



## 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*

### Commentary...

#### Don't Interfere in Israel's Decisions By Haim Shine

Fifty years ago, on the holiday of Shavuot, I was among the masses that flocked to the Western Wall after Israeli soldiers liberated it from foreign hands. Among these masses there were religious and secular Israelis; ultra-Orthodox and espresso-drinking cosmopolitan youngsters; native Israelis and Jewish tourists. We all felt that history was unfolding before our eyes. Sadly, this site where God's spirit is eternally present has now become the site of controversy, dispute and argument. The quarrel revolves around religion, politics, external considerations and above all, the all too familiar Jewish tendency to argue.

The Western Wall is within the borders of the State of Israel, and therefore an internal Israeli matter. It is the Israeli people's absolute right to decide, via their representatives in the Knesset, what arrangements are made at the holy site. For the sake of comparison, would it be acceptable for American Jews to decide on funeral arrangements at the Mount Herzl Military Cemetery in Jerusalem, where Israel's greatest heroes are buried? By the same token, Israelis have no say in the visitation arrangements at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, for example. This is the essence of the territorial application of democracy.

Any Jew in the world who wants to influence procedures in Israel and Knesset decisions -- on any matter, including religious conversion or matters of religion and state -- is welcome to invoke his or her right of return, immigrate to Israel and vote in the Knesset elections. As long as they choose to live abroad, however, Jews must be humble and refrain from presumptive aggression. In recent years, the solidarity and support displayed by U.S. Jews has been increasingly unimpressive, particularly considering that the vast majority of them preferred Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton in the last U.S. election -- not out of concern for the future and security of the Jewish state but to advance their own liberal worldview.

The State of Israel is also a Jewish state. It is the national home and existential fortress for Jews around the world, even if they have not yet chosen to immigrate. It is well known that I am moved by the fact that for so many Jews around the world, the Western Wall represents connection and belonging. Therefore, regardless of politics, there is room to find a just balance that will allow any Jew to find his or her place in the Western Wall area, where a personal connection can be made. If there is goodwill, it is possible to find a solution and allocate another, separate place in the plaza, as long as issues are not made into matters of principle. When you prioritize arguing to win, you inevitably lose. Let wisdom triumph.

(Israel Hayom Jun 26)

#### Haredim Win with Home-Team Advantage By Nadav Shragai

I understand why Jewish Agency Chairman Natan Sharansky is outraged over the nixing of the Western Wall compromise. I can also understand why Conservative and Reform leaders are outraged.

Under the now-shelved compromise, those streams would have obtained formal status with a large, designated area for mixed-gender prayer. The decision to abandon this plan damages relations with many Jewish communities abroad.

Nevertheless it was an inevitable outcome.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faced a choice: widening the gulf between Israel and Jews who live elsewhere, do not make aliyah and do not take part in Israeli elections, or alienating about a million ultra-Orthodox Jews who do live here, take part in Israeli elections and insist on continuing the tradition of their forefathers. Netanyahu made the right choice, not just politically.

Many national-religious Jews see no problem with designating an area for mixed-gender prayer services at the Western Wall. The area in question

lies just south of the Western Wall Plaza, in what is now largely an archaeological site. The compromise ultimately unraveled because American Jews insisted on obtaining administrative powers in the Western Wall area, essentially planting their flag there. Had they agreed to a less

formal compromise, they would have benefited much more.

One day, Reform Jews may become a force to be reckoned with in Israeli society, rather than just a minor group. Formal recognition would soon follow. But until that happens, they are expected to accept the views of the overwhelming majority of Israelis who visit the Western Wall, however outrageous these may seem to them.

Just as the Left should prefer peace at home rather than seek a questionable peace with Israel's enemies, so too should U.S. Jews accept that the majority of Israelis are unwilling to see changes made to the tradition of their forefathers at the ancient vestige of our temple.

Back in the days of the Mandate, the British placed restrictions on Jewish prayer at the site, prompting Itamar Ben-Avi to make his now-famous statement: "Hear O Israel, the wall, our wall, is one."

The proposed compromise over the wall could undo this by effectively creating two walls.

