



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*

Natalie, it's not about the Refugees

By Amnon Lord

Natalie Portman can give one reason or another for her act of boycott, she can make the subtlest of distinctions that will differentiate her from the rest of the entities that operate against Israel, but in the end, her decision to boycott the Genesis

Prize ceremony is seen here as part of the cloud of hostility that hangs over the country – and since when, actually? These past 70 years? Ms. Neta-Li Hershlag, who Anglicized her name to Natalie Portman thanks to a name from her mother's side, won't escape that cloud.

We shouldn't delude ourselves. Portman is a personality under direction. As a major Hollywood star, she is surrounded by agents and managers. She also has her own independent, original thoughts, which she computes as part of her management software.

The Natalie Portman firm concluded that her participation in a public ceremony in Israel, and being photographed at said ceremony with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, would hurt the Portman brand more than a nonappearance, along with political messages against the government of Israel, would. Omar Barghouti has already co-opted Portman's statements for the BDS movement. He's right. He is managing to poison the Israel brand in many circles.

Portman is not some minor personality. She represents the broad spectrum of liberal American Jewry. Every Jewish personality identified with liberal American finds some way to express their opposition to Israel, without of course denying Israel's right to exist.

This was more or less the message from World Jewish Congress Chairman Ron Lauder in his most recent New York Times opinion piece, in which he accused Israel of hurting itself by not making peace with the Palestinians.

This pathetic, hurtful phenomenon among liberal American Jews perpetuates and even intensifies the policy that was traditional in the American administration for years. In effect, this tradition ended only when President Donald Trump took office.

There is no point in getting into a one-on-one historical debate with Portman; her conscience is partisan so there's no point. But the interesting point is the tendency of American Jewry to condition its closeness to or distance from Israel on how the peace process "progresses" toward a Palestinian state.

This was the attitude of previous administrations. The closer Israel got to the two-state solution, the closer the U.S. drew to Israel. Ironically, this is American Jews' message to Israel, making them tools of blackmail in the hands of the terrorist organization known as the Palestinian Authority.

Portman might explain her boycott by referring to the issue of African "refugees," but she means the same much-discussed gap in values between Israel and "progressive" American Jewry. It could be the Palestinian issue, the Western Wall, the question of "who is a Jew?" or, most recently, migrants who entered Israel illegally. Any issue can be thrown on the pile of growing alienation of American Jews.

What makes Portman's political approach suspicious is the fact that she has both her feet in a moral disaster area – and this refers to Hollywood; America that commits acts of mass slaughter; California, whose open southern border has become an entry point for human trafficking, particularly the trafficking of women.

Out of the ruins of the totalitarian republic that replaced the strains of "Hava Nagila" with Harvey Weinstein and Barack Obama, Portman is in no position to preach to Israeli society, which is heroically defending its life and protecting its democracy. It would be best to accept the fact that even people like Portman are part of this same group.
(Israel Hayom Apr 23)

Trump 'Sold Israel down the River' By Guy Cohen

There is anger among Israel's supporters in the US after the administration reportedly caved in to European demands, and decided to allow Iran to continue to hold medium range ballistic missiles.

According to a report by Adam Kredo in the Washington Free Beacon, the Trump administration is "poised to legitimize Iran's ballistic missile program, granting the Islamic Republic the ability to produce and test a series of missiles capable of striking Israel."

The report says European countries have been pressuring the Trump administration for weeks on the matter, and the senior officials handling

Events...

Thursday May 3, 8pm

Jacques Gauthier speaks on "Forget Politics: Who Has Legal Rights in Jerusalem" at the Village Shul.

Commentary...

What we Learned from Ms. Portman By Eitan Orkibi

While everyone was busy being star struck, an important aspect of Natalie Portman's decision to reject the Genesis Prize "due to recent events" on the Gaza border was missed in the public discourse. Her announcement reeks of opportunism, as explained on these pages by Amnon Lord on Monday, and her reasoning vacillated until finally finding the safe shores of "not wanting to appear as endorsing Benjamin Netanyahu."

