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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*

Palestinian statehood by way of an Israeli withdrawal to the 1947 armistice lines.

Ditto for the two Meretz members—Regional Cooperation Minister Esawi Frej and faction head Knesset member Michal Rozin—who accompanied him.

Commentary...

The Delusion of Reaching an 'Arrangement' with Hamas

By Doron Matza

The death of Israeli Border Police officer Bar-El Hadaria Shmueli, who was shot in the head during a riot on the Gaza-Israel border on Aug. 21, is not merely the reflection of a tactical error by the IDF but of a perverted strategic approach.

Israel, like the United States in the Iranian context, longs to work things out with Hamas. And just as with the U.S. and Iran, Israel's desire hides a mistaken reading of the situation. In Israel's case, a misreading of Hamas under its leader in the Gaza Strip, Yahya Sinwar, echoes Israel's failure to understand Yasser Arafat's Fatah or PLO.

In 1991, Israel adopted the goal of reaching a "political agreement" as a solution to the conflict with the Palestinians. The assumption, which turned out to be incorrect, was that adopting the "territory for peace" concept would completely erode Palestinian belligerence.

The collapse of the "Oslo process" due to the Second Intifada, which erupted after Arafat rejected Israel's generous offer for a permanent peace deal and backed violence against Israel, illustrated that the Palestinian national movement never saw the conflict as something that could be resolved via political agreements. Rather, it viewed the conflict as a long-term battle to defeat Zionism.

In recent years, this outlook has become the bedrock of Israel's Gaza policy. It dovetails with Israel's disinclination to conduct a military operation in Gaza. Israel has clung to it so tightly that it has tended to blindly view Hamas's continued terrorism as "rogue" acts that do not represent the organization's official line. As the birth pangs of the movement getting on board with a long-term "arrangement" (hudna or "truce") that supposedly includes a willingness to thoroughly contain terrorist acts.

Even the latest round of hostilities with Hamas, in May, did not do anything to change Israel's view. The opposite. It anchored the assumption that after the fighting, it was time for a long-term arrangement. There was no understanding that as with Arafat's PLO-Fatah, which in the name of the eternal principle of the conflict was never willing to end it and mixed violence with any dialogue, Hamas sees its own strategy in terms of a reality that combines negotiations and terrorism.

This is the strategy of "both" (agreement and "resistance") that characterizes Iran's approach to the West (which wants talks with the United States and also nuclear weapons), and is the opposite of the Israeli strategy, which is based on an "either-or" model—conflict, or a deal.

History not only teaches us that there is no real difference between the secular PLO-Fatah and the Islamist Hamas, but also gives us the insight that Israel tends to repeat the mistake of projecting Western thinking onto its opponents (not to mention the fact that political victimization is not a matter of fate).

Only once we set aside the delusion of a long-term political agreement or arrangement will it be possible to wake up from the idea of an economic arrangement with Hamas. Or at least to recognize that such an arrangement would not necessarily guarantee quiet on the security front. (Israel Hayom Oct 7)

Meretz's Pilgrimage to Ramallah By Ruthie Blum

If anything illustrates the farcical nature of the current makeup of the government in Jerusalem, it's the parley in Ramallah on Sunday evening between Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas and a delegation of Israel's Meretz Party, headed by Health Minister Nitzan Horowitz.

Horowitz didn't even bother to obscure his exit from a meeting of the ministerial committee on fighting the coronavirus, which hadn't convened since the end of August, in order to make his appointment at the Muqata. But then, his role as the country's most senior official charged with handling the pandemic is secondary to his true ambition:

The purpose of their little gathering was twofold.

Firstly, it was to show their voters that, despite their party's sitting in a coalition with and under politicians traditionally after the right, it's still committed to Israeli capitulation at all costs. Secondly, it was to signal to Abbas that he has the power to achieve their shared goal.

In one respect, he's correct. Every party in the coalition possesses the leverage to cause it to fall.

But just like any of the strange bedfellows able to use this option as a threat, none has the desire to follow through with it. They all realize that in such an event, what awaits them on the "day after" is political exile.