In my view, the situation that has emerged since 1967 should remain in place. The area to the south of the Mughrabi Gate should remain an archaeological site; the area north of the gate should be designated for prayer. The compromise alarmed not just haredim, but also many archaeologists, who feared the creation of a formal prayer area on top of the ruins would undermine the monumental archaeological finds they have unearthed.

The High Court of Justice may ultimately do the dirty work for Netanyahu and the haredim by imposing a compromise. They would then tell each other that they had no choice but comply. That is, unless the High Court surprises us and concludes that it is not always smart to implement equality, despite this being a noble value. The court understood this when it ruled to prohibit Jews from praying on the Temple Mount.

(Israel Hayom Jun 27)

#### Northern Border Heating Up By Ofek Ish Maas

In the past few days, the Syrian civil war has been knocking on Israel's door. On Saturday, 10 errant mortars and tank shells landed in the northern Golan Heights, and at the beginning of the week the IDF Spokesperson's Unit reported a few more ordnance hits in open areas.

In accordance with policy, the IDF responded by firing at Syrian army targets. But although tenuous quiet has been restored, we cannot discount the possibility that errant fire from Syria will continue and increase.

The army of Syrian President Bashar Assad, which was responsible for the errant fire, is trying to block an attack by rebels, who want to break through and reach the highway that leads from Damascus to the southwestern city of Daraa, which has been the site of heavy fighting for control of southern Syria over the past month.

Since the beginning of June, Daraa has been subjected to massive bombing by the Syrian regime and its allies. Hundreds of barrel bombs and rockets and dozens of bombs from Syrian and Russian planes have rained down on the city. According to rebel reports, some of the bombs even included phosphorus. Among other things, in an attempt to deter the rebels, the regime intentionally attacked a school in a nearby village, killing more than 20 women and children who had sought shelter there. The worsening situation led the local government to declare Daraa and its surroundings a disaster area.

Daraa, which lies about 30 kilometers (18.5 miles) east of Israel and 13 kilometers (8 miles) north of Syria's border with Jordan, is a strategic target for the Syrian regime. First, control over border crossings is a symbol of sovereignty and the implementation of Assad's desire to once again control all of Syria. Second, the regime and its Shiite allies want to reduce the chance of a sustainable security buffer zone under Western, Jordanian, and Israeli influence being established in southern Syria. Assad's forces reaching the Jordanian border would stop the supply of

logistic, military, and humanitarian aid Western and Persian Gulf nations are sending the rebels and would create a divide between the two rebel-controlled areas in southern Syria.

With a goal so important to the regime, and with the increasingly serious stand-off between the U.S., Russia, and Iran in eastern Syria threatening any chances of a peace deal in the south, it appears that nothing is stopping Assad from proceeding full force.

The ramifications for Israel's security could be heavy. In the short term, if we see a repeat of the images out of Aleppo at the end of 2016 -- women and children slaughtered, buildings collapsing with people inside, the use of unconventional weapons against civilians -- there will be waves of displaced persons, some of whom might seek shelter along the border, in Israel's shadow, and even ask for asylum. In the long term, Israel's northeastern front could become a stronghold of Iran, Hezbollah, and other Shiite militias that would comprise a threat to security and safety in northern Israel.

Israel must decide how it will prepare to prevent these dangerous scenarios. It must choose between increasing support for the Sunni rebels as a buffer against Iran and its satellites, or assenting through silence to Assad returning to power. If Israel wants to stick to the idea of a buffer zone, it will have to increase support for the rebels and provide them with defense coverage, both diplomatic, against Russia, and military, in hope that the U.S. will agree. But diverting American attention to southwestern Syria will hamper its efforts to defeat the Islamic State in the east and prevent Iran from filling the ensuing vacuum. Israel, therefore, would have to roll up its sleeves and plunge its hands into the Syrian mess. On the other hand, if Israel is unwilling to do so, it will have to set clear rules of engagement for the Assad regime, which is regaining ground, by demanding that Iranian satellites not gain a foothold in the region and backing that demand up with military action.

In any case, neither option is certain and each has its risks. But the reality in Syria, especially in the south of the country, is changing fast, and the comparative security that Israel has been enjoying is in danger and requires immediate planning and responses. (Israel Hayom Jun 27)

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### **The Flip Side of the Western Wall Crisis: A two-way street.**

By Evelyn Gordon

The Israeli government's decision on Sunday to freeze a much-touted compromise on the Western Wall, which would have created a non-Orthodox prayer space equal in status to the existing Orthodox area, sparked numerous warnings of a grave rift between Israel and American Jewry.