There is a lesson here that we should learn though, whether about the dizzying speed in which anti-Israel propaganda spreads, or about the capriciousness of our friends who preach in favor of territorial concessions.

Some Israelis, ever since Barack Obama's departure from the White House, have desperately sought an alternate cosmopolitan hero to rely on and apparently think the Israeli public suffers from short-term memory loss about the withdrawal from Gaza and the promises that were made about giving the IDF freedom of action once gone from the coastal enclave. We would be able to deploy along a recognized sovereign border, they assured us, from where we could defend Israel's security without having to answer to the world.

It's ironic that the disengagement from Gaza – whose propagandists marketed as a successful "pilot" for a future "ingathering" from Judea and Samaria – did in fact play the role of harbinger. Not only did it foreshadow Palestinian violence and their plans for the day after occupation, but the behavior of the so-called peace camp as well. The public is asking what it can glean from this camp's reaction to the IDF's conduct on the Gaza border, and about the day we will have to contend with a similar scenario on a different border – next to Modiin let's say?

The Palestinians occasionally try catching us off guard: a rocket here, a tunnel there, storming the border fence. On the other hand, those who wanted us to leave Gaza adhere to a fairly regular script: First comes a provocative post on social media, followed by the appearance of opinion pieces and petitions against Israel's military brutality; eventually, portions of this sentiment are translated into a heartfelt declaration and land on the pages of some leading European journal or in a pointed interview on Al-Jazeera.

What is still changing is the speed with which the IDF is accused of war crimes. It seems that from one incident to the next, the time it takes to go from accusations of "disproportionate response" to "slaughtering innocents" keeps getting shorter. And if "the State of Israel shoots protesters" then clearly it would be immoral to receive an award from its blood-drenched hands.

None of this is to say that the "peace camp" shouldn't be allowed to protest, or that criticizing the IDF is forbidden. It only means that from one round to the next it is getting easier to predict certain behaviors. A large part of the public's aversion to future territorial concessions doesn't stem from the violence we can expect from the Palestinians; rather it exists because those pushing for the next withdrawal don't exactly stand by our side when we have to contend with the consequences.

Some of them are quick to accuse IDF soldiers of perpetrating a massacre; others don't hesitate to shake Israel off like a piece of dog feces stuck to the soles of their pristine shoes. This message has also been heard loud and clear, Ms. Portman. (Israel Hayom Dec 24)

the talks are "said to have conceded to a demand that Iran only restrict ballistic missile activity to its longer range missiles, leaving untouched its mammoth arsenal of short-range and medium-range missiles that could easily hit Israel and other Middle Eastern nations."

Sen. Ted Cruz (R., Texas) told the conservative website that the proposed European "fixes" "would only constrain the Iranians from doing things they never would have done" and that President Trump should reject these empty promises and withdraw America from this disastrous deal."

The Beacon added that the US negotiating team and its stance has not changed since former secretary of state Rex Tillerson and former National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster were fired by Trump. "The Tillerson-McMaster negotiating team is carrying water for the Europeans," said one administration insider. "They have nothing real to show after months of negotiations," the source said. "The idea that they are even close to 'fixing' the JCPOA is farcical."

"I honestly don't know how the president can sell Israel down the river like that," said one Jewish official who "routinely engaged with the White House" on Iran issues. "It's bad enough they're trying to deal with missile threats to their north alone. Now Iran gets a green light to perfect missiles that will one day constitute an existential threat to Israel's existence?"

Josh Block, a former Clinton administration official who serves as the CEO and president of The Israel Project, told the Free Beacon that the Trump administration is leaving Israel open to attack.

"We know that the mullah regime already has the capability to strike targets up to 1,240 miles from Iran's borders—a range sufficient to hit the State of Israel, our Arab allies across the region, every U.S. military installation and American soldier in the region, and even parts of Europe," said Block.