In the meantime, each enjoys a degree of freedom from facing the electorate for a fifth time in two-and-a-half years. And Meretz is milking its ability to go against the wishes of Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and discuss policy with Holocaust denier Abbas—a "pay for slay" terrorism instigator who's been refusing to engage in talks with Israel since 2014.

"Meretz has a task within the government: to keep the two-state solution alive, not let it disappear, and not sabotage the chance of reaching it in the future," Horowitz told the octogenarian P.A. chief. "Because there is no other solution."

It would be almost amusing if it weren't such a lie. Abbas has made it clear, time and again, that this is not his aim.

"We [in Meretz] believe that there's no room for unilateral measures that would harm the chances of implementing the two-state solution. No new settlements, no illegal outposts and no violence by extremists among the settlers."

Fatah's propagandists couldn't have expressed that last bit better themselves.

"It is my duty, our duty, to promote joint action," Horowitz continued. "We arrived today to rebuild a direct and permanent channel between [Israel and the P.A.], and to give a 'booster [shot]' to the cooperation."

Frej chimed in, as well.

"We are here to promote a two-state solution; to say that you are our partner," he stated. "The future is important, but we must first act to make the present better, and for that we need cooperation between ministries and governments."

Rosin made reference to the fact that other Israelis didn't back the visit.

"We came here openly; didn't hide. On the contrary, we came with pride. We'll do everything necessary to advance the two-state solution, to build the practical foundations for peace."

The fact that Abbas has never been interested in a two-state solution—or any arrangement, for that matter—either doesn't occur to Meretz or its members don't care. Their main objective, after all, is to place the blame for the plight of the Arabs ruled by Fatah in Judea and Samaria and by Hamas in Gaza on Israel. It's a false narrative that Abbas promotes on purpose, as it provides him relevance in the international arena—stature that he utterly lacks among his own people.

Awareness of this fact is responsible for his postponement, yet again, of the P.A. legislative elections, which this time around were slated for May, after a nearly 17-year reign. It was a vote that he was certain to lose and he knew it.

It seems that only the left in Israel and elsewhere in the West still buys the bull. The rest of the population in the Jewish state and abroad has grasped that until there is genuine internal change in Palestinian society and an end to backing by Iran, no peace of any kind is possible.

It is thus that the Abraham Accords are a thorn in Abbas's side. Not, however, as the likes of Meretz would have one believe because the P.A. wasn't included. No, the real cause for anger on the part of the "peace camp" is that the deals signed between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, shortly followed by others with Morocco and Sudan, belie the fantasists' longstanding failed paradigm.

The good news is that Horowitz and his gang had zero effect on

Abbas, other than to give him the opportunity to fabricate a call for talks with Israeli figures, such as Lapid, Bennett and Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked.

"It won't happen," Shaked tweeted. "I won't meet with a Holocaust denier who is suing Israeli soldiers at The Hague and paying the murderers of Jews."

Bennett didn't respond. Lapid's tactic was to warn against cracks in the coalition.

"In recent days, Knesset members and ministers have been acting as if all the problems are behind us. Everyone has started pulling in their own direction, making unnecessary headlines, acting as if this government is self-evident," he posted on Twitter. "[But] the last thing that can be said about the government is that it is self-evident. It's a miracle. More than that, it's a fragile miracle, which happened against all odds. Instead of everyone pulling in their own direction, our job is to pass a budget. We have five weeks where we all have one task: to pass a budget. Without it, there will be no government. Without it, no one will fulfill his dreams."

One thing that's become evident since this "fragile miracle" was foisted upon the Israeli public is that apparently "no one will fulfill his dreams" while it's in power, either, except for the countries' enemies emboldened by the hodge-podge. (JNS Oct 5)

For Peace, Abbas's Long-Standing Rejectionism has to be Defeated By Gregg Roman

Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas has a long career of making promises that disappoint and threats that do not reach fruition. Nevertheless, the demand by Abbas during a speech to the United Nations General Assembly on September 24 that Israel withdraw to the 1967 boundaries within one year or threaten repercussions, appears to come from a different place.

