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ב"ה שבת שלום
פרשת מקץ

Enduring Issues

Iran's Undivided and Indivisible Regime

Caroline B. Glick

This week, we saw the true face of the Iranian regime at home and abroad.

In regards to Iran, for forty years, Western policymakers have been lying to themselves about the nature of the Iranian regime and the basing their Iran policies on the lies they tell themselves. The main lie has been that there is an ongoing, existential struggle for power and control within the ranks of the regime's leadership.

On the one hand, the fantasy goes, you have the "hardliners." They are the ones behind all the terrorism. They are the ones working to develop nuclear weapons and the warheads to deliver them. They are the ones who call out "Death to America, Death to Israel."

Facing them are the "moderates." If the moderates seize the reins, the Iranians will eschew terror. They will walk away from their nuclear program. And the aspiration for an Islamic global empire will become no more than a children's fairytale.

The conceptual framework for American and Western policy relating to Iran since the 1979 revolution has been that all you need to do to end the conflict with Iran, and bring it back into the family of nations is to find the right mix of concessions to enable the moderates win their power struggle against the hardliners.

Monday, Reuters published a report about how the regime brutally repressed the countrywide protests last month that put paid this delusional notion. Based on accounts from four Iranian regime sources, Reuters reported that on November 17, the second day of the protests, when the demonstrations spread to Tehran, the demonstrators called openly for the regime to be overthrow and for the late shah's son Reza Pahlavi to return to Iran and lead a post-Khomeinist republic, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei held a meeting to discuss how to handle the demonstrations. It was attended by President Hassan Rouhani, several members of his cabinet and senior security officials.

After seeing pictures of protesters burning his photo and destroying a statue of Khomeini, Khamenei reportedly yelled, "The Islamic Republic is in danger. Do whatever it takes to end it. You have my order."

Khamenei also said that "he would hold the assembled officials responsible for the consequences of the protests if they didn't immediately stop them."

The participants at the meeting were made to understand that "those rioters should be crushed," Reuters reported: *And they were. According to Reuters' sources, within two weeks, 1,500 demonstrators, including 400 women and at least 17 teenagers were killed by regime forces.*

In other words, there is no epic struggle between hardliners and moderates in Iran. The leader of the "moderates," Rouhani is just as responsible for the brutal repression of the protesters as supposed "hardliners." They were all at the meeting. They all agreed that the protests had to be brutally crushed.

Since Rouhani was first elected to the presidency in 2013, Western leaders have extolled him as the moderate we were all waiting for.

The Obama administration, together with the Europeans insisted that with President Rouhani at the helm of Iran, the West could make a nuclear deal with Iran that would give the regime a glide path to a nuclear arsenal inside of a decade and \$150 billion in sanctions relief.

Even Israel's security chiefs embraced the dream. In an interview with the Times of London on the eve of his retirement from the IDF last January, then Chief of the General Staff Lt. Gen. Gabi Eisenkot repeated the standard talking points.

There is a "power struggle in Iran between the Revolutionary Guards commander Qassem] Soleimani, who is exporting the Islamic revolution, and the more moderate faction led by President Hassan Rouhani, who wants to invest in the tottering economy rather than wars abroad," Eisenkot insisted.

As Iran scholar Michael Ledeen wrote in response to Eisenkot's remarks, the dynamic in Iran doesn't involve "a power struggle between a radical and moderate faction. It's a rejection of regime strategy by the bulk of the Iranian people."

Thanks to the Obama administration's political, economic and military support for Iran, when President Donald Trump entered office in January 2017, Iran had effectively consolidated its control over an empire that stretched from Iran through Iraq to Syria and Lebanon. Yemen had also become an Iranian colony. With Trump's decision in May 2018 to withdraw the U.S. from Obama's nuclear deal and reinstate U.S. sanctions against Iran, the Trump administration began destabilizing Iran, at home and throughout its colonies. The protests which began in Lebanon and Iraq in October, and spread last month to Iran are rooted in economic privation and dislocation fomented in large part by the U.S. sanctions.

The regime's brutal repression of last month's protests, (like its repression of the protests in Iraq where its forces and proxies have reportedly killed nearly 500 anti-Iranian demonstrators), show that in lieu of money, the Iranians – fake moderates and hardliners alike -- are perfectly willing rule through the jackboot.

The implication of this bitter, but obvious truth is that the only goal that should guide Iran's foes, and first and foremost, Israel and the U.S. is the goal of overthrowing the regime. That doesn't mean that Israel or the U.S. needs to send an invasion force into Iran tomorrow. But it does mean that all efforts in relation to Iran should have a component that destabilizes the regime both at home and throughout its empire.

This then brings us to Lebanon. This week, the mask came off in Lebanon twice. Whereas the myth that has guided Western policymaking regarding the regime in Iran has been the existence of a power struggle between moderates and hardliners, the myth relating to Lebanon has been that the government of Lebanon and the Lebanese armed forces are moderate actors that are independent and opposed to Iran's Lebanese proxy Hezbollah.

