is something particularly bitter about Spyer's predicament. A ban on traveling to the United States can't prevent him from continuing to report on these conflict zones, but it will increase the level of risk he faces should he return to the field. Nor will the impact of this decision be confined to Spyer alone; there is a dangerous precedent here that could be applied to other reporters whose work furrows official eyebrows in Turkey (or Saudi Arabia, or Qatar, or Egypt—or any other autocratic U.S. ally in the Middle East.)

Over many decades, American Jews have expressed concern about bias in media coverage of the Middle East, along with the skewed picture of the region that presents the Palestinian question as being at the core of its conflicts. For that reason, ours is a community that should be especially disturbed by the State Department's decision to ban Spyer, and especially resolved in seeking to overturn it immediately.

Let us hope as well that his case is quickly brought to the attention of U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who knows a thing or two about the Middle East, and will therefore grasp why Spyer's punishment is so profoundly absurd and unjust. In the meantime, Spyer has the minor consolation of a growing audience for his work. (JNS Oct 2)