Commentator Rachel Sharansky Danziger, for instance, wondered how the relationship could continue after the Israeli government "delivered a resounding, 'You don't actually matter to us'" to American Jews. But there's a flip side to Danziger's question that many commentators have ignored: The confrontation ended as it did partly because too many American Jews have delivered that same resounding message to Israelis in recent years.

Numerous previous battles over religious issues in Israel have ended the opposite way, with the prime minister bowing to American Jewish pressure. As recently as 2011, for instance, the government froze and ultimately scrapped a planned reform of conversion procedures because American Jews objected. Since American Jews were both members of the family and important sources of American political support, no Israeli prime minister wanted to alienate them, and neither did most ordinary Israelis.

If that sentiment is fraying today, it's not just because of fringe anti-Zionist groups like Jewish Voice for Peace or even the growing ranks of the utterly indifferent, but also because of the attitudes of many American Jews who call themselves--and in many ways genuinely are--pro-Israel. To understand why, it's worth pondering something Jewish-American author Jamaica Kincaid said in an interview with Haaretz earlier this month about Israel's control of the West Bank.

"I think one of the reasons this whole thing with the occupation and the territories is so alive is because most people do what Israelis do, just do it. They just do it! It's not a conversation. You conquer the line, you drive the people off it, or you kill them. You know, you just do it. Then you move on. And maybe 100 years later, you have a little ceremony where you say, the head of state says, 'I'm so sorry I did that.' But you just do it..."

"I suppose what surprises me is that Israel is the winning society, so I don't expect it to be so self-examining. Usually, winners don't examine themselves at all, but in Israel [there is] constant questioning and constant examining, constantly stating why you are right."

Kincaid is obviously correct: If the Palestinian-Israeli conflict draws

disproportionate international attention, it's in part because Israelis themselves endlessly and vocally debate its legitimacy, morality, and possible solutions. It's also because, as an outgrowth of this debate, Israelis have made numerous attempts to solve it over the past quarter century, including repeated rounds of peace talks and unilateral withdrawals, and action of any kind is obviously more newsworthy than stasis.

But to many American Jews, even many who consider themselves pro-Israel, it doesn't seem to matter that Israelis have repeatedly made generous peace offers, only to have the Palestinians walk away without even bothering to respond. It doesn't seem to matter that every territorial withdrawal has led to a massive increase in Palestinian terror. It doesn't seem to matter that numerous conflicts worldwide have produced far more bloodshed and far more oppression than this one. It doesn't seem to matter that after almost 25 years of failed peacemaking efforts accompanied by vigorous internal debate, a solid majority of Israelis has reluctantly concluded that while a Palestinian state might be a good idea in principle, in practice, for the foreseeable future, there's no better alternative to the status quo.

Despite all this, liberal American Jews are convinced that they know better. They know that the continued "occupation" is mostly Israel's fault, and that Israel must end it immediately regardless of the price in Israeli blood and their job as American Jews isn't to support Israelis' painfully reached conclusions, but to pressure Israelis to disregard the lessons of their lived experience. If there's a better way of telling Israelis "You don't actually matter to us," I don't know what it might be.

Moreover, pursuant to that attitude, many American Jews--and again, not just fringe groups like JVP--are actively undermining Israel in various ways. Mainstream American Jewish groups like campus Hillels repeatedly host speakers from organizations that spew outright lies about Israel, such as Breaking the Silence, which even recycles the medieval blood libel about Jews poisoning wells.

American Jews also provide substantial financial support to such organizations, mainly through the New Israel Fund. Rabbis and Jewish organizations provide cover for anti-Israel activists. Leading liberal rabbi Sharon Brous, for instance, praised Linda Sarsour for "building a movement that can hold all of us in our diversity with love" even as Sarsour explicitly banned all Israel supporters from her movement. The Anti-Defamation League defended Keith Ellison, one of the few congressmen who consistently backs anti-Israel resolutions while shunning pro-Israel ones, as "an important ally in the fight against anti-Semitism" right up until he was caught out in overt anti-Semitism. American rabbinical students term Israel's very existence a cause for mourning and engage in anti-Israel commercial boycotts. The Union for Reform Judaism urges members to step up their criticism of Israel. And on, and on.