Over the past week, this myth has been exposed as a lie twice. First, the Hezbollah-controlled Lebanese parliament elected Hezbollah's candidate, Hassan Diab to serve as Lebanon's next prime minister and form its next government. Diab is entirely controlled by Hezbollah. There is no way that a government he leads will act independently of Hezbollah.

Second, following airstrikes against Iranian assets and personnel south of Damascus this week which were attributed to Israel, Khamenei's top security advisor Ali Akhbar Velayati threatened to respond by waging war against Israel from Lebanon.

In his words, "The Zionist entity will regret its actions. We will respond sooner or later with the resistance in Syria and Lebanon. Hezbollah will harm Israel in its territory if it dares to strike in Lebanon."

In other words, Iran said – and not for the first time – that it controls Lebanon. Through Hezbollah, it can and will attack Israel from Lebanon.

Since the first Iranian war against Israel from Lebanon in 2006, U.S. policy has been to pretend that the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Lebanese government are independent entities that oppose Hezbollah and operate independently of Hezbollah. The fact that Lebanese military forces provided logistical and targeting assistance to Hezbollah forces during the 2006 war made no impression on then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice when she

announced and began implementing a policy of massively funding, arming and training the Lebanese armed forces. The fact that the Lebanese government served throughout the war as Hezbollah's foreign ministry also made no impression as the U.S. massively expanded its economic assistance to the Lebanese government. Indeed, the U.S. increased its funding of the Lebanese government after Hezbollah won the 2007 elections and began exercising formal control over the Lebanese government after its mini-coup in 2008.

Israel, for its part recognizes that Lebanon is controlled by Hezbollah and also recognizes that the goal of its actions against Iran must play on and exacerbate the destabilization of the regime's grip on power at home and throughout its colonial possessions.

In a speech on Wednesday, Eisenkot's successor Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi set out Israel's plan for fighting Lebanon in the next war with Iran. He made clear that Lebanese infrastructure and urban centers would be targeted because they serve Hezbollah's war machine.

In a conversation with this writer, a senior defense official said that Israel's military goal in its operations in Syria has shifted in recent weeks. Until now, the purpose of Israel's military operations in Syria was to prevent the shipment of advanced, precision guided munitions to Hezbollah. "Today the goal is to remove Iran from Syria," he said.

"Our operational method is a combination of aggressive strikes and attrition. We're not going anywhere. We live here. The average Iranian woman has 1.9 children. They cannot sustain losses over the long haul. "We want to do to Iran in Syria what the Americans did to the Soviets in Afghanistan."

Israel's concept is right. But it may be alone in recognizing the nature of the challenge that Iran poses at home and through its proxies. The Europeans support Iran to all practical purposes. Despite the fact that Iran is has now enriched twice the amount of uranium it is permitted to enrich under the nuclear deal, and has opened its heavy water reactor at Arak in material breach of the agreement, the Europeans refuse to restore UN sanctions even though, under the nuclear deal, they were supposed to automatically "snap back" the minute Iran breached the deal.

The Americans for their part are divided. The official position of the Trump administration – restated this week by Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin at a conference in Doha – is that the U.S. seeks to negotiate a better deal with the regime.

So too, last week, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo ordered the release of \$130 million in economic aid to the Hezbollah-controlled Lebanese government.

Dennis Ross, an elder statesman of Washington's fantasy-based foreign policy elite penned an article in Foreign Policy this week where he recommended that the Democratic Congress budget massive aid to Lebanon to show the Lebanese people that America has their back and Iran doesn't. For Ross, the fact that Iran controls the Lebanese government which would receive all that money is neither here nor there.

Israel is the only one fighting Iran militarily today. It can manage alone, but only so long as the Americans don't go wobbly and the Europeans feel pressured to change course on Iran. Along these lines, is imperative that Israel ensure the Americans and Europeans understand the significance of Rouhani's involvement in the repression of last month's protests, Diab's election, and Velayati's threat this week to wage war against Israel through Lebanon.

The Iranian regime is unified in its commitment to maintain its control over Iran and its empire. If they consolidate their Obama-era gains and complete their nuclear weapons program, it will be a strategic disaster for Israel and the world as a whole.

Iran must be fought relentlessly on all fronts until its regime is consigned to history.

Beinart's Complaint

Victor Rosenthal

A recent news item indicates that among the candidates for seats in the World Zionist Congress – founded by Theodor Herzl in 1897 – are Peter Beinart and Jeremy Ben Ami.

To tell the truth, when I see the petulant babyface of Peter Beinart, I experience a feeling of nausea. A misozionist and tikkunist*, Beinart was one of the more successful figures at monetizing his brand with his 2010 article "The Failure of the American Jewish Establishment." It was followed by a book which expanded on his thesis that established American Jewish organizations were "failing" young liberal Jews because they were not sufficiently sensitive to the "fact" that Israel was viciously oppressing Palestinian Arabs.