He called Iran's new ballistic missile cap offer "a total sham—once cooked-up by Iran's allies in Russia, who are already supporting Tehran and Assad's violent war to dominate the Middle East—designed to fool President Trump, with the support of greedy Europeans who care more about making money." (IsraelNationalNews.com Apr 26)

Urging 'Restraint' and Other Anti-Israel Mischief

By Manfred Gerstenfeld

There is a long history of anti-Israel bias among many in the Western world. This has led Palestinian leaders to conclude that provocations against Israel can be productive, because they have important public relations value. Such action often leads to condemnations from sources like the United Nations, Arab countries, the European Union, NGOs, as well as some Jewish organizations. These reactions then provide a further incentive for more Palestinian provocations.

The recent Hamas-conducted "March of Return" protests along the Gaza border were not peaceful. They included rock throwing, Molotov cocktails, and shooting at IDF soldiers. There were also repeated attempts by Palestinians to cross the Israeli border in order to launch violent attacks on Israelis. Eleven of the first Palestinian casualties in the protests were proven to be terrorists, including those from Hamas.

During the second march, there was new violence, including the burning of what may have been 10,000 tires. There were also further attempts to both attack IDF soldiers and infiltrate Israel under the resulting smokescreen. Since then, burning kites have been launched against the Jewish state. But these kites are far from innocent; at least one had a firebomb attached to it.

Many Western anti-Israel statements were issued after Israel responded to this rampant Palestinian violence. A number of these statements were of four types. On the surface, they seem reasonable. But even superficial analysis shows that all of these kinds of statements involve hypocrisy and bias. A few examples will illustrate this.

The first type of statement claims that Palestinians are entitled to demonstrate peacefully, suggesting that Israel was trying to stop the Gazans from doing so. Those who made this statement knew the truth: the demonstrations were not peaceful, and included violent attempts to breach the border with Israel. Among those whose statements stressed the Palestinian right to "peaceful demonstrations" were the European Union, France, US senators Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, and J Street.

The second type consisted of calling for "restraint." This came in two versions: either calling for Israeli restraint alone, or calling for restraint from both Israel and Hamas — thereby equating the two. Statements about restraint on both sides were made by the EU, the deputy prime minister of Ireland, J Street, and Russia. Other statements that addressed only Israel came from France, Senator Warren, and the head of the Union of Reform Judaism, Rabbi Rick Jacobs.

As far as armies go, the Israeli army is probably the most codified and restrained army which has ever existed on the planet. Amos Guiora, a professor at the University of Utah, has described the many codes that the Israeli army follows concerning morality and ethics in combat. It is doubtful whether anything similar exists elsewhere. These codes have been praised by several Western armies.

The third type of statement includes asking for an independent investigation of the events in question. Here we find the EU in the company of the deputy prime minister of Ireland and Kuwait. Those who make this claim know full well that the logical candidates for such pseudo-independent investigations are United Nations associate bodies. The best known such investigation was the report by the Goldstone committee, which was so extremely distorted that in 2011 editors Gerald Steinberg and Anne Herzberg were able to publish an entire book about its massive bias.

The fourth type of statement concerns the proportionality of Israeli actions. This implies that Israel's actions are not proportionate. Here we find the EU and France, along with Iran, Turkey, and Russia.

There were also other Western statements. For instance, the long-time anti-Israel inciter Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the British Labour party, asked for a review of his country's arms sales to Israel.

These kinds of Western reactions will stimulate further Hamas-initiated violent demonstrations, as the organization hopes to solicit more anti-Israel reactions. Those Westerners who make these declarations may claim that incentivizing Hamas is not their intention — but that is immaterial. They should have learned from history that they contribute to causing more Palestinian violence and more Palestinian casualties. (Algemeiner Apr 25)

How Not to Beat BDS By Jonathan S. Tobin

The BDS movement hasn't won many victories in the United States in recent years, but Israel's opponents had to be thrilled when they learned that the student body at Barnard College voted by a 2-1 margin to endorse a proposal asking the highly regarded educational institution to divest from eight companies that do business in Israel.