American Jews no longer the bastion of support for Israel that they once were. If they still believe they have a familial relationship with Israelis, it increasingly feels like an abusive one in which the abuser shows his "love" by causing pain. Thus, it's no surprise that support for Israel has plummeted among young American Jews; how many of them ever hear anything positive about Israel from their "pro-Israel" elders?

The result is that some Israelis are starting to feel, as Hillel Halkin wrote in Mosaic last month, "The distance between Israeli and American Jews is growing? Let it grow ... so what?" Until recently, few Israelis would have said such a thing, and I still consider it a tragedy. But if American Jews keep telling Israelis that everything they think, feel and experience "doesn't actually matter to us," the number of Israelis who agree with Halkin will only grow. (CommentaryMagazine.com Jun 28)

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### **Under Trump, Israeli Victims of Terror at Least Get Genuine Condolences** By Gregg Roman

The Trump administration's reaction to the June 16 killing of Hadas Malka by Palestinian terrorists was missing the usual boilerplate admonition to Israel.

Although U.S. President Donald Trump made a host of widely-publicized pledges to strengthen the US-Israeli relationship during his presidential campaign, his five-month old administration has shown few tangible signs of movement on any of them. It has passed on opportunities to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv and to scrap the Iran nuclear deal. And it certainly doesn't appear to be undertaking a major rethink about how to bring about Israeli-Palestinian peace.

But credit the White House with making one critically important, lower-profile change, evident in the reaction of Trump's peace envoy to the June 16 killing of Border Police officer Hadas Malka by Palestinian

terrorists outside of Jerusalem's Old City.

"The United States stands with our ally Israel and condemns the savage terrorist attack in Jerusalem," tweeted Trump's lead international negotiator Jason Greenblatt as he was leaving on a trip to Israel. After visiting the family of the deceased on June 19, he released a prepared statement saying "[St.-] Sgt. Major [Hadas] Malka was murdered by terrorists," with a bit at the end about Trump's vision for a Middle East free from "threats of terrorism and extremism."

Past practice of victim-shaming Israel is unique in the annals of American diplomacy.

If all that seems pretty typical of how an American envoy would react to a deadly terrorist attack against a longstanding U.S. ally, that's precisely the point. Under previous administrations, it had become standard practice in reacting to terrorist attacks against Israelis to urge Israel (or both sides) to "exercise restraint," "not escalate tensions any further," "avoid any kind of innocent civilian casualties," "avoid... making provocative statements that can further inflame tensions," and various other equivalents.

This practice of singling Israel out for what can best be described as victim-shaming is unique in the annals of American diplomacy. Most countries get unmitigated expressions of sympathy after experiencing terrorist attacks. "Each and every American stands with you today. We stand with you in solidarity... to the cause of confronting extremism," said secretary of state John Kerry in response to the January 2016 Paris terrorist attacks. Nothing about avoiding provocations or not escalating tensions.

Even Pakistan got straight-up State Department condolences last year, without any insulting riders or caveats.

Of course, admonitions to avoid doing bad things after being attacked crop up at times in U.S. handling of countries like Lebanon and Syria, where the absence of a functioning state has given rise to ethno-sectarian score-settling, and China, which has been prone to excesses in responding to terrorist attacks, but the usage of this rhetoric doesn't seem to have been routine.

Israel, of all countries, doesn't need lessons on restraint.

It goes without saying that singling out Israel is unfair – any country willing to turn the other cheek when under repeated Scud missile attack by Saddam Hussein doesn't need lessons on restraint. But even if it did, it's difficult to imagine a less effective way of counseling an ally than demeaning it publicly every time it is murderously attacked.

This is the Middle East's lone true democracy and a regional oasis of women's rights and minority freedoms we're talking about. Pretending otherwise only legitimizes extremists obsessed with demonizing, boycotting, and ultimately destroying Israel.

Why, then, the deliberate projection of false moral equivalence between Palestinian terrorism and Israeli self-defense? It's partly the result of decades of Arab diplomatic pressure, and partly a result of the Stockholm Syndrome-like belief among State Department careerists that Palestinian leaders won't come to (or at any rate stay at) the table unless they and their narrative are accorded the same respect and acknowledgment as Israel's.