Beinart continued to write and speak on this theme, and as often happens, as time passed he became more and more extreme in his anti-Israel expression. Nevertheless, he continues to insist that he is a Zionist. For someone like myself, who believes that the survival of the Jewish people everywhere depends on a strong Jewish state, the hypocrisy of a comfortable American Jew telling Israelis to commit suicide is infuriating.

The mention of hypocrisy immediately brings to mind the organization J Street, which was midwived in 2007 by a large infusion of cash from groups connected to George Soros (an infusion that J Street lied about until it was exposed). J Street, which also took money from individuals connected to Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia to lobby the US Congress, claims to be "pro-Israel and pro-peace," but its consistently anti-Israel actions have proven it to be neither. Like Beinart, J Street appeals to American Jewish progressives and liberals, who either don't see or don't care that the objects of their support are enemies of the Jewish state.

J Street is led by Jeremy Ben Ami, who is himself a study in hypocrisy (or psychopathology of another sort). His father, Yitzhak Ben Ami, was a member of the etzel, the underground army organization led by Menachem Begin that fought the British and the Arabs to create the state of Israel. He came to America during the Holocaust as part of the "Bergson Group," in an attempt – scuttled by the liberal Jewish establishment of the time – to mobilize support to rescue the doomed Jews of Europe. Thus, Jeremy is on the opposite side of his father's struggle.

Beinart and Ben Ami are two of a type that has begun to flourish in recent decades: Jews that make a career for themselves – either for money, academic advancement, fame, or all of the above – by exploiting the fact that they have Jewish parents to give them an aura of authority with which to attack the state of Israel. Although they have no personal stake in the consequences of their advice, they give it with a pretense of great moral weight.

Beinart's complaint (unfortunately) no longer makes sense. In recent years, many "establishment" Jewish organizations in the US – the ADL, Hillel International, the Federation system, the Union for Reform Judaism, and others have moved farther and farther away from supporting Israel. In some cases the reason is simply practical fund-raising: they would like to be acceptable to a new group of donors who are less pro-Israel than their parents, a consequence of the concentrated anti-Israel indoctrination they have received in American universities. In other cases, like the ADL, the dominant personalities in the organizations have been replaced by political operatives with a leftist (and anti-Israel) orientation.

I think that the Obama Administration also had much to do with this, providing support for J Street as their go-to Jewish group, as well as generating a continuous flow of propaganda against the Netanyahu government. The theme was "we love and support Israel, but Netanyahu is making it a racist theocracy." Liberal American Jews seem to have been very susceptible to this approach.

The change stood out for me when I reread Beinart's seminal 2010 article. I don't think that today he would be able to say that the "American Jewish establishment" univocally supports Israel. Indeed, the truth is closer to the opposite. And the "establishment" has been joined by groups like J Street and If Not Now; even Jewish Voice for Peace is being treated as a legitimate representative of a

segment of the Jewish population. None of this is an accident: a great deal of money has been expended by anti-Israel foundations like the Ford Foundation and Soros-connected foundations in order to accomplish this. And Beinart himself has been a tireless soldier in this campaign.

The World Zionist Congress consists of delegates from all over the world, in proportion to the Jewish populations of various countries. An election will be held to select them this January, and American Jews can vote for one of several slates of candidates. One is ironically called "Hatikvah"; its platform is a politically-correct compendium of left-wing causes, and its slate contains Beinart and Ben Ami, as well as the full panoply of American Jewish virtue-signalers and opportunists. For those Liberals/Progressives who can't quite stomach Beinart or Ben Ami, there is a very slightly less aggressively left-wing platform and slate provided by the Union for Reform Judaism.

With due respect for Herzl, I think that the World Zionist Organization and its Congress have outlived their usefulness now that the Jewish state has been reestablished and is thriving. Israel does not need financial contributions from the diaspora, and it needs advice and political pressure even less. The WZO should dissolve itself and turn over whatever resources it has to the true Zionist entity in the world (just ask the Iranian regime), the State of Israel.

For now, I recommend that American Zionists vote for the Herut Zionists, which – unlike "Hatikvah" and the Reform slate, does espouse true Zionist goals like the ingathering of exiles and the development of all of Eretz Yisrael.

Yisrael Beyteinu's Russian Campaign

Rochel Sylvestsky

Listening to several Israeli radio station talk shows this week, Kol Chai, Reshet Bet and Galei Yisrael, one heard commentators reacting with shock to an article by Yishai Friedman in Makor Rishon Hebrew weekly this past Friday which revealed Avigdor Liberman's Russian language campaign to the Hebrew speaking Israeli population.

Israelis are familiar with Liberman's Hebrew language campaign, aimed at frightening secular Israelis into thinking that the religious parties are going to force them to keep Shabbat, wear kippot and daven three times a day if they are in the governing coalition or face biblical punishments (His slogan: "Yes to a Jewish State, no to a Halakic State" is said solemnly – as if that were an imminent danger, when, as is obvious, it is not even a remote possibility). They heard his demands for public transportation on Shabbat, forcing haredi schools to teach secular studies, allowing civil marriage, recognizing no-requirement conversions and above all, his demand to force all yeshiva students to serve in the army (the IDF cannot handle that kind of influx – but this is not the place for an analysis of the complex and explosive issue).