Abbas is at an all-time low in popularity. His failed Palestinian elections gambit, coupled with the murder of critic Nizar Banat and subsequent clampdown on demonstrations have meant that many are calling for the end of the Abbas era. A poll published last week by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research showed that almost 80% of the Palestinian public demands the resignation of Abbas.

While many might see Abbas's speech as a way to engender favorability at home, it is also the cry of a leader who knows that his strategy is failing. Abbas' tenure has been full of missed opportunities for his people. He firmly rejected the overly generous offer by prime minister Ehud Olmert in 2008, claiming in an interview with The Washington Post a few months later that his people were in no rush as "in the West Bank we have a good reality... the people are living a normal life."

He then demanded that Israel freeze building in Israeli communities to arrive at further negotiations, which they subsequently did. Yet, Abbas still stayed away from the negotiating table.

There are many other examples of failures to engage with Israel or return to the peace process and Abbas turned them all down. For many years, this left many Israeli senior officials and decision-makers to understand that Abbas is too embedded in rejectionism to move an inch toward them. While there was some hope that Abbas would be more amenable than Yasser Arafat, that idea quickly evaporated, despite his better understanding of diplomacy and the language of international relations.

In fact, it could be argued that Abbas has reversed any gains made by the Palestinians under Arafat, and the very recognition of Israel, the type of mutual recognition that was the foundation of the Oslo Accords, is now under threat.

There are a number of approaches that Israel and its leaders could take. Israel could go down the endless tunnel of greater concessions and try to appease Abbas by teasing him away from his extolled brink. History has demonstrated where this will lead.

Another path could be for Israel to use this as an opportunity to defeat Palestinian rejectionism once and for all. It could embark on the Israel victory route and take stronger measures against Abbas and his rejectionist cadres. These figures still believe that they will ultimately pummel Israel into submission and eventually rid themselves of the Jewish state, however unlikely that might seem to many.

The opposite can and should be enacted. Israel should now be thinking about how it can break Abbas's will to continue his rejectionism: diplomatic, legal, economic and violent. One just has to listen to Abbas refer to the creation of Israel as a Nakba, a catastrophe, and look at the maps on the wall behind him as he recorded his UN speech which do not feature Israel, to hear and witness that his

ultimate goal is to turn back time and reverse the reality on the ground.

This should be shocking to every single Israeli, but many see this as harmless or irrelevant background noise or banter. However, on the Palestinian street, since the beginning of the year there has been a constant talk of a "Third Intifada." Israel witnessed how quickly the fuse was lit to take advantage of the legal dispute in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood.

Israel is faced with a choice: Look back after there is further bloodshed, enacted or goaded on by a leader who has moved his people further away from peace, or instead the Jewish state can act now. It needs to raise and not lower the pressure on Abbas. He is teetering and the UN speech demonstrated this more than anything else. He is irrelevant to the vast majority of Palestinians, many of whom dream of a better tomorrow, so he should be made irrelevant for Israel.

By taking a strong hand against Abbas and his stalwarts in the Palestinian Authority, Israel can ensure that rejectionism comes to an end and the cycle of seemingly never-ending conflict and violence is ended. This will have obvious benefits for Israel, but it will be even better for the Palestinians. It will bring about the badly needed peace and prosperity, and allow them to build up their polity without the distraction of the conflict and for the betterment of the people.

This would be a win-win situation for both peoples, but first Abbas and his impermeable form of rejectionism must be defeated. (Jerusalem Post Oct 3)

The writer is the director of the Middle East Forum.

Israel Must Actively Oppose US Return to the JCPOA

By Efraim Inbar and Omer Dostri

While previous Israeli governments strongly and publicly opposed the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran, the Bennett-Lapid government seems to be shying away from open opposition to U.S. return to the deal. In his speech last week to the United Nations General Assembly, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett did not mention the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) at all.