The symbolic importance of the Barnard vote wasn't limited to the timing, which came on the eve of Israel's Independence Day. According to Hillel International, Barnard is one of the most heavily Jewish colleges in the United States with 850 Jewish students out of a student body of 2,500. That makes the vote in which 1,153 students participated a signal triumph for the anti-Zionist Jewish Voices for Peace and Students for Justice in Palestine groups, which sponsored the resolution.

While pro-Israel groups vowed to redouble their efforts to fight BDS, some Jews blamed the Jewish establishment for what happened. Barnard alumna Jenny Singer wrote in *The Forward* that the problem was that Jewish students are fed fairy tales about a perfect Israel and are then unprepared to face the anti-Zionist narrative in which the Jewish state is portrayed as a human-rights offender. She believes that what's needed is Jewish education about Israel that is more self-critical.

Singer is right about the appalling ignorance about the Middle East that is displayed by Jewish students. She's also right that this reflects a failure on the part of the American Jewish community, rather than putting the onus just on the students. However, she's wrong to think that the answer to the antisemitism of the BDS movement is more criticism of Israel, or that a decision not to directly confront the liars and haters is the wiser path for pro-Israel students.

The problem at Barnard is no different than that of scores of other colleges.

Jewish teenagers arrive on campus and are confronted by Israel-haters that have a clear script in which the Jewish state is depicted as an apartheid regime that commits genocide against innocent Palestinians. Most Jewish students don't know that the smears of Israel are lies or lack the basic knowledge of history to refute them. Even many who do realize that the charges are false feel intimidated by a campus culture in which intersectional theory has become a modern gospel. At a time when support for groups like Black Lives Matter is the new liberal orthodoxy, the bogus connection asserted between US civil-rights disputes and the Palestinian war on the Jewish state is enough to bludgeon a great many Jewish students into silence or acquiescence. That's the opening that BDS supporters have exploited into victories like the Barnard vote.

Why don't Jewish kids know as much about the Middle East as the BDS crowd?

The answer starts and finishes with the appalling failure of Jewish education.

Large numbers of Jewish kids get no Jewish education at all, let alone one that will arm them with the facts about the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Yet the truth is that those who do get some kind of Jewish education often don't wind up knowing much about Israel either.

Given the limited time they get with their students, even the best synagogue schools are hard-pressed to give youngsters the religious knowledge and Hebrew skills needed to pull off a bar or bat mitzvah. An in-depth look at the Jewish state is usually beyond their means. Sadly, the same is often true for many day schools, which, in theory, ought to have the time to teach Jewish history and Zionism, as well as dive deeply into contemporary Israel's challenges. Nevertheless, sometimes they wind up giving all that short shrift.

One of the greatest achievements of American Jewry in the last 20 years was the creation of Birthright Israel, the program that takes college-age students (as well as young adults in their later 20s) on trips to Israel. As much as Birthright has had a positive impact, if we wait until kids get to college to teach them about Israel, we're going to lose most of them. Jewish schools of every variety need to begin making the centrality of Israel a bigger part of Jewish education.

It's also true that teaching about Israel should take into account the complex nature of the conflict with the Palestinians. It's OK to acknowledge that Israel isn't perfect, while still pointing out that it is the sole real democracy in the Middle East, and that Arab citizens there have rights denied to their counterparts in Arab majority nations.

But the problem goes deeper than that. Jewish kids grow up in an environment that tends to view all forms of nationalism as illegitimate and to regard the concept of a Jewish state as a form of racism. That makes them vulnerable to the lies of those who wish to destroy Israel.

Many on the left point to groups like AIPAC, blaming them for not being more critical of Israel. But the notion that BDS can be countered by advocates who spend as much time bashing the Jewish state as upholding the justice of its cause is as much of a myth as any tall tales about a perfect Israel. The problem isn't that the pro-Israel side isn't more reasonable. It's that countering the lies requires a willingness to stand out in a campus world where doing so isn't going to win you many friends (and in some cases could even affect your academic standing).