Hopefully the changing substance and tenor of U.S. public statements about Israel reflects a discarding of such faulty assumptions, a willingness to help build Israel's confidence rather than undermine it, and greater commitment to letting this loyal ally get on with the business of combating Islamist terrorism the way it knows best. (Jerusalem Post Jun 27)

*The writer is director of the Middle East Forum.*

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### **The PLO's IDF Lobbyists** By Caroline B. Glick

Should the United States pay Palestinian terrorists? For the overwhelming majority of Americans and Israelis this is a rhetorical question.

The position of the American people was made clear – yet again – last week when US President Donald Trump's senior envoys Jared Kushner and Jason Greenblatt met with Palestinian Authority chairman and PLO chief Mahmoud Abbas and repeated Trump's demand that the PA cut off the payments.

Not only did Abbas reject their demand, he reportedly accused the presidential envoys of working as Israeli agents.

Abbas's treatment of Kushner and Greenblatt was in line with his refusal to even meet with US Ambassador David Friedman, reportedly because he doesn't like Friedman's views.

The most amazing aspect of Abbas's contemptuous treatment of the Trump administration is that he abuses Trump and his senior advisers while demanding that Trump continue funding him in excess of half a billion dollars a year, and do so in contravention of the will of the Republican-controlled Congress.

Abbas's meeting last week took place as the Taylor Force Act makes its

way through Congress.

Named for Taylor Force, the West Point graduate and US army veteran who was murdered in March 2016 in Tel Aviv by a Palestinian terrorist, the Taylor Force Act will end US funding of the PA until it ends its payments to terrorists and their families – including the family of Force's murderer Bashar Masalha.

The Taylor Force Act enjoys bipartisan majority support in both the House and the Senate. It is also supported by the Israeli government.

Given the stakes, what could possibly have possessed Abbas to believe he can get away with mistreating Trump and his envoys? Who does he think will save him from Congress and the White House? Enter Commanders for Israel's Security (CIS), stage left.

CIS is a consortium of 260 left-wing retired security brass. It formed just before the 2015 elections. CIS refuses to reveal its funding sources. Several of its most visible members worked with the Obama administration through the George Soros-funded Center for a New American Security. Since its inception, CIS has effectively served as a PLO lobby. It supports Israeli land giveaways and insists that Israel can do without a defensible eastern border.

Last Wednesday CIS released a common-sense defying statement opposing the Taylor Force Act.

The generals mind-numbingly insisted the US must continue paying the terrorism-financing PA because Israel needs the help of the terrorism-incentivizing PA to fight the terrorists the PA incentivizes. If the US cuts off funding to the PA because it incentivizes terrorism, then the PA will refuse to cooperate with Israel in fighting the terrorism it incentivizes.

If you fail to follow this logic, well, you don't have what it takes to be an Israeli general.

Moreover, if you fail to follow this logic, and you defy the position of Israel's retired generals, then you may well endanger Israel.

After all, they know what's best even better than the Israeli government because they are retired Israeli generals.

The CIS group would be bad enough for Israel on its own. But unfortunately, the radical politics of its members – and their anonymous funders – are all too resonant inside of the IDF itself.

And just as CIS members use the ranks they received in the past to undermine the powers of the government today, so the current crop of serving generals use their positions to advance policies that are contrary to the expressed position of the government.

This is nowhere more evident than in the behavior of the Civil Administration in Judea and Samaria.

Until Israel formed the PLO-controlled PA in 1994, the Civil Administration was responsible for governing Judea and Samaria as the governing arm of the military government that Israel set up in the area after the Six Day War.

In 1996, Israel transferred all Palestinian population centers in Judea and Samaria to the PA. Since then, the Civil Administration has been responsible only for Area C where all Israeli communities are located and where between 100,000 and 200,000 Palestinians also live.

The question of what the ultimate disposition of Area C will be is the top issue on the national agenda today. The majority of government ministers and the majority of the public support applying Israeli law to all or parts of the area.

