



## 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*

Egypt opposed the efforts of Sunni rebel groups to depose Bashar al-Assad, and Israel, too, has been careful not to destabilize Assad's regime—to preserve Israel's freedom of action against Iranian targets in Syria in line with the quid quo pro reached between Israel and

Russia after the September 2015 Russian military intervention.

Egyptians often call their country "umm ad-dunya," the mother of the world, expressing self-importance. However, ever since the heyday of Nasser, Egypt's regional weight has declined. Cairo's focus is primarily domestic, like that of most Arab countries. Nevertheless, Egypt is the most populous and important Arab state, with the strongest military among Israel's neighbors. Therefore, Egypt is an important strategic partner for Israel that rates a high priority on Israel's foreign policy agenda. (JNS Sep 14)

## Commentary...

### The Common Egypt-Israel Strategic Agenda By Efraim Inbar

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's official meeting on Monday with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi indicates that the Egyptian government is ready to work publicly with Israel's new government.

Egypt broke the Arab taboo on relations with Israel when it signed a peace treaty with the Jewish state in March 1979. Nevertheless, Egypt has been reluctant to implement the treaty's "normalization" clauses, keeping to a "cold peace" instead. Cairo has discouraged its citizens from interactions with Israelis, and government-controlled media has remained hostile and occasionally anti-Semitic. There has been some cooperation between the two countries in agriculture and energy, and for a while, Israeli tourists were welcome in Egypt. But the narrow bilateral ties were primarily conducted via military channels.

The Egyptian posture toward Israel seemed to signal the limits on relations with Jerusalem for an Arab state. To a great extent, Jordan emulated the Egyptian position. (Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994). In contrast, the 2020 Abraham Accords constituted a dramatic change in approach, encouraging multi-faceted people-to-people interactions, particularly between the United Arab Emirates and Israel.

The fanfare around the Abraham Accords, as well as the fact that Israel has a new prime minister, probably made it easier for Cairo to invite Bennett. The cumulative impact of enhanced covert security cooperation in recent years between the two countries likely also played a role.

Israel and Egypt share a burgeoning common strategic agenda. The 1979 peace treaty was primarily the result of Sadat's realization that Egypt needed a drastic change in its foreign policy, moving to a pro-American orientation instead of relying on the Soviet Union, coupled with weariness regarding the conflict with Israel. Egypt is still looking to Washington, and needs Israel more than ever to deflect American and European criticism regarding human rights violations.

Moreover, U.S. assistance to Egypt, \$1.3 billion a year, has played an important role in Egypt's economic and military development, and this is linked to American assistance to Israel. While Egypt has tried to diversify its arms suppliers, Jerusalem has a clear interest in continuous American influence in Cairo.

Undoubtedly, Cairo and Jerusalem think alike with regard to the Afghanistan debacle and the regional implications of American retreat from the Middle East, and in particular the resulting reinvigoration of Muslim extremism around the world.

At the regional level, Jerusalem and Cairo share concern about Iran's aggressive policies, although Israel's threat perception is greater. However, they are fully in sync with regard to Turkey's promotion of Islamic extremism (with Qatar) and its neo-Ottoman aspirations. Egypt and Israel are also allied in their opposition to growing Turkish assertiveness in the eastern Mediterranean. Egypt is a key member of the strategic alignment embodied by the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), alongside Greece, Cyprus and Israel—an alignment designed, inter alia, to contain Turkish quest for hegemony in the region.

Israel lends substantial support to Egypt in the latter's efforts to suppress an Islamic insurgency in Sinai. The Gaza Strip is sandwiched between Egypt and Israel and ruled by Hamas, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, the arch-enemy of the Egyptian regime. Hamas has assisted the Islamists in Sinai. While not averse to bleeding the Jewish state a bit, Egypt is interested in lowering the flames of Israel-Hamas confrontation and has acquired an important role in the mediation between the two sides. This diplomatic role gains Egypt points in Jerusalem and Washington, and gives it leverage over Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza.