No matter how educated college students are about the Middle East or how nuanced their views of the conflict or Israel's flaws, resisting BDS also requires a willingness to do something that is hard for anyone: standing up to the political fashion of the day and being willing sometimes to be an embattled minority.

Calling out antisemites on campus is the kind of a task that won't win anyone a popularity contest. But when confronted by groups like Students for Justice in Palestine and Jewish Voices for Peace, which trade in lies about Israel and engage in anti-Semitic arguments that delegitimize Jewish rights, that's exactly what is needed. Yet before we can expect Jewish kids to muster the courage to fight back, the Jewish community must do a better job in preparing them for the challenge. Until that happens, more debacles like the one at Barnard are almost certain to follow. (Algemeiner Apr 23)

The Palestinians' Kite Jihad By A.J. Caschetta

In the history of weaponizing the mundane, no one beats the Palestinians. When they have been unable to acquire conventional weapons, they have resorted to the unconventional — such as kitchen knives and screwdrivers. When unable to acquire conventional vehicles of war, they have resorted to the unconventional — such as cars, truck, and even bulldozers.

In the latest round of attacks against Israel — the “March of Return” — they have yet again demonstrated ingenuity by weaponizing the simplest of children's toys: the kite.

Their method involves fashioning a wire tail onto a kite, with an explosive attached to it. The kite is then flown from the relative safety of the Gaza side of the border into Israel. Once it has reached far enough into Israeli territory, the string is cut and the kite — explosive attached — falls into Israeli territory.

Recalling the success of the November 2016 fire jihad, some of the kites have been used to deliver incendiary devices, while others have used explosives. Some of the weaponized kites are made to resemble the Palestinian flag, while others more ominously feature swastikas.

Reporters from the Agence France Presse (AFP) found Palestinian children boasting of their new “means of struggle,” one of whom enthused: “They [the IDF] are firing explosives bullets and tear gas, we are flying kites to burn the farmland.”

On Tuesday, April 17, one such weaponized kite — with a Molotov cocktail attached — started a fire in a field outside Kibbutz Be'eri, several miles into Israeli territory. According to The Times of Israel, it took four teams of firefighters to put out the fire, which had spread over nearly 25 acres.

Using toys as weapons recalls the tactic that the Soviet Union used against the children of Afghanistan in the 1980s. The idea was to maim, but not kill, Afghan children in order to fill hospital beds that therefore couldn't be used to treat mujahideen fighters attacking Soviet troops. So the ingenious minds of Soviet scientists designed bombs disguised as toys.

In 1985, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights — which was inquiry conducted by an Felix Ermacora — asserted that many Afghan “children had been very seriously wounded, having their hands or feet blown off, either by handling booby-trap toys they had picked up along the roadway, or by stepping on them ... booby-trap toys encountered include those resembling pens, harmonicas, radios or matchboxes, and little bombs shaped like a bird. This type of bomb, consisting of two wings, one flexible and the other rigid, in the shape and colors of a bird, explodes when the flexible wing is touched.”

After the Russians were expelled from Afghanistan, the Taliban infamously forbade Afghan children from playing with kites which they deemed “un-Islamic.” Yet they too came up with ingenious ways to disguise weapons, especially bombs — for instance, in turbans. Burhanuddin Rabbani, head of the Afghan High Peace Council, was assassinated by a Taliban bomber who defeated security measures by hiding explosives in his turban.

Al Qaeda has used the human body to disguise their bombs, either as suicide vests (which they learned from the Tamil Tigers) or by shoving bombs in their rectums. In Iraq, bombs were disguised as the pregnant abdomens of women, packing a larger payload than the slim vests.

The ingenuity displayed by jihad warriors to disguise their weapons shows just how adaptable they are, always a step or two ahead of Western thinkers in their deviousness. It also shows that the Palestinians are willing to sacrifice their children.