Popular rightwing (once the darling of the leftwing) broadcaster Irit Linor had the courage to say what people who want the Jewish state to remain Jewish in public places and want people to be allowed to educate their children as they see fit, have been saying to one another for weeks. Israel is facing Avigdor Liberman's demands to erase the Jewish character of the Jewish State because Israel's government allowed hundreds of thousands of non-halakhically Jewish Russians to enter the country when it included the father/grandfather clause in Israel's Law of Return in 1970. This allowed grandchildren and children of non-Jewish grandmothers and their families – if a grandfather was Jewish – to become automatic citizens under the Law of Return, the law that was meant to make Israel a place where Jews could always find a haven without worrying about quotas or the need for visas.

The Russian immigrant non-Jews have no desire to convert, she said, exposing the lie behind all the media-encouraged liberal Orthodox and Reform Movement accusations that the Rabbinate placed unnecessary impediments before Russians allegedly begging to convert. The extensive experience I received running a youth village with hundreds of Russian teens and a user-friendly conversion (but Rabbinate approved) program as well as the information gleaned at meetings with other educators is proof enough that she is right. Most Russian

students did not want to convert – and why should they? They came from anti-religious surroundings and they got the same benefits if they stayed non-halakhically Jewish. Yes, we now have thousands of non-Jewish children in public religious elementary schools, but the answer, sadly, is not their mass conversion – a bad enough answer because both parents are not Jewish and it is hard to imagine a converted child eating in his own home – but because they have no intentions of doing so if there is even a modicum of change in lifestyles involved. And that, by all accounts, is their right. No one made that a condition for coming to Israel. (The Ethiopian aliyah is a totally different story). But that is not the same as trying to change the country's ethos.

Since most non-Jewish immigrants are from Ukraine and Russia, where anti-Semitism is part of the local culture, some are infected with antipathy to anything smacking of Judaism – and sometimes to Jews themselves.

In that vein, two incidents this past week caused the Yisrael Beyteinu Party some uncomfortable moments. The first was when a campaign video in Russian by party member Dr. Alex Kushner containing undisguised hatred for the haredi community was translated into Hebrew on the web. "Over a million representatives of the Orthodox community live at our expense" railed Kushner, on a backdrop of a photograph of masses of haredi Jews. "The state subsidizes them using our taxes, our labor. Enough."

The second was when the Makor Rishon website reported that Haifa deputy mayor and member of Yisrael Beyteinu, Lazar Kaploun, posted on the web that the religious are "gluttons and drunkards" who "rape minors."

Religious public figures and politicians reacted furiously to these incidents, and in Haifa there were calls for Kaploun's resignation. Organizations identified with the religious sector sent letters to the Attorney General demanding Kaploun's dismissal for "spreading anti-Semitic writings." Kaploun later apologized for his remarks.

The following weekend, Makor Rishon's magazine section contained an exposé of the hitherto unknown Liberman campaign, the one in Russian aimed at his core electoral base, non-Jewish and anti-religious (including some halakhically Jewish) Russian immigrants.

The paper also spoke to a grassroots group of veteran Russian immigrants, many of them refuseniks from the 1990s, some once supporters of the Yisrael Beyteinu party, who are appalled at what they call its "campaign of enmity-arousing anti-Semitism and hatred within the Russian population against the religious and haredi public." They claim that the level of discourse Yisrael Beyteinu maintains on the Russian web awakens dark evil impulses and breeds anti-Semitism.

In an op-ed on the subject, the group informed the public that Yisrael Beyteinu's Russian campaign is entirely different from its Hebrew one. "The Russian campaign is skewed, one-sided and in essence antisemitic, it incites against religious and haredi Jews, calls the religious sector 'parasites who take advantage of state funds at the expense of the Russian sector.'"

The Yisrael Beyteinu MKs in the Russian broadcasts, the group wrote, "purposely try to arouse fears of a bullying halakhic State that is in the works, thereby bringing certain parts of the Russian sector to express real anti-Semitism, including calls for violence against the Religious Zionists and haredim. Some accuse the entire haredi sector of pedophilia. They try to give the impression that the haredim intend to rule over and discriminate against the secular."

Former refusenik Natalie Rotenberg, a secular grandmother of five, has created a website called "Danger from within" – "Sakana miBeyteinu" – a play on the name of Liberman's party. Some of the group's members say that the social media conversation of Yisrael Beyteinu supporters brings them back to the dark days of Jew hatred in Russia. A number of the Hebrew and Russian quotes they have collected call for pogroms, ghettos for haredim, and even violence.