Yet while the government debates the issue and formulates policies to advance whatever policies it adopts on this issue, the Civil Administration has for the past several years been acting independently to undermine and constrain the government's ability to make strategic decisions relating to Area C. Among other things, the Civil Administration has been independently initiating Palestinian settlement projects in Area C that undermine Israel's ability to govern the areas. By the same token, the Civil Administration has used its powers to scupper, delay and prevent Israeli construction projects in the area.

The story of the Civil Administration's rogue policymaking was catapulted to the headlines last week when Channel 2 reported that it was advancing a plan to massively expand the Palestinian city of Kalkilya into Area C. Among other things, the plan endangers Israeli communities whose territory abuts the expanded boundaries of Kalkilya advanced by the plan.

Channel 2 reported that the Netanyahu government's security cabinet had given the Civil Administration a green light to begin construction.

The story caused a political outcry not only from Likud voters but from the security cabinet members themselves. Led by Minister Ze'ev Elkin, the Likud ministers insisted that they had been misled by the Civil Administration which deliberately hid the nature of the plan from them when it brought it to the cabinet for approval.

The ministers' protests ring true because the Civil Administration has

a history of acting in this manner.

In 2008 for instance, the Civil Administration initiated a building scheme in the Jordan Valley that would have taken land from Moshav Tomer to build Palestinian settlements.

The head of the local council complained to the government only to discover that the ministers had no idea what he was talking about. The Civil Administration had undertaken the plan, which undermined Israel's control over a strategically vital area, without government knowledge or approval.

In contrast, and again against the wishes of the government, the Civil Administration has repeatedly acted to block Israeli construction in Area C. For instance, the IDF insists that no land deal between Israel and Palestinians is final until the IDF approves it. The policy harms Israeli construction in two ways.

First, it gives the Civil Administration the power – which it uses – to delay Israeli construction indefinitely.

Second, by forcing parties to land deals to come forward publicly, the Civil Administration intimidates Palestinian land sellers. They know that if their land deals with Israelis become public they will face execution by the PA.

Returning to Abbas for a moment, the PLO chief may have overplayed his hand by insulting Trump and his senior envoys. All the politicized retired and currently serving Israeli generals together cannot convince Trump to send US tax dollars to a terrorism supporting leader who trashes him and his senior officials. Consequently, there is every reason to believe that the Taylor Force Act will soon be signed into law and the US will end its financing of Palestinian terrorism.

But even if Washington cuts off funding to the PA, Israel is still left to deal with its radicalized generals who exploit their rank to undermine the government.

The best way to end this situation is for the government to shut down the Civil Administration and get the IDF out of the governing business in Judea and Samaria. So long as the government continues to empower unaccountable generals to administer civilian areas instead of its accountable, civilian bureaucracy, we will continue to be confronted with the surreal spectacle of Israeli generals lobbying for Palestinian terrorists.

If the government applies Israeli law to Area C, it can still negotiate with the PLO, just as it has negotiated about the Golan Heights and Jerusalem. But in the meantime, it will remove one of the most corrupting and corrosive forces preying on our generals and our democracy for the benefit of the Israeli and Palestinian residents of Area C alike and indeed for Israel as a whole. (Jerusalem Post Jun 27)

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### **The Pernicious Effects of Defining Deviancy Up** By Evelyn Gordon

Imposing reporting requirements on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) is like jailing activists. Criticizing journalists is like physical violence against them. Repatriating citizens of a wealthy, stable democracy is like sending them to death camps. All of the above follow logically from real statements made recently by respected people or organizations, and they reflect a pernicious modern trend that might be called “defining deviancy up.”

Take, for instance, German Foreign Ministry spokesman Martin Schaefer's assertion that Hungary's legislation banning foreign donations to NGOs puts it in “the ranks of countries like Russia, China, and Israel, which obviously regard the funding of non-government organizations, of civil society efforts, by donors from abroad as a hostile or at least an unfriendly act.” His purpose was to shame both Hungary and Israel by lumping them in the same category as Russia and China in their treatment of NGOs.

But while all four countries do impose some restrictions on foreign funding of NGOs (and in Israel's case, for good reason), in China and Russia, this is part of a systematic attempt to silence criticism of the government that includes jailing and torturing activists (China) and even killing them (Russia). In Israel, NGOs can and do criticize the government without fear. The only “restriction” they face is that if more than 50 percent of their funding comes from foreign governments, all their published material must note that fact (unlike Russia or China, Israel places no restrictions on funding from nongovernmental foreign sources).