AFP reporters in Gaza not only found children willing to talk, but also adults, who had put the children up to their treachery. One said that the aim was “to destabilize, creating confusion,” and to “burn ... crops.” A man named Jamal al-Fadi, identified as a professor of political science in Gaza, said that, “The Palestinian people, frustrated and desperate due to the Israeli siege ... have had their hope renewed” by the new “means of struggle.”

If the Palestinians devoted a fraction of the ingenuity they have shown in devising and hiding weapons to diplomacy, compromise, and to building in the territory that Israel abandoned in 2005, they would be far closer to achieving the state they crave. Unfortunately, they prefer killing over negotiating, protesting over compromising, and burning over building. (Algemeiner Apr 24)

Israel Survives Because of an Iron Will and an Iron Wall

By Zev Chafetz

In the run-up to this week's 70th anniversary of Israel's independence, Israeli Defense Forces chief of Staff General Gabi Eisenkot pronounced the country “invincible.”

This was a bold statement. The country faces a growing threat from Iran and its puppets in Lebanon and Gaza, and the possibility of a clash with Russia over Syria. And yet, few Israelis have disagreed with this assessment.

There is mood of confidence here, and its origin lies in a doctrine of strategic defense that has proven itself over nearly a century of intermittent warfare.

That doctrine was first enunciated in an article in 1923 entitled “The Iron Wall.” Its author was Ze'ev Jabotinsky, a visionary Zionist leader and the ideological father of the Likud.

At the time of its publication, the Jews of Palestine were a small, embattled minority. Only three years had passed since the first Arab riots in Jerusalem against them. The Jewish community's socialist leaders hoped they could appease Arab enmity by offering economic cooperation, progress and prosperity.

Jabotinsky derided this as childish, and insulting to the Arabs, who would not barter away their homeland for more bread or modern railroads. They would, he said, resist while they had a spark of hope of preventing a Jewish state.

“There is only one thing the Zionists want, and that is the one thing the Arabs do not want,” he wrote. Nothing short of abandoning the Zionist project would placate Arab hostility and violence. If the Jews wanted to remain, they would have to come to terms with a harsh reality: This was a zero-sum game. There could be no peace until the Arabs accepted Israel's right to exist.

Jabotinsky saw that the Arabs (in Palestine and beyond) were far too numerous to be defeated in a single decisive war. The Jews needed to erect an iron wall of self-defense and deterrence -- a metaphorical wall built of Jewish determination, immigration, material progress, strong democratic institutions and a willingness to fight. Gradually, the enemy would be forced to conclude that this wall could not be breached.

The Iron Wall concept was intended to deter aggression until psychological victory was won, and extremists, “whose watchword is ‘Never!’” were replaced by more moderate leaders willing to live peacefully with a Jewish state.

David Ben Gurion, Israel's founding prime minister, despised Jabotinsky and his political heir, the future Prime Minister Menachem Begin. He certainly rejected their ideological commitment to a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan River.

In 1947, he accepted a two-state partition. The Arabs of Palestine, and their allies in the Arab world, rejected it.

The war that followed created the Jewish state, but as Jabotinsky had predicted, the Arabs refused to accept it. Ben Gurion came to the reluctant conclusion that his rival's doctrine -- deterrence by gradual demoralization of the enemy -- was correct. In 1953, Ben Gurion essentially adopted this concept (without, of course, crediting Jabotinsky). Israel would be forced

to fight a long, existential war composed of many small wars. It must win each time, and use the interim to strengthen the national wall of iron by cultivating Israel's advantages in human resources, technology and military experience.

Egypt, Jordan and Syria bounced off the Iron Wall in the Six-Day War of 1967. That was enough for Jordan, which withdrew permanently from armed conflict with Israel. But in 1973, Egypt and Syria tried again, launching a surprise attack that caught the IDF completely unprepared. It was their last best shot and it failed. Israel did not crumble. Four years later, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat came to Jerusalem and cut a deal with Begin. A few years later, King Hussein of Jordan followed. The rest of the Arab states have gradually come to terms with the permanence of Israel.