According to media reports, Bennett has pledged to U.S. President Joe Biden not to conduct a public campaign against a U.S. return to JCPOA. Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz has gone further, telling Foreign Policy magazine (Sept. 14, 2021) that "Israel can live with a new nuclear agreement." At the same time, the government has rescinded former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's directive to refrain from discussing with the Biden administration the details of negotiations to reinstate the JCPOA.

Apparently, the current Israeli government wants to avoid tensions with the Biden administration. Perhaps it views the nuclear agreement as less dangerous, and/or it considers coordination with the United States regarding Iran's nuclear program more important. Perhaps it thinks that negotiations for renewal of the JCPOA will fail in any case.

Whichever is the case, Israel is making a serious mistake. Cessation of Israeli opposition to a U.S. return to the JCPOA carries significant risks, and could undermine Israel's struggle against the Iranian nuclear project.

A return to the original, weak agreement would allow Iran to come close to assembling a nuclear bomb. The agreement does not prohibit research and development on centrifuges intended for uranium enrichment, and the inspection regimes are hardly effective. Above all, many of the agreement's restrictions on Iran's nuclear program will sunset (expire) in 2025. Moreover, the very negotiations over a framework for return to the agreement is dangerous. The Iranians are just bidding for time, while their centrifuges spin away.

Second, by implicitly agreeing to a U.S. return to the deal, Israel largely loses the ability to demand realization of the American promise to negotiate a separate, "better and longer" agreement, which would supposedly fix the flaws in the 2015 deal. With this Israeli concession, such a "better and longer" deal seems even further unlikely, and this includes placing limits Iran's ballistic missile program (the delivery means for nuclear weapons) and curbing Iranian aggression (funding and supporting terrorism) across the Middle East.

Third, Israel's past, open opposition to the agreement lent legitimacy to the possibility of unilateral military action against Iran's nuclear program. It is more difficult to justify Israeli military activity when Israel intimates that it can live with the agreement.

Opposing the agreement also carries strategic significance, by

signaling to the world Israel's willingness to act without coordination with the United States, if necessary. This is an important element of Israel's national security doctrine; that Israel defends itself, by itself.

The significance of the Israeli government's promise to the Biden administration of "zero surprises" is not entirely clear, but it would appear to contradict the above pillar of Israel's national security doctrine. Israel's apparent willingness to align with the United States on such an existential issue suggests Israeli strategic weakness.

Fourth, the change in Israel's position jeopardizes Israel's diplomatic achievements in the region. Israel's vociferous opposition to the nuclear accord (including Netanyahu's landmark speech to the U.S. Congress in 2015) earned Israel great support in Arab capitals. The Abraham Accords normalization agreements are largely a result of Israel's stubborn stance against the Obama administration on this matter.

Fifth, the apparent Israeli policy change fosters the fantasy that if Iran produces a nuclear bomb, a stable nuclear balance of terror can be reached in the Middle East. This is a dangerous illusion.

Mutual nuclear deterrence would not be obtained between Israel and Iran, for many reasons: the short distance between the two countries reduces warning time; the difficulties in establishing second-strike capabilities; the lack of communication between the two sides; and Iran's willingness to bear great losses in striking at Israel.

Sixth, the change in Israel's position encourages nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, which is a strategic nightmare for Israel. Several states in the Middle East counted on Israel's opposition to slow proliferation.

Seventh, Washington probably was ready to compensate Israel for not publicly opposing a U.S. return to the agreement. Jerusalem missed the opportunity to negotiate significant strategic compensation by bowing so swiftly to American wishes.

Finally, by renouncing Israeli opposition to the nuclear agreement, Iran's position in the region is strengthened. This will encourage radical Islamist forces, especially against the background of America's humiliating flight from Afghanistan.

The bottom line is that by forgoing Israeli opposition to a U.S. return to the nuclear agreement—even if only as a matter of appearance, recognizing that Israel cannot truly influence U.S. decision-making on this issue—is detrimental to Israel's security.