By lumping these countries together, Schaefer didn't merely smear Israel; he also paradoxically legitimized Russian and Chinese abuses. After all, if Russia and China are no worse than Israel, they can't be that bad.

Moreover, such comparisons eviscerate one of the West's main weapons against human rights abuses: the power to name and shame. By treating non-issues like NGO reporting requirements as major rights violations, Western officials are like the boy who cried wolf: Eventually, many people will simply stop listening to them.

Worst of all, however, if jailing and killing activists provoke no more outrage than imposing financial reporting requirements on NGOs, brutal dictatorships have no reason not to go straight to the torturing and killing. That provides more effective suppression for the same price in international opprobrium.

For another example of this pernicious approach, consider Freedom House's lowering of Israel's press freedom ranking earlier this year “due to unprecedented personal attacks by the prime minister on leading investigative journalists, which contributed to a hostile environment for the press.”

Once, press freedom was measured by objective factors like whether journalists could write what they please without fear of physical or financial consequences—a standard by which Israel does fine. As Freedom House admitted, “Israel hosts a lively, pluralistic media environment in which press freedom is generally respected ... Legal protections for freedom of the press are robust ... The Israeli media collectively offer a diverse range of views, and they are generally free from overt political interference.”

But today, that isn't enough: Politicians must also serve as the media's cheerleaders. Should they dare to criticize it—something politicians have done since the dawn of time—then, in Freedom House's view, that's just as bad as the overt oppression practiced by other countries on its list of “most noteworthy” declines.

India, for instance, “declined due to violent reprisals against journalists” and “government blocking of internet service and halting of printing presses” in Kashmir. Hungary “declined because independent media have been squeezed out of the market, partly through the acquisition and creation of outlets by presumed government allies.” Hong Kong “declined due to increased mainland interference in local media as well as multiple attacks on journalists during demonstrations.”

Such inane comparisons clearly undermine Freedom House's credibility. But worse, if governments can use violence against journalists, block internet service and take over the independent press without suffering any more international criticism than they'd get for making petulant remarks about journalists, what is to deter any government unhappy with the media—i.e. every government that ever existed—from taking such forceful measures?

Finally, consider the new trend of Holocaust survivors speaking out against President Donald Trump's immigration policies because, as one told the Michigan state legislature: “I see a lot of parallels to what is going on right now in cities like Ann Arbor and Pontiac, where ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] is coming in and with the help of the local police are picking up immigrants,” and the infamous roundup of Parisian Jews during the Holocaust that resulted in most of his family being murdered at Auschwitz.

I wouldn't presume to judge any survivor's emotional response. But on a rational level, even opponents of Trump's immigration policies ought to recognize that this is ludicrous. The biggest source of illegal immigration to America is Mexico—a democratic country which, by global standards, is both wealthy and stable (hence its membership in the OECD). Moreover, the migrants are Mexican citizens with full rights in Mexico. Whether or not deporting illegal immigrants makes for good policy, it's not remotely comparable to France deporting its own citizens to a foreign country where they had no rights and which was ruled by a genocidal dictatorship.

Once again, by treating all deportations as equally unacceptable, opponents make the truly unacceptable seem not so bad. There are countries to which America shouldn't be deporting people. But if activists treat deportations to Mexico as no less outrageous than deportations to genuinely repressive or dysfunctional countries, they'll have no credibility left to combat the latter. Moreover, supporters of mass deportation will see no advantage to exempting certain countries from the deportation list, because doing so won't diminish opposition to their policy.

In 1993, when Daniel Patrick Moynihan coined the phrase “defining deviancy down,” he was concerned that formerly unacceptable behavior had become unexceptionable. But it turns out that defining deviancy up can have the same effect: Treating behavior which should be unexceptionable as if it were unacceptable makes the truly unacceptable seem not so bad. That's precisely why moral hierarchies are critical to any properly functioning society: If everything is equally evil, then “evil” loses all meaning.

Thus, by defining deviancy up to include even completely legitimate actions, people who genuinely seek to increase respect for human rights are instead creating a system of moral equivalence in which even the worst offenses are no longer beyond the pale.

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