The Palestinian Arabs have a harder time reading the writing on the Iron Wall. Palestinian Liberation Organization leaders Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas have resisted any deal that would end the Palestinian "right of return," which is a euphemism for the destruction of Israel as a Jewish state. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a political disciple of Jabotinsky's, has embraced the diplomatic precept of the Iron Wall doctrine and stalled until that happens. "The only way to reach an agreement in the future is to abandon all idea of seeking an agreement in the present."

In the meantime, Israel maintains its essential security doctrine. It defends its skies an anti-missile system whose first component was dubbed "iron dome." And the metaphorical wall has now reached outer space.

"Israel's ability to develop and launch satellites project a clear message of national might," says Isaac Ben-Israel, the chairman of the Israel Space Agency. "This contributes to and reinforces the image of the Iron Wall in the eyes of Israel's enemies."

Meanwhile, back on earth, the IDF continues to build and fortify its tangible security barriers -- defenses against terrorism in the West Bank and aggression along the northern front with Iran's puppet Syria and its surrogate Hezbollah. There is also a barrier separating Israel from Gaza, where Hamas has lately been staging marches under the under the century-old Palestinian banner of "Never!"

Hamas intends to march again during the Independence Day weekend. It is a futile gesture. The Iron Wall is no longer simply a metaphor. It is a description of the Jewish state itself. And, as Eisenkot says, it is invincible. (Bloomberg Apr 18)

Area C Is Strategically Vital for Israel By Gershon Hacohen

Last year, upon the publication of Micah Goodman's book *Catch-67*, I explained the basic reasons for my disagreement with his analysis and recommendations. That seemed at the time to be the end of the matter. A year later, when Goodman chose to set forth his views in two almost identical articles — one in the *Haaretz* supplement (February 16, 2018), the other in *Makor Rishon* (April 5, 2018) — I felt compelled to warn of the danger that his recommendations entail.

Opposed to what some Israelis see as a desirable status quo in the West Bank, Goodman recommends a string of pragmatic small steps that would "enable Palestinian autonomy to expand without Israel's security contracting." He explains that "this does not entail major ideological concessions such as evacuating settlements."

The essence of the dispute lies in two practical recommendations that, to my mind, are disastrous: transferring considerable parts of Area C to Palestinian Authority control and "halting settlement expansion outside the large blocs." These recommendations show that Goodman is stuck in a mechanistic security paradigm borrowed from senior defense establishment officials whom he met while writing his book. But Israel's control of the West Bank is not solely predicated on security needs.

The national-security equation goes well beyond technical security aspects. As stated in IDF doctrine, "National security is the domain concerned with ensuring the national ability to contend effectively with any threat to the national existence and to the vital national interests." Indeed, the debate between right and left about Israel's continued control of the West Bank (or parts of it) is rooted in the question of its vital national interests there.

Unable to agree on their national vision, Israelis have placed the debate in the hands of the security specialists. As a result, those vital interests have been reduced to little more than an inventory of security requirements, such as monitoring the border crossings in the Jordan Valley and having an early warning station on Mount Hazor.

For Goodman, his only interest beyond technical security matters, to which he assigns major importance, is separating from the Palestinians. This goal has been turned — by the likes of Ehud Barak, Haim Ramon, and Tzipi Livni — into a supreme national interest. Yet in their many statements about the need for separation, they totally ignore the fact that the lion's share of the separation was already implemented at the start of the Oslo process under Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

In May 1994, Israel's rule over the Palestinian population of the Gaza Strip came to an end with the establishment of the PA. In January 1996, the Israeli civil administration's rule over the Palestinian population of Areas A

and B of the West Bank came to an end. Since that time, over 90% of the Palestinians in the territories conquered in the June 1967 war have been living under the PA.