"Yisrael Beyteinu's campaign awakens the nascent anti-Semitism in part of the Russian population, now aimed at the religious and haredi sectors. When you

see a video showing haredi Jews (in this case, it was of Arye Deri and Shas members, ed.) dancing as money falls from the sky upon them, it causes irreparable damage to the social fabric of this country. And I am quite sure Avigdor Liberman knows exactly what he is doing and what he is encouraging."

The blatantly anti-Semitic trope used by Liberman's party is the warning that haredi parties are out to "empty the pockets" of Russian speaking immigrants. One video has Deri's face framed by a circle of dollars. Several official posts claim that the dead vote for Deri en masse (thereby accusing the party of using identity cards of the deceased to add voters, ed.) and show him reciting the Shema and praying for the dead to be resurrected so they can vote for Shas. There are posts against Religious Zionists, claiming the sector is prejudiced against Russians and harbors insane messianic beliefs.

The refusenik's website also brings talkbacks that appear under the official party posts. Here is one: "The time has come to take our pitchforks and go out to the streets. Our problem is that we don't get together against the darkness of the dosim (pejorative for religious, ed.) and we will end up like Iran..." And another: "We have to stop giving the wages of our labor to thieves and parasites in black jackets and smelly hats." More: "The religious are not descended from the apes, but from moldy fungi." And this: "We have to destroy entire neighborhoods, starting with Bnai Brak and Kfar Chabad. I wish I could reach Hamas to show them how to direct their rockets." Also, "put my name on the list of pogrom activists." One post reportedly said "Hitler was right to destroy Jews."

Talkbacks the world over are a way for deviants to come out of the woodwork, but the horrified refuseniks say, with justification, that these go way beyond the Israeli talkback level—and that in addition, they contain blatant anti-Semitic motifs of a virulence which does not appear on the Israeli web.

Makor Rishon spoke to several of the group members. Mordecai Tomshpolsky, 70, says that he knew people like that in Russia, aggressive "pogromatics" who incited to physical violence. He says that Israelis don't really fathom what is going on, but that he himself is afraid. "When MK Milinovsky (of Yisrael Beyteinu, ed.) writes that the haredim are a population that endangers the rest because they spread diseases and don't get vaccinations, I remember what they accused the Jews of Europe of doing. When a deputy mayor calls Jews loyal to Torah pedophiles, that is absolutely shocking. He is a public official! I think Yisrael Beyteinu is doing us a service, revealing something the public was not aware of—that we have sleeper cells of anti-Semitism in Israel, which are beginning to hit the streets."

Ilya Levin was once an active member of Yisrael Beyteinu, but left over a year ago because of the attitude of the party to mitzvah observant citizens. "We are a small people. We cannot allow ourselves to fight within our ranks. Liberman has always wanted the votes of those who arrived here because of the Law of Return but are not halakhically Jewish. The non-Jewish vote is worth at least a Knesset seat and since he wants that seat, he is campaigning in a manner that would be called out as anti-Semitic in any other country."

"The anti-Semitism revealed among the Russian sector is shocking," says another activist in the refusenik group who wishes to remain nameless. "The campaign defining an entire sector as the enemy, as money hungry and dominating, is spinning out of control. The quantity of nasty talkbacks is the sign of a trend."

Yisrael Beyteinu's office dismissed the criticism and the entire expose as politically motivated, according to the Makor Rishon article.

Except that the quotes are real and so are the videos and the talkbacks, so that a better question might be—why is Avigdor Liberman doing this? Liberman is in total control of his party, from choosing the candidates to telling them what to say and there is no way he has not approved of this campaign. But he is far from stupid and he must know where this is leading.

Why is he burning every bridge to religious Jewry, when his wife and children are observant Jews? What is making Liberman do this? Why does his party's Russian campaign sound like Louis Farrakhan

crossed with Jeremy Wright? Is it the same phenomenon as today's Black anti-Semitism which ignores the fact that it was Jews who risked their lives marching down South to end segregation, this because it helps the goals of Black Power to define a group of whiteys they can hate? It was religious Jewry who fought the Let My People Go campaign to free Soviet Jewry. Does that make them ripe for hating as well by those who did not join that people?

And is it really Liberman talking or is there some other force behind him out to pit Israelis against one another in the Jewish state, one that has Liberman under its thumb for whatever reason? We may never know, but one thing we do know: About that hatred genie. Once it is out of the bottle, it is almost impossible to put it back in.

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The graphic features the Boomerang logo at the top, with the text "Fighting for Israel" below it. The main title is "Weekly Terror Report" in large red letters, followed by "In Judea and Samaria" in smaller red letters. Below that, it says "14 - 21 of December" in black. A list of statistics is shown: "4 Pipe Bombs", "5 Firebombs", and "60 Stone Throwings". At the bottom, a red box contains the text "2146 terror attacks" and "Since the Beginning of 2019". The background is a dark, textured image with a small figure of a person in the lower right corner.