Egyptian and Israeli interests also converge in Libya. Both countries side with Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, the commander of the Tobruk-based Libyan National Army, while Turkey intervened in 2020 in the Libyan civil war to prevent the fall of the Government of National Accord in Tripoli, that includes Islamist elements. Israel's new partner, the UAE, has also assisted Haftar.

Even in Syria, Israel and Egypt seem to have the same preferences.

### How Israel has Been Aiding and Abetting Illegal Palestinian Construction By Naomi Kahn

It's no secret that the system of law in force in Judea and Samaria is far from ideal: In the aftermath of the Six-Day War, the Israeli government balked.

Rather than applying Israeli law to the territory liberated in 1967—territory that had always been within the internationally recognized borders of the Jewish homeland—Israel chose instead to "temporarily" maintain the existing legal framework. Despite the fact that Jordan's invasion, occupation and annexation of Judea and Samaria (the areas that it then began to refer to as "the West Bank" as a means of justifying its presence there) were illegal, and were never recognized by the international community, Israel deemed it more prudent not to act on its very solid and exclusive claims to the historic heartland of Israel.

Instead, it left the territory to the mercy of a hodgepodge of legal relics, pasted together with a smattering of military orders, that has continued to hold sway for more than half a century—longer than the Jordanian occupation and the British Mandate combined. It's no secret that this outmoded and convoluted system is a gold mine for construction offenders. Nor is it a secret that the Palestinian Authority and its generous European supporters have perfected the art of using this "system" to their advantage.

Antiquated, ineffective and labyrinthine Jordanian regulations have been famously exploited in what is known as "lawfare": Through incessant legal and procedural appeals, the P.A. has upended Israeli law enforcement and set the system against itself, creating facts on the ground that are re-drawing the map and laying the foundations of a Palestinian state in the heart of the land of Israel.

Over the past two years, Regavim has filed a number of administrative petitions in the Jerusalem District Court (which serves as the Court for Administrative Affairs) against the Ministry of Defense and the Civil Administration, regarding instances of illegal construction and de facto annexation by the P.A. and its local authorities. Specifically, Regavim's petitions sought the implementation and execution of the "Order for Removal of New Structures," military legislation created by the defense establishment in 2018 to cut through the legal and bureaucratic red tape that characterizes "standard enforcement procedures" in Judea and Samaria, the legal quicksand that has made law enforcement virtually non-existent.

Again and again, the state's lawyers argued for dismissal of Regavim's petitions on jurisdictional grounds: The New Structures Order, they claimed, does not fall within the jurisdiction of the Administrative Court, and should be heard in the High Court of Justice (HCJ).

But when Regavim petitioned the HCJ to compel the state to enforce the "New Structures Order," the government's lawyers argued that the petitions should be dismissed out of hand, because an alternative legal remedy is available—namely, "standard enforcement procedures" arising from the Planning and Construction Code. Even though these alternative legal remedies have not been enforced, the state argued, the proper forum for hearing these cases is ... the District Court.

The long and short of it is that the government's enforcement arm is trying to dodge any and all cases involving its failure to enforce the law—either under the New Structures Order or under the Jordanian Planning and Construction Code, whether in the District Court or in the HCJ. Avi Segal, Regavim's attorney, explained: "At issue is a broader question that goes beyond the individual cases. The

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government is shirking its responsibility to enforce the law. This is a deliberate attempt to create a legal ‘Catch 22’ that will neuter the law and empty it of all meaning, while at the same time limiting the public’s ability to scrutinize and evaluate the state’s continued inaction before a court of law—whatever court that may be.”

In the HCJ hearing on Sept. 13, Justices Anat Baron, Yael Vilner and Ofer Grosskopf had some very pointed criticism for the State Attorney. The justices required the government to provide answers, rather than hiding behind procedural cat-and-mouse jurisdictional arguments.

The court’s decision is quite clear: The state will not be allowed to continue to duck the questions raised by Regavim’s petitions, nor will it be allowed to continue to use the “Catch 22” of jurisdiction to avoid enforcing the law. The state was required to submit, within 60 days, substantive arguments regarding its failure to enact the “Removal of New Structures Order” in these cases.

Furthermore, the state was required to submit, within 60 days, an update on its progress towards amending the “Removal of New Structures Order,” so that the question of jurisdiction is clarified once and for all.

Perhaps this will go down in history as the day that the government was forced to own up to its failure to protect Israel’s interests in Judea and Samaria, and the day that the Israeli version of “Catch 22” began to unravel. (JNS Sep 14)

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### **They’re Terrorists, not ‘Security Prisoners’** By Ruthie Blum

How do news outlets love to portray the recent “great escape” from Israel’s Gilboa Prison? Let us count the ways.

The first is to refer to the six Palestinian terrorists who plotted and carried out the most egregious jailbreak in Israel’s history as “security prisoners.”

The second is to downplay the rap sheets of the four who were apprehended and the remaining two fugitives still on the loose.

The third is to take a pause from the above to blame Israel for the lax conditions that enabled the men to spend months digging the tunnel—from the floor of the shower cubicle in their cell—through which they fled from behind bars. Oh, and, of course, for failing to catch them as soon as they managed to pull off the daring stunt.

It’s a neat trick. Simultaneously sanitizing the terrorists’ blood-stained hands and magnifying Israel’s role in the debacle is precisely how the Palestinian Authority runs its propaganda campaign: at once denying the Holocaust, for instance, while accusing the Jewish state of emulating the Nazis.

The same ostensible paradox applies to Palestinians’ rioting on behalf of the escapees by hurling fire bombs at the “occupation forces” and threatening terrorist attacks if those of their brethren who were captured, or the ones on the run and those still in jail are treated poorly by the Shin Bet, Israel Police and Israel Prison Service. Meanwhile, inmates left behind are warning that if their cushy conditions are altered one iota, they’ll launch a hunger strike.

Israel’s grown so used to the scenario that all its new leaders can do is pat themselves on the back for playing catch-up and vowing to rectify the dereliction of their predecessors. You know, the Cabinet led by former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

But even Naftali Bennett’s government, which the press has been treating with kid gloves for having ousted nemesis Netanyahu, can’t overcome the media’s knee-jerk reaction to any catastrophe involving the Palestinians. Two choice examples are in order—The New York Times and Reuters—though others abound, including in Israeli papers.

“The Israeli police said on Saturday that they had captured four of the six Palestinian fugitives who escaped a maximum-security prison this week, in a case seen as a rare humiliation of the country’s security establishment,” writes New York Times Jerusalem bureau chief Patrick Kingsley in an updated report on the incident.

Clearly, he thinks that the “rare humiliation” of [Israel’s] security establishment” is more newsworthy than the identity of the “fugitives.”

Let’s not be too hasty, however, in judging the copy and priorities of others. Kingsley does proceed to name the prisoners—Mahmoud Ardah, Yaqoub Qadri, Zakaria Zubeidi and Mohammad Ardah (Mahmoud’s brother), who were captured, and the two still at large, Eham Kamamji and Munadil Nafayat.

Here’s how he describes “Mr. Zubeidi”: “a prominent militant leader during the second Palestinian intifada ... in the 2000s and ... former commander of the Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, a militant group loosely affiliated with Fatah, the secular group that dominates Palestinian politics in the occupied West Bank.”

He goes on to state that the “other three recaptured inmates are members of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, an Iran-backed Islamist militant group, [who] have been serving life sentences for involvement in attacks on Israeli civilians, the police said.”

The two not yet caught (as of the time of his and this writing), he

mentions, are “both members of Islamic Jihad, the authorities said.”

Kamamji, he adds, “was serving a life sentence for kidnapping and killing an Israeli teenager, Eliyahu Asheri,” and “Nafayat had been imprisoned without charge since 2019.”

Reuters presents an evocative depiction of the affair, calling the escapees “militants” and highlighting that the search for them was taking place “across northern Israel, where the Arab city of Nazareth sits, and the occupied West Bank.”

The international news service continues, “The facility the men escaped from, about 4 km (2 miles) from the boundary with the occupied West Bank, is one of the highest-security jails in Israel. The escapees include Zakaria Zubeidi, a former commander of Fatah’s Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in the West Bank city of Jenin who once received Israeli amnesty. Zubeidi was rearrested by Israel in 2019 after his alleged involvement in new shooting attacks.”

The only thing “alleged” about the whole nasty business—a result of Israel’s trying to placate the Palestinians and international community by allowing jailed jihadists better benefits than those granted to white-collar criminals—is the “occupation.”

Judea and Samaria, at worst, is “disputed” territory. And “Mr. Zubeidi” is a terrorist, not a “militant.” Nothing “alleged” about him or his fellow evildoers whose imprisonment was justified, and whose escape endangered any Jew who would have had, or still has, the misfortune to encounter any one of them.

Nor are the cheers among Palestinians for these dastardly “heroes” to be taken lightly. Killing and abetting the planned murder of innocent Israelis is an integral part of P.A. culture. The so-called, falsely dubbed “occupation” has nothing to do with it, as Israel’s many territorial withdrawals and P.A. leader Mahmoud Abbas’s behavior have illustrated.

The distortion of language in relation to Israel and the Palestinians is especially disconcerting—and par for the course—on the 20th anniversary of 9/11. As JNS editor-in-chief Jonathan Tobin points out, much of the left considers the most important aspect of the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon to be “the alleged racism and religious bigotry for which [they] served as an excuse.”

The same moral inversion characterizes the left’s attitude towards the West in general and Israel in particular. Sadly, its slant only serves to embolden the bad guys who make no bones about their immediate and ultimate aims.

It’s the height of tragic irony that whenever and wherever Islamofascists get their way, Western journalists are among the first in line for literal and figurative beheading. (JNS Sep 14)

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### **As Afghanistan Collapses, Israel Learns the Value of International ‘Security Guarantees’**

By Amir Avivi and Or Yissachar

Former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, one of the architects of the war in Afghanistan, made a point of distinguishing between the “known knowns” (already known variables), the predictable, though still indistinct, “known unknowns” and the completely obscure “unknown unknowns.”

Twenty years after the grand debut of the longest war in American and NATO history, however, one has to wonder why such a particularly heavy toll of blood, treasure and conflict was necessary in order to know what was safely considered to be well-known. That is, upon the hasty withdrawal of deployed international forces, the Taliban wasted no time in completely filling the vacuum they left behind; Al-Qaeda, which drew the United States into Afghanistan in the first place, is already operating in at least 15 provinces; and ISIS Khorasan is on the rise.

While the complex evacuation operation certainly deserves credit, returning to square one is hardly what the United States was hoping for upon the conclusion of this sanguinary campaign.

Understandably, from the American point of view, it was no longer in America’s interest to prolong this war. Nation-building turned out to be a fiasco. During the transitional period, acting U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan James Dobbins once put it: In Afghanistan, one has to choose “between losing and not losing.” Placing a high premium on the priorities of the people he was elected to serve, U.S. President Joe Biden simply did not see any reason to distinguish counter-terrorism operations in Afghanistan from those in Yemen or Mali, with no permanent boots on the ground.

Yet this is precisely the point. When interests change or an interest is lost, international policies that were easily promised may just as easily be reversed at the stroke of a pen. From U.N. peacekeeping forces standing idly by as massacres unfolded in Yugoslavia to ISIS’s takeover of Iraq, one cannot avoid drawing a strong conclusion on the genuine value of international security guarantees, to whose limitations the Afghan case provided a perfect

illustration.

Indeed, there has never been a successful attempt to artificially replace self-reliance with international commitments, simply because no mercenary or foreign force can be a substitute for an authentic, grassroots creed to safeguard one's own homeland.

Already in 1776, Adam Smith understood what we know today—that prosperity and stability stem from self-interest, in the best sense of the word. In his book, *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith wrote: “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.”

This is the genuine engine behind the dynamics that rule the international arena. Self-interest also drove the United States—justifiably, from its perspective—to reach an understanding with the Taliban that it is free to target the local Afghan population, certainly the “corrupt pro-American puppet government,” so long as it doesn't “interfere with” the U.S. withdrawal.

This “deconfliction mechanism” echoes the 2020 accord that only tackled U.S.-Taliban relations, not the fate of the Afghan people. No nation can survive in security and prosperity at the mercy of international benevolence.

Yet, relying on this very model has been at the core of international security guarantees to Israel—attempting to persuade it into making impossible territorial concessions and retreat to indefensible borders.

Take Gen. John Allen's 2013 plan, for example. Initiated by the Obama White House and echoed today by certain officials with influence on the Biden administration, it was aimed at addressing Israel's security concerns by—you guessed it—removing Israeli forces from the territories and deploying U.S. troops around Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) and the Jordan Valley, along with “training, equipping, evaluating and monitoring” local Palestinian forces.

Then-Secretary of State John Kerry even offered then-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a clandestine visit to have a close look at the successful “Afghan model.” Netanyahu politely declined the offer.

Replicating the “Afghan model” in Israel was and still is unrealistic for multiple reasons. There can be no guarantee that the above-mentioned “Palestinian forces” will not be replaced by Iran-backed Hamas militias, much like the coup that was staged in Gaza a mere two years after Israel's withdrawal from the Strip; that scenario is, in fact, highly plausible.

The Samaria mountain range is an elevated, 3,300-foot terrain that overlooks the densely populated Israeli shoreline, the nerve center of the Israeli economy, as well as virtually all of the tiny country's strategic infrastructure, from military facilities to power plants. There already exists a multilayered terror infrastructure from both Gaza and the Palestinian Authority-controlled territories around Judea and Samaria targeting the Israeli population. The current threats of ground-to-ground missiles, drive-by shootings and infiltration by elite terrorist squads leave no doubt as to the existential menace to Israel that a reckless step of strengthening such units would bring about.

Further still, guarantees on paper, as diplomatically wordsmithed as they may be, were given to both the Afghani and Israeli people—and proved meaningless. With much pomp and circumstance, well-meaning, but naive international actors promise “multilayered systems,” “target timetables and benchmarks,” “state-of-the-art technology” and “unfettered support,” then land in the unpleasant, scorching Middle Eastern sand dunes.

When these failed models collapse, it is the local people who are left to deal with the fallout, while airlifts take international forces to safety.

Other variants, such as the ravaging corruption within the Afghan government, or the inauthentic national identity forced on the country's many tribes may, also account for the failure of the Afghanistan campaign. Still, when international commitments prove to be in vain, time and again, from peacekeeping forces in the Sinai—ordered to evacuate by then-Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser prior to the 1967 Six-Day War—to UNIFIL standing by as Hezbollah takes over southern Lebanon, Israel cannot seriously be expected to entrust its security to the hands of unaccountable international forces with fluctuating interests. Israel cannot allow the potential creation of a strategic existential threat—an Iranian vassal state in the outskirts of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

In any future arrangement with the Palestinians, then, Israel must keep full sovereign control over the Jordan Valley, as well as over large parts of strategic areas around Judea and Samaria, and keep operational freedom everywhere in the territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. This was also the position of the government of late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, which signed the Oslo Accords with the PLO, and it remains true today.

Critically, these territories are also viewed by Israel as its ancestral homeland, intrinsically wedded to the *raison-d'être* of “the return to

Zion,” which were merely snatched away temporarily due to arbitrary armistice lines that were signed and agreed upon as politically meaningless. In terms of national security, instilling the “Afghan model” in Israel would be promoting an allegiance-free security paradigm that has failed time and again, with zero benefit and overwhelming risk.

While international actors may be able to afford the gamble of being wrong, a menaced country such as Israel does not have the luxury to survive a failed security guarantee. (JNS Sep 12)

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## **The New York Times's Corrupted Lessons on Ancient Jewish History** By Tamar Sternthal

While denying and downplaying Jews' presence in their ancient homeland has long been a mainstay of Arab anti-Israel propaganda, at times this particularly noxious type of delegitimization of the Jewish state also finds a platform in international media coverage.

Curiously, it's precisely media items supposedly about Jewish history that tend to minimize the historical connection between the Jews and their ancient land.

For example, The New York Times in 2015 infamously called into question whether the ancient Jewish Temples were located on the Temple Mount (“Historical Certainty Proves Elusive at Jerusalem's Holiest Place”). In fact, serious archeologists agree with the indisputable evidence of the Temple's location at the site, and The Times subsequently published a lengthy editor's note.

In a 2019 feature titled “Six periods in Jewish history,” Agence France Presse reported, unbelievably, that Jerusalem became a city sacred to Jews during the Muslim conquest in the seventh century. In reality, Jerusalem held a sacred status in Jerusalem for some 1,500 years prior to the Muslim conquest, as the media outlet was compelled to state in its correction.

Last week, the Times again flunked on the facts regarding Jews in their homeland during antiquity. The Sept. 11 article examines lessons for present-day Israel from “Legend of Destruction,” an animated film about the destruction of the Second Temple and the fall of Jerusalem in the Roman conquest against the backdrop of internal disunity (“For a Fractured Israel, a Film Offers Ominous Lessons From Ancient Past”).

Leaving aside whether Israelis have absorbed the lessons about the past concerning unity and civil discourse, it's clear that The New York Times has not learned its own lessons. Once again, it mangled the historical record, minimizing the Jewish people's presence in ancient Israel.

Thus, Isabel Kershner errs: “The Jews enjoyed two previous periods of sovereignty in the land in ancient times, but both lasted only about 70 or 80 years....”

In fact, the Kingdom of Judah was extant for more than 300 years, from the time of the collapse of the United Kingdom of Israel in 922 BCE until the Babylonian conquest in 586 BC. (The United Kingdom lasted for approximately a century, starting around 1020 BCE).

The northern Kingdom of Israel, the other half of what had been the United Kingdom until it fell apart in 922 BCE, lasted for approximately 200 years, until the Neo-Assyrian empire's conquest.

Besides these three separate Jewish kingdoms (two of which were contemporaneous), there was also the Hasmonean dynasty, which achieved autonomy from the Seleucids in 147 BCE and independence in 129 BCE. Their kingdom lasted some 80 years.

Thus, four Jewish kingdoms predated the modern Jewish state, and the longest one lasted more than three centuries, not 80 years.

By falsely reporting that the longest Jewish rule in Israel fell in fewer than 100 years, the Times minimizes the historic Jewish connection to ancient Israel, eroding the legitimacy of the present Jewish state.

Tellingly, from the otherwise fascinating and informative article about what looks to be an intriguing film, The New York Times selected to highlight on Twitter that singular sentence with the falsehood underreporting the long Jewish sovereignty in the ancient land of Israel.

CAMERA contacted the Times to request a correction, making clear that the longest Jewish sovereignty in ancient Israel extended beyond three centuries, and that it was one of four Jewish sovereignties in antiquity.

True to its identity as “the paper of narrative,” as opposed to the paper of record, the Times declined to correct, responding that article's “intention” was to reference the “two periods when there was both unity and sovereignty,” supposedly the United Kingdom of Israel (in which Saul, David and Solomon ruled), and also the Hasmonean period. (As for unity during the Hasmonean period, that too is a total fallacy.)

An 80-year lifespan for ancient Jewish sovereignty provides a

tidy touch to the article's narrative about fractious present-day Israel learning from the dangers of the fallen kingdoms of antiquity. The passage in question suggests that the 73-year-old Jewish state likewise totters perilously close to the abyss of expiration:

"Israeli leaders have increasingly drawn on the lessons from Jewish history, noting that the Jews enjoyed two previous periods of sovereignty in the land in ancient times, but both lasted only about 70 or 80 years — a poignant reminder for the modern state that, founded in 1948, has passed the 70-year mark."

As for the paper's justification for refusing to conform with the facts, whether or not the article intended for the 80 years to refer specifically to periods of sovereignty and unity, that's not what it says.

How many Times readers are familiar with Israel's complex ancient history and would understand from the sentence that really, the author meant "sovereignty and unity"?

Since when does intent (which is in the journalist's head, and which readers cannot possibly divine) take precedence over language which informs—or misinforms—readers? (JNS Sep 15)

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## **The Obligation to Remember, Even on a Day When We Look Inward** By Jonathan S. Tobin

It comes in a part of the Yom Kippur service that even many of those who are more than three-day-a-year synagogue-goers often skip in the late afternoon as the daylong fast heads towards its conclusion. In the Ashkenazi prayer book for the Day of Atonement, the martyrology service—the centerpiece of which is the poem *Eleh Ezkerah*, "These I Will Remember"—follows the *Avodah* or the description of the service that was held in the biblical Temple in Jerusalem on Yom Kippur. But after immersing themselves in the memories of the sacred rites that the Jews of the Temple period engaged in, worshippers are reminded of another more brutal form of sacrifice.

*Eleh Ezkerah*, which was composed by an anonymous medieval author, tells the story of 10 rabbis who were martyred by Roman persecutors in the period after Jerusalem's destruction. As with all other writings that are known as *Midrash*, the poem is an interpretation of these events rather than a historical chronicle. Though it represents the 10 as having died around the same time, two were killed in the immediate aftermath of the Great Revolt that ended the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. The rest, including well-known historical figures like Rabbi Akiba, died during what are known as the Hadrianic persecutions. That happened decades later when the Roman rulers of the land of Israel sought to eradicate Judaism. That provoked the doomed Bar Kochba revolt, which proved to be the last moment when Jewish sovereignty over the land was imaginable until the rise of the Zionist movement 18 centuries later.

The stories of their deaths are told in a dramatic and gruesome fashion with special tortures being devised to increase the suffering of the sages. The account is heart-rending, and all the more so because of the heroism and dedication to stay loyal to their faith that the martyred rabbis show. They are resolute not just in the face of death but to hideous mistreatment that would be enough to cause even the most stalwart believer to tremble in fear. Even worse, the Roman emperor in the poem says his cruelty is justified because it is a punishment for what happened to the biblical figure Joseph when he was sold into slavery by 10 of his jealous brothers.

What do we learn from this terrible chapter of Jewish history? Or, indeed, from other accounts of suffering that are, in many synagogues, followed by remembrances of other atrocities visited upon the Jews during other periods of persecution, such as the Crusades, and most notably, the Holocaust?

In some ways, honoring the martyrs of the past—and indeed, all Jews who were victimized by oppressors—comes naturally on Yom Kippur since it's also a day when *Yizkor*, the memorial prayer for the dead, is also recited. But on a day when Jews are asked by their faith to look inward, the martyrology shakes us, at least for a few minutes, out of our introspection. It demands that we also look out on a world that has from ancient times to the present been a dangerous place for a people that has often found itself at the mercy of ruthless foes without the power needed for self-defense. It forces us to confront a reality to which our every day means of coping in what we hope is a rational world provides no answer.

On Passover, Jews read in the *Haggadah*: "For not only one enemy has risen up against us to destroy us, but in every generation they rise up to destroy us. But the Holy One, Blessed be He, delivers us from their hands." But as *Eleh Ezkerah* and much of Jewish history teaches us, the sort of Divine intervention that is the centerpiece of the Exodus from Egypt is not something that can always be counted on to save the day. That's especially true when villains obsessed with the Jews are in a position to inflict harm on those without the means to adequately defend their existence.

Jewish reactions to this quandary have varied over the centuries. Like many victims, they have often not only internalized the hate directed at them but sought to use their misfortunes as lessons in self-improvement.