To continue demanding that Israel separate from the Palestinians and minimize its rule over them, when that rule was already minimized quite some time ago, is a manipulative way of pushing for a near-total Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, including the Jordan Valley, something that Rabin was adamantly opposed to. (The settlement blocs that are supposed to remain in Israeli hands constitute no more than 4% of the entire territory.)

Moreover, from a spatial and ecological standpoint, an Israel that shrinks down to a strip of land along the coastal plain, from Nahariya to Ashkelon, becomes a densely populated urban nightmare. Even today the problem of density has reached the boiling point. For example, the Planning Authority has been ordered to plan the construction of an additional 2.6 million new apartments by 2040, all within the Green Line. Yet the spatial future lies in the open territory of the Jordan Valley, from the river to the mountain spine. It is there that millions of Jews can be settled in a swath of land parallel to the coastal strip.

The way in which Rabin drew the contours of Area C, paying close personal attention to every road and hill, shows the map of Israel's spatial interests in the West Bank. The territorial aspects of this conception require a settlement endeavor comprising four main tasks: 1) Developing Greater Jerusalem, primarily eastward toward the Dead Sea. 2) Developing southern Mount Hebron. 3) Developing the Jordan Valley. And 4) developing the corridors from the coastal strip to the Jordan Valley. The distribution of Jewish localities in the West Bank, supported by outposts, hews very closely to this strategic logic.

Herein lies the key to understanding the subversive activity that the EU and the PA have been conducting in Area C in recent years. With coordinated strategic planning, stepped-up construction, and extensive agricultural development, the PA is striving, with overt European support, to prevent Israel from realizing its national interests in the West Bank. This means not only struggling to broaden the Palestinian living space, but also to fragment and isolate areas of Jewish settlement.

The struggle between Israel and the Palestinians now centers on the question of who, at the end of the day, will find himself fragmented and isolated. For Micah Goodman, who lives in Kfar Adumim, the personal significance of his own proposal is that his own village, like the Gush Etzion neighborhoods, will become an enclave in a Palestinian domain. This struggle will also determine the status of Jerusalem: whether Palestinian neighborhoods such as A-Tur and Isawwiya will be Palestinian enclaves in the Israeli space, or whether Maale Adumim will be an Israeli enclave in the Palestinian space.

This explains the stubborn American opposition to the creation of a national park on the eastern slopes of Mount Scopus: the goal is that Maale Adumim will become an Israeli enclave in a Palestinian area. Goodman's recommendations dovetail with EU-led efforts to curtail Israeli control of Area C. What his small-steps paradigm really portends — even if the settlement blocs remain in Israeli hands — is a creeping Israeli withdrawal to the Green Line.

This dispute should be presented in its true colors. It involves contrasting understandings of Israel's national mission and the issue of reclaiming the Jewish ancestral homeland, as well as different ways of assessing the security aspects of the situation. The dispute is not between those advocating judicious pragmatism and those caught up in an ideological vision that ignores the constraints of reality. The latter too are committed to pragmatic navigation that surmounts obstacles. It appears, though, that not only are the two parties' goals different, but their compasses are differently calibrated.

In line with the traditional security concept of the pioneering Zionist movement, my pragmatic navigation sees extensive settlement in Area C as the key to strategic stability. The more Israelis settle in this area, the more others will come to view Israel's presence as an unalterable reality with which it is best to reconcile. That is why the EU chose to get so openly involved in shaping this territory in the Palestinians' favor.

Goodman's recommendations run counter not only to the vision of the settlement enterprise in the West Bank and the Jordan Valley, but also to the way in which Rabin viewed Israel's national interests in this territory.

"The only way to maintain the existing situation is to change it." With those words Goodman ended his article. I certainly agree. The dispute, however, is over the direction of the change. Contrary to Goodman's recommendations, Israel must increase its settlement activities with the goal in mind of three million Jews living in Area C, especially the Jordan Valley. Given that this area is almost totally bereft of Palestinians, such a development is bound to strengthen Israel's national security while having a negligible impact on its demographic balance, and none whatsoever on its continued existence as a Jewish and democratic state.

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