But it is not too late to return to a policy that defiantly objects to a U.S. return to the nuclear deal.
(Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security Oct 4)

The Blessing and Potential Curse of Prosperity

By Douglas Altabef

The history of the rebirth of Israel—the return to the land and its resettlement and flourishing—had very little to do with material wealth. The ethos of the kibbutz movement was actually profoundly anti-materialistic, and often self-righteously so.

Many kibbutznikim had been middle-class Europeans who abandoned a bourgeois lifestyle in favor of a more rugged, direct and land-enthralled one of collective responsibility. Material wealth was often frowned upon as being decadent or, at a minimum, a hindrance to the work at hand, which was the restoration of the land under Jewish sovereignty.

Under the sway of socialist-oriented governments and leadership, Israel had a lackluster economy for decades. And the specter of material wealth was the province of "the 18 families," a sliver of the population who were out-and-out rich. There was a small middle class and the immigrants who, as the old joke went, came to Israel to become millionaires by arriving as multi-millionaires.

The story of Israel's economy and wealth-accumulation during the past 20 years stands in stark contrast to its prior history. The confluence of several factors, including a brain in-migration, an ethos of innovation and high-risk tolerance and reduced governmental regulation and restriction, all combined to create the "start-up nation."

But what has truly sent the start-up nation into the economic stratosphere has been the simple reality that what Israel is brilliant at innovating, the world wants in a major way. This fact, combined with the happy reality that such innovation has not had to be terribly capital-intensive, has provided the perfect positive storm for Israel's economic advancement.

Nowhere has that advancement been as prominent, pronounced or visible as it has been in the technology sector. While it is estimated that approximately 10 percent of Israel's workforce is devoted to tech,

the per capita impact of tech workers is estimated at somewhere between 20 and 30 percent of Israel's economic output and wealth creation.

In other words, workers in tech are higher paid, in many cases vastly higher paid, than the average Israeli.

While we could devote chapters to the implications of a booming tech sector, suffice it to say that it's a mixed blessing. Such prosperity has filled the tax coffers of the government, enabling it to do more on behalf of the broader population. Tech success has had a pronounced ripple effect, creating and benefiting service industries and providing for more variety and diversity in areas like food and clothing and, for those who can afford it, housing and automobiles.

Such prosperity has put Israel at the table of the leading world economies, as validated by its admission into the OECD in 2010. Furthermore, economic success has made Israel a more attractive aliyah possibility for many Jews of more developed countries, whose Zionist aspirations were often inhibited by a fear of suffering tremendous economic diminution. No longer.

That's the good news. And it is good news, indeed, for, as one American pundit put it, "Rich or poor, it's nice to have money."

So where does the downside lie? First of all, disparities of wealth have always been with us, and likely always will. There has been, however, understandable concern about the increasing, almost unprecedented disparities of wealth that now define much of the West.

I would submit that such disparities per se need not be problematic. The issue has become how such disparities have been employed by the uber-rich, and the resulting mindset that has been taking hold.

Every year, the global elite gather in Davos, Switzerland to validate their own economic supremacy and to play at being an unaccountable super-legislature on behalf of the rest of us. Most recently, the Davos crew has initiated the Great Global Reset, which is an initiative that, under their auspices, will address climate change and other global issues, such as population growth.

If your stomach is tightening, there is a good reason for it. Basically, these are plutocratic initiatives, where the oligarchs of wealth and privilege are deciding what is in the best interests of the rest of us.

What marks these gatherings and this agenda is the strong sense that each of the attendees can more readily relate to their global counterparts than the great unwashed among their own citizenry.

Not only that. It is presumed both that the unwashed do not know what is in their best interests, and also that therefore only the elites should be enfranchised to decide.

The trend therefore is towards more internationalism, here economically driven, and a decoupling of elites from their own nations.

The overarching power of uber-tech companies, such as Google, Facebook and Microsoft, is also indicative of worldwide forces that increasingly see their missions in both international and super-legislative modes.