Choreographed Coups,

Martin Sherman **With the Law as a Prop**

"We cannot rely on an election to solve our problems"

- Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), House Judiciary Committee Chairman, Dec. 11, 2019, on the need to impeach President Donald Trump.

Every legal precedent must begin at some point...So, just because it involves the prime minister, we should delay the precedent for another time?

- Shai Nitzan, Israel's State Prosecutor, May 8, 2019, on the decision to indict PM Benjamin Netanyahu for bribery, on grounds unprecedented in any Western democracy.

Israel and the US are very different in many ways. Geographically, they are separated by the width of an ocean and the breadth of a continent. The population of the US is almost 40 times that of Israel's and its land mass over 450 times bigger than that of the Jewish state. Israel was founded on an ethos of socialist collectivism; the US on an ethos of capitalist individualism.

There are also wide differences in the political systems of the two countries. The US has a bicameral legislature (the Senate and the House) while Israel has a uni-cameral one (the Knesset). In Israel, the composition of the legislature is determined by a nationwide multi-party election, in which the number of seats allotted each party is proportional to the number of votes it won, out of the total number cast; in the US it is determined on a state by state basis in which the winner takes all, and all votes for the loser are discarded. Israel has a parliamentary system in which the head of the executive branch is selected from the ranks of the legislature; the US has a presidential system in which the head of the executive branch is not a member of the legislature...

Clearly contrived and contorted

Yet despite the dramatic physical, societal and political differences between the two countries, a very similar—and disturbing—process is taking place in the polities of each of them.

In both countries, we are witnessing a blatant, thinly

veiled attempt by a frustrated Left-of-Center opposition, fearing itself unable to unseat a duly elected Right-of-Center head of the executive branch via the polls, resorting to clearly contrived and contorted legal machinations to do so.

In Israel, the head of the executive branch, Prime Minister Netanyahu, has been submitted to an unrelenting drive to bring an indictment — any indictment — against him that has long exceeded the bounds of reasonable law enforcement.

This perverse and perturbing syndrome was succinctly portrayed by veteran pundit, Isi Leibler, in a piece entitled *Dysfunctional Politics and Disgraceful Behavior*. "Ever since he [Benjamin Netanyahu] was elected to lead the Likud and especially after he became prime minister, the mainstream media has ceaselessly sought to besmirch him and his family. No other democratic leader has been continuously vilified to such an extent. The liberal Israeli media has had more front-page coverage of Netanyahu's alleged personal failings and vague accusations of corruption than coverage of the turbulent and bloody events in the region that threaten our very survival."

Dogged for decades

Ever since his unexpected, razor-thin 1996 victory over Shimon Peres (then the left-leaning liberal establishment candidate for the premiership), Netanyahu has been hounded and harassed by his political rivals within Israel's entrenched civil society elites—and subjected to a maelstrom of allegations that range from the petty to the preposterous.

For two decades, he has been assailed by the self-appointed bon-ton set, who saw him as an impudent upstart usurper of their divinely ordained right to govern.

As their astonished disbelief morphed into visceral rage, a cavalcade of charges was unleashed, admonishing him (and/or his spouse) for irregular use of garden furniture, the employment of an electrician, the proceeds from the sale of recycled bottles; payments to a moving contractor, an inflated ice cream bill (no kidding), the cost of his wife's coiffure, meals ordered for the official PM residence from restaurants; and expenses involving the care of his ailing 96 year old father-in-law...

Significantly, the recriminations against him rarely — if ever — related to the way he discharged the duties of the office to which he was elected.

Finally, in November of this year, Netanyahu was indicted on three counts of breach of trust and one count of bribery. As I have pointed out elsewhere, prima facie, the charges seem anything but compelling and indeed have been excoriated by an impressive array of internationally renowned legal experts as being wildly inappropriate and posing a serious danger for democratic governance in the future.

But not only legal experts appear dubious as to the substantive merit of the indictments. Indeed, as the continuing widespread support for Netanyahu underscores, many in the general public remain unconvinced on this matter. Understandably, for a layman, one's sense of puzzlement and skepticism is inevitably increased by the fact that the State Prosecution has as good as admitted that Netanyahu could not be indicted on the basis of well-established legal practice—and to do so, new legal precedents needed to be invoked—see introductory excerpt.

Similar sentiments were expressed recently by Aharon Gerber, deputy head of the Kohelet Policy Forum's legal department. He writes: "The prime minister's opponents are willing to disregard the Basic Laws as they try to set legal precedent that will send him home; it's no wonder that public confidence in the rule of law has been greatly diminished."

He goes on to note: "The widespread support awarded to Netanyahu despite his indictment exposes an issue that will not go away when his legal battles are over."

According to Gerber: "Most of his supporters ... have already lost their faith in the justice system. Deviation from the Basic Laws and the creation of a legal precedent fuels public rage".

He suggests: "The solution is to apply the natural boundaries of legal discourse", and warns: "...Any attempt to deviate from the norm by creating ad-hoc legal standards will not lead to a model society, but rather an anarchic one."

