

**Amos Oz and the centrality of Hebrew in Jewish life**

By Jonathan S. Tobin

jns.org

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**The great novelist's passing should remind us that understanding the glories of modern Hebrew literature is essential to the future of the Jewish people.**

For those who only know Israel as a field of political combat, Amos Oz was just a writer with a point of view about his country's basic political and security dilemmas. Oz's advocacy for the two-state solution and his dim view of the current Israeli government, as well as many of its predecessors, figured prominently in obituaries that noted his death on Dec. 28 at the age of 79.

Oz was a major figure in Israeli letters dating back to the 1960s, and had been an international literary star since his novel *My Michael* was translated into English in 1972. But the fact that he was one of the founders of "Peace Now" seemed to be just as important as his writing to those whose interest in Israel begins and ends with discussions about the conflict with the Palestinians.

Oz's political leanings are worth discussing primarily because he stood for a form of liberal Zionism that is growing increasingly out of fashion on the left. At a time when attacks on the legitimacy of the Jewish state—no matter where its borders are drawn—have become commonplace among those who laud intersectional ideology, Oz's intense Israeli patriotism and belief in his country's right of self-defense seemed out of step with the views of some of the Jewish state's critics, including many who are Jewish. Meanwhile, right-wingers dismissed his belief that the country's future could only be secured by a peace deal that would allow two states for two peoples, in addition to his criticism of the settlement movement. Indeed, after belief in Oslo was blown up by Yasser Arafat and the Second Intifada, coupled with repeated Palestinian rejections of offers of statehood, Oz's politics came to be viewed as obsolete by many on both ends of the political spectrum.

But it would be a mistake to view Amos Oz primarily through a political lens or to gauge his worth solely by one's stance on the peace process. Oz's place in Jewish history is instilled as an eminent figure of Hebrew and Israeli literature. More importantly, commemorating his life means reminding us of the centrality of Hebrew in not only providing the foundation for Israel's creation, but also as essential to the future of the Jewish people. His achievements, along with other exceptional Israeli writers, must be understood as having provided the idiom by which the truest expression of Jewish and Israeli identity can be expressed.

The revival of Hebrew as a modern language was as

important to the success of the Zionist movement as other efforts to settle the land, and build and defend the Jewish state. It is entirely right to honor and wish to preserve the joys and achievements of Yiddish, as well as Ladino and the other languages (including English) in which Jewish thought has been expressed. But Hebrew is the only tongue and the only literature that unites the entire Jewish people, rather than just the segments that lived in Eastern Europe or portions of the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Diaspora.

Making the language of the Bible and Jewish religious liturgy, which linked Jews to their home in the land of Israel, the lingua franca of the ingathered Jewish people was essential to their becoming a nation rather than a collection of immigrants. The enormous achievements of Hebrew literature lies not in just telling us the stories of the community that was created in the Jews' ancient homeland, but in providing the narrative of a nation reborn in all of its complexity, sorrow and greatness.

Oz's tales and his prose exemplify this process by which modern Hebrew literature became the vessel through which Israeli thought and identity was expressed. The Jews are a people who have always valued the written word, and in that sense the literature of modern