The upshot of this situation will be an increasing bifurcation of individual societies, as the members of the great middle feel that their elites are not focused on their welfare; even worse, where regular folks believe that elites are willing to sacrifice the interests of the great middle in favor of a larger, more abstract agenda.

This is increasingly the unfolding disaster in the United States, where progressive policies are not only dividing the nation politically, but also are giving elites an agenda to drive a deeper, existential wedge in the country.

How does all of this affect Israel? The answer today is that we do not yet know, but the country should be very concerned and prepared to do all it can to prevent this phenomenon of bifurcation from taking place.

While every society strives for unity, Israel's is ultimately dependent on it. Few, if any countries in the world—certainly not the wealthy, developed countries of the West—are facing existential threats on their borders. Such threats have typically fostered a sense of unity, a bedrock understanding that, regardless of our other differences, Israelis must stand together or we will all fall together.

I pray that Israel doesn't cultivate a detached elite, driven by newfound wealth, which finds more affinities with international elites than with its fellow Israelis. Ironically, such an effort would backfire badly, because global elites hate the nationalistic character of Israel, and also embrace the Palestinians as a show of virtue-signaling.

So, craven Israeli elites seeking international camaraderie will inevitably have to turn away from—and, possibly, have to turn on—their own countrymen to achieve such unattainable acceptance.

How can Israel proactively address this situation such that it prevents the dreaded outcome? Making sure that national service continues to be honored by the children of elites is a must. Anecdotally, I am hearing of increasing numbers of wealthy families figuring out how to keep their kids out of the Israel Defense Forces. That must stop.

Some kind of Jewish participation would be a great antidote to separation and dissociation. And above all, Jewish youth must continue to be taught Zionist history and values, with the fundamental message that we are all part of a people who has been blessed to return to its ancestral homeland, under Jewish sovereignty.

Prosperity in Israel is a great blessing, but one that needs to be directed towards the greater good of its citizens, and not ever to be allowed to become a dividing wedge. (JNS Oct 3)

Is it Ever OK to Praise the ‘Truth’ of an Anti-Semitic Blood Libel? By Jonathan S. Tobin

Does it matter if politicians let lies told by people they meet publicly go unanswered? That’s the question that many in the Jewish community, especially the majority who regularly vote for Democrats, are asking this week in the wake of an incident this week involving Vice President Kamala Harris.

After giving a brief talk at George Mason University in Fairfax, Va., advocating her party’s position opposing the passage of what Republicans believe to be voter integrity laws and that Democrats claim are “voter suppression,” Harris took questions from students. One of them, who identified herself as “half-Iranian and half-Yemeni,” launched into a diatribe where she contrasted the “protests and demonstrations in astronomical numbers” on behalf of “Palestine” with the fact that Congress had passed funding for the Iron Dome missile-defense system for Israel. “That hurts my heart,” the student said, because Israel’s existence is an expression of “ethnic genocide” and the same thing “that happened in America.” She went on to say that instead of funding Israel’s ethnic genocide, the money should have gone to health care.

As the student spoke, the masked vice president listened quietly and nodded. But rather than push back against that false and libelous characterization of the Jewish state—and why Israel has a right to self-defense and that it is America’s obligation to stand with a fellow democracy—Harris responded with a lecture about pluralism and the need for activism.

“Your voice, your perspective, your experience, your truth cannot be suppressed, and it must be heard,” said Harris.

The vice president, whose performance to date in the undefined and generally non-challenging role of veep, has gotten generally poor marks from political observers for her lack of engagement and poor messaging on a number of issues, such as focusing on the border crisis. But instead of diffusing a difficult moment that she may have feared would provoke unnecessary controversy, she did the opposite.

The video of the confrontation, broadcast live on C-SPAN, went viral and led to an avalanche of criticism, largely from Republicans and Israelis, who regarded Harris’s refusal to express any disagreement with the student and her nodding along as she said those things as tantamount to agreeing with her.

It would be a full two days later, as comments about the incident began to intrude on the news cycle, when the vice president, through her spokesperson, said that she disagreed with what the student had said.