Impeachment preordained

On the other side of the Atlantic, a very similar farcical fiasco has been unfolding.

In the US, the duly elected Right-of Center head of the executive branch, President Donald Trump, has also been under sustained assault by his Left-of-Center opposition, which is attempting to remove him from office by means other than the ballot box.

Of course, since Trump has not been involved in politics as long as Netanyahu, he has not been hounded and harassed for decades as has the Israeli prime minister. However, he has had the specter of impeachment brandished at him almost from the moment he stepped into the political arena.

Indeed, as early as April 2016 (some seven months before the elections and almost ten months prior to his inauguration), Politico reported: "Donald Trump isn't even the Republican nominee yet. But 'Impeachment' is already on the lips of pundits, newspaper editorials, constitutional scholars, and even a few members of Congress."

It thus appears that an endeavor to unseat Trump was virtually preordained—even before he could commit any act as president—whether praiseworthy or pernicious—that could even be remotely considered meriting impeachment.

Similarly, on the very day of his inauguration (January, 20, 2017), the Washington Post ran a piece headlined, The campaign to impeach President Trump has begun, in which it cited Anthony D. Romero, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union as saying: "We think that President Trump will be in violation of the Constitution ... on day one..."

Rashida's "refined" rhetoric

The premature pursuit of impeachment continued virtually unabated thereafter.

For example, just two weeks after Trump taking office, Democrat Congresswoman Maxine Waters tweeted: "Today, I told @cheddar [a video news service] that my greatest desire was to lead @realDonaldTrump right into impeachment."

Likewise, barely six months into his presidency, Democratic Representatives Brad Sherman (California) and Al Green (Texas) initiated formal impeachment charges against Trump (see here and here).

Then there was radical freshman, Rashida Tlaib (D-MI), who shortly after being sworn in to the House of Representatives following the November 2018 elections, set out the mission to which she had dedicated herself. With her uniquely "refined" rhetoric, she told a cheering crowd: "... we're gonna go in there and impeach the motherfucker."

As time passed, the clamor for impeachment persisted. Tlaib's cronies in the infamous radical "Squad of Four", including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) and Ilhan Omar (D-MN) joined in the witch-hunt. Similarly, in April 2019, the current contender for the Democratic presidential nomination, Elizabeth Warren called for the impeachment of Trump—after opposing it only several months previously, in the hope that the Mueller Report would produce damning proof of impeachable offences, hopes that were soon to be dashed.

"...compelling, overwhelming and bipartisan"???

To be fair to the Democrats, initially, the party's mainstream establishment was loath to pursue impeachment—as illustrated by the reluctance of the Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi (D-Ca). In a wide-ranging Washington Post interview in March this year, headlined, "Nancy Pelosi on Impeaching Trump: 'He's Just Not Worth It', she excoriated Trump, pronouncing: "I don't think he's fit to be president of the United States. [He is] ethically unfit. Intellectually unfit. Curiosity-wise unfit".

However, despite all this, she shied away from endorsing impeachment as being too divisive. She stated explicitly: "I'm not for impeachment. Impeachment is so divisive to the country that unless there's something so compelling and overwhelming and bipartisan, I don't think we should go down that path, because it divides the country", adding dismissively: "And he's just not worth it."

In this regard, it is intriguing to compare Rep. Jerold Nadler's (D-N.Y.) reticence regarding the prudence of impeachment prior to his selection as Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee with his current zeal in pursuing it (see opening excerpt). Thus, in December 2017, Nadler warned against doing

precisely what he later embraced with such partisan fervor: "There's not much point in impeaching a president and having him acquitted in the Senate as happened with Clinton."

He added: "If you are actually going to remove a president from office, you are in effect nullifying the last election", cautioning: "Certainly the people who voted for him will think you're nullifying the election..."

According to Nadler: "It may be necessary to do that—as long as you have persuaded a sufficient fraction of the president's former supporters, the people who voted for him, that you have to, that it's necessary."

Uncompelling, overwhelming, and partisan

However, with the passage of time and the accumulation of Trump's policy successes, the Democrats began to despair—and, the more sober elements began to cave into pressure from the more radical ones in the party—eventually adopting the very path they advocated avoiding.

Thus, Pelosi embraced an impeachment endeavor that was anything but "compelling, overwhelming and bipartisan" as she prescribed, while Nadler rode roughshod over the very caveats he himself articulated—attempting to nullify elections without enlisting an iota of support from the Trump electorate or the Republican Party. Moreover, there is no realistic prospect that the president will be ousted by the Republican-dominated Senate—rendering the entire impeachment initiative, headed by Nadler, pointless by the self-same criterion he himself laid out.

Accordingly, any fair-minded analysis of the motivations behind the Netanyahu indictment and the Trump impeachment will swiftly reveal them to be far more a pursuit of power rather than a pursuit of justice—in which political rivals, frustrated by a recalcitrant electorate, turn to the disingenuous and manipulative use of the law to achieve what their political platforms, personalities and performance could not.