The story of the Jewish people from their earliest origins after their emergence as a nation after the Exodus is one of punishment and redemption, as the recalcitrant and often stubbornly obtuse Jews refuse to obey the rules set down for them by their Redeemer. As a result, they suffer one chastisement after another, and eventually, are sent into exile for their sins.

Even the catastrophe of the encounter with the Roman Empire has always been understood by Jewish sources as being a story about Jews with their enemies playing merely a supporting role. It is seen by tradition through the prism of Jewish disunity and *sinat chinam*—the baseless hatred of one Jew for another—rather than one about either the tyranny of their oppressors or the geostrategic madness of a tiny people living in a crucial piece of territory without natural defenses (as was the case with the German tribes or the Parthians, who both managed to avoid total defeat by Rome) repeatedly choosing to pick a fight with the greatest military power in the world.

This way of looking at a hostile world in which their enemies are essentially robbed of their agency—and instead viewed as merely unwitting tools of the judgment of the God of Israel—was a normative Jewish response to anti-Semitism throughout the two millennia of exile and powerlessness that followed. Even the hope of a return to their land, which was embedded into every aspect of Judaism, was put off until the Messianic era. It was no surprise that many, if not most, religious authorities rejected the modern Zionist movement as an impermissible attempt to jump-start history rather than an entirely necessary effort to re-enter it and provide protection and justice to a persecuted people.

It would not be until the Holocaust that Jews would overwhelmingly reject this internalization of their foes' narratives. In the face of Auschwitz, it was no longer possible to view the irrational hatred that arose against them as a just punishment for their sins. One needn't reject the biblical narrative about the need for the Jews to embrace the laws and the moral code set down for them, or the desire to judge their own conduct by the high standards set by the Torah rather than by lesser and more expedient rules. But when confronted with 20th-century anti-Semitism, such a response is itself immoral as well as an inadequate explanation for the unspeakable horrors of the Shoah.

While it's hard to find anyone other than a raging anti-Semite who would seriously argue that the Nazis were reacting to Jewish misbehavior rather than merely projecting their own maniacal beliefs onto their victims, many still fall into the trap of accepting the similarly distorted evaluations of contemporary Jew-haters.

The State of Israel is not perfect, and the challenges, both moral and political, of having to engage in a conflict in which Palestinian Arabs and their allies who remain unreconciled to Jewish rights or sovereignty in the land of Israel are many. But it remains a fact that the only nation in the world that is singled out not merely for unfair treatment in international forums or judged by double standards, but whose legitimacy is repeatedly called into question, remains the only Jewish one on the planet. It remains the only country about which other nations' open desire for its extermination is considered understandable, if a bit extreme, by polite opinion in much of the world. Support for the justice of its cause has become distinctly unpopular among intellectuals. Ideas like critical race theory and intersectionality, which are increasingly accepted not merely by the woke left but others who wish to signal their opposition to racism, treat the Jewish state and the Jews who support it as an expression of white privilege for which decent people ought to apologize.

In this way, while traditional enemies from the right still treat Jews as the boogymen that have always bedeviled the Western imagination, the left also grants a permission slip to Jew-hatred by calling it anti-Zionism.

Thus, even amid the need for Jews to engage in a *cheshbon hanefesh* or an "accounting of the soul" during the Days of Awe that lead up to the Day of Atonement, the martyrology is a reminder that there are some evils that can't be dealt with by rigorous self-examination. Anti-Semitism is, as it has always been, a function of the shortcomings of anti-Semites, not that of the Jews. The proper response to it is not self-criticism, let alone the sort of self-loathing that 19 centuries of oppression has sometimes given rise to.

The emotions conjured up the remembrances of Jewish martyrs throughout the ages is not an exercise in maudlin mourning. It should instead trigger an understanding that while the persistence of Jew-hatred is a mystery that we will never entirely solve, it must be answered by a vigorous defense of Jewish rights and security, not a self-destructive search for fault that only aids those whose purpose is an all-too-familiar desire to spill Jewish blood. (JNS Sep 15)