Reaching out to liberal groups like the Anti-Defamation League and the partisan Democratic Majority for Israel, and then to various news outlets, the vice president’s office said that she “strongly disagrees” with the student and sought to claim that she has always supported Israel.

At that point, the Democratic spinners also sought to point out that the video of the incident seen by most viewers had cut off before Harris replied to the student: “The point that you are making about policy that relates to Middle East policy, foreign policy; we still have healthy debates in our country about what is the right path, and nobody’s voice should be suppressed on that.”

That last part is true. America is still a free country, and those who wish to debate U.S. support for Israel, even by making false and defamatory arguments, should be allowed to do so.

That still begs the question as to why Harris felt the need to validate the student’s point of view in some way. It also leaves open the matter of why, if the vice president was such a strong supporter of the Jewish state, she didn’t think it appropriate to preface her entirely superfluous defense of the right to dissent with even a hint that the views being expressed were not only wrongheaded but dangerous. That’s especially true since the protests in May the student was referring to, which took place as the Hamas terror organization was launching missiles into Israeli population centers, were largely a defense of the right of Palestinians in Gaza to kill Jews. Such sentiments, in the United States and elsewhere, led to anti-Semitic violence on campus and off.

The likely correct answer to these questions is both prosaic and provides an illustration of what it means to be a “progressive” in 21st-century America.

Not everyone is always ready with the right response or quip in the moment when it’s needed. A lot of us have to think a bit before we realize what is happening in a conversation and then only come up with what should have been said until much later. But Harris—a quick-witted veteran attorney, prosecutor and politician—is actually known for her sharp tongue and readiness to use it on anyone with whom she disagrees. That was something made abundantly clear by her conduct on the Senate Judiciary Committee during televised confirmation hearings.

It’s also true that politicians are generally not in the business of telling people “no.” They love to be loved and generally seek applause wherever they go. Even when confronted with disagreement, protest or hecklers, most respond gently, even if something roils them.

There have also been politicians who take it as their obligation not just to engage and please voters, but to chide them when they are wrong. The late Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) is remembered for his willingness to scold those who made disparaging remarks about former President Barack Obama, his opponent in the 2008 presidential election. While some Republicans look back on this and say this proves the old baseball adage about “nice guys finishing last,” it was more than an example of his honesty and devotion to fair play. It was also a reflection of his belief that those in the public service were not obligated to pander to the lowest common denominator in their search for votes.

Yet in order to understand the significance of an incident that loyal Democrats insist is a meaningless kerfuffle, ask yourself this question.

What would Democrats have said if former Vice President Mike Pence had responded with the same sort of blather about diversity and pluralism if he was confronted with a question by someone who expressed racist views disparaging African-Americans or Hispanics?

After all, Jewish liberals spent the four years of the Trump administration insisting that the coarse and imprecise language used by Pence’s boss was somehow responsible for a rise in anti-Semitism, even if his policies were the most pro-Israel in history, and he had taken strong stands against Jew-hatred.

More than an example of liberal hypocrisy, what happened at George Mason was likely an expression of the dynamic that currently exists on the political left these days.

Harris went to the school to generate support for her party’s positions from student activists. She had no interest in a Sister Souljah moment in which she would demonstrate either her moderate chops or her pro-Israel bona fides. Speaking up for the Jewish state under those circumstances would have undermined the whole point of the appearance and alienated the very leftist base that is the cutting edge of Democratic Party activism these days. Her instincts were to stay silent because that is what she and many others in her party think are in their best political interests. It was only later when the incident blew up that she and her handlers came to a different conclusion, though it’s likely they still gauge that criticism from pro-Israel groups is a smaller price to pay than the blowback they would have gotten from party activists had she rebuked the student as she should have.

Instead of being a meaningless kerfuffle, more evidence that Harris isn’t up to the challenges of being veep or even the perils of living in a 24/7 news cycle in which no gaffe goes unnoticed, what happened at George Mason University gave us some insight into the lamentable state of discourse on the left about Israel. (JNS Oct 1)