In this sense, both are little more than a blatant attempt to choreograph a coup, with the law as no more than a prop on their political stage.

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In Other News ...

There are endless powerful and logical arguments against the International Court of Justice's investigation of Israel—for war crimes. Reality and real news is the best response. Please, also see:

AfterShabbat.com

Christmas In PA-Controlled Bethlehem

Judy Lash Balint

On the afternoon of Christmas Eve, Manger Square in Bethlehem was filled with people, but local Christians were few and far between. The majority of those milling around in the sunshine appeared to be local Muslims, along with a smattering of tourists.

In previous years, visitors waiting to step into the tiny opening of the Church of the Nativity could expect to stand in line for up to an hour. This year, despite the completion of a four-year, \$18 million restoration project at the church, the line was short; most of those in the square were more interested in snapping selfies in front of the 55-foot Christmas tree and perusing the numerous street food stalls dotted around the square.

Also in contrast to previous years, there was a lack of tension in the air at the square this year. The faces of the locals reflected a certain resignation.

Crowds gathered to watch the traditional, colorful and noisy parade of uniformed Palestinian scouts as they marched through town with drums and bagpipes. But once the parade was over the crowds thinned under the watchful eyes of scores of heavily armed Palestinian police and Palestinian Authority security forces, who closed off streets and directed traffic.

Following the parade, the market streets leading off Manger Square quickly returned to normal. Most foreign visitors seemed reluctant to venture into the steep, narrow alleyways lined with small jewelry shops and houseware stores.

On one side street, the green iron doors of the Palestinian Bible Society Christian Cultural Center

were locked tight. A few yards up the street, the doors of St. Mary's Syrian Orthodox Church were open, but the church was empty. The Orthodox Christmas is celebrated on January 6.

Peter, the lone church official present, was dusting the empty benches of the ornate church, built in the 1920s. He was happy to show a visitor the hand-written Aramaic bible used by the Syriac parishioners.

Crediting Bethlehem's Christian Mayor Anton Salman with helping to preserve a positive climate for Bethlehem's Christians, Peter said, "things are all good under the Palestinians."

Slightly different views were expressed by members of the Gattas family, Greek Orthodox Christians who own a sophisticated women's clothing store directly across from the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church on Pope Paul VI Street, where foot traffic was very thin on Christmas Eve.

George Gattas, 42, told JNS the store has been in their family for more than 50 years, with his father originally using the space as an electrical supplies shop.

"There's no good employment here for people," said George. "Business last year was better. The tourists only benefit the hotels, not local businesses," he added. Without elaborating, Gattas's sister noted simply that "the politics are not so good right now. Most young people are leaving or want to leave."

Signs on the door of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church invited people to English-language Christmas Eve vespers and a Christmas Eve service, as well as an Arabic Christmas Day morning service.

Prominently on display in the foyer of the church was the 2019 "Christmas Alert" booklet produced by the Kairos Palestine project, which advocates for BDS. The church's pastor, Dr. Munther Isaac, is an active Kairos board member. Much of the booklet is dedicated to decrying the Trump administration's as-yet unrevealed Mideast peace plan, also known as the "deal of the century."

This year, Israel's Tourism Ministry provided round-trip shuttle service for the short journey between central Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Most of those taking advantage of the free service were curious European tourists, but there was also a smattering of American Christians staying in Jerusalem.

Three members of the Carter family from Huntsville, Alabama, were surprised to discover that the southern boundary of Jerusalem is just a few hundred yards from Bethlehem. Others on the bus expressed astonishment at the ease of passage over the Rachel's Crossing checkpoint between Israel and Area A, the Bethlehem area largely under P.A. control. Neither Israeli nor P.A. security personnel checked travel documents in either direction.

Gunther Shtas and his wife, Eva, tourists from Hamburg, told JNS they had no idea Bethlehem was no longer under Israeli control or that they would be crossing a checkpoint.

For many visitors to Manger Square in 2019 it's hard to understand that Bethlehem was the source of many terror attacks against Israeli civilians after Israel handed the town over to Palestinian rule a few days before Christmas 1995, in compliance with the 1993 Oslo Accords.

The transfer of power occurred despite the pleas of the city's Christian mayor, Elias Freij, who urged Israel to refrain from handing over the town to the P.A. because he was concerned about the fate of its Christians.

On Christmas Day that year, P.A. head Yasser Arafat raised the Palestinian flag over Manger Square and addressed thousands from a rooftop in view of the Church of the Nativity. In the 24 years since, the Christian population of the area has dwindled to less than 20 percent, according to most estimates.

Few outside the Christians of Bethlehem remember the month-long April 2002 takeover of the Church of the Nativity by 13 heavily armed Palestinian extremists, orchestrated by Yasser Arafat.

A prominent poster at the Bethlehem Police station at the edge of Manger Square featuring Arafat's smiling face, together with that of current P.A. leader Mahmoud Abbas, provides a not-so-subtle reminder of who is still in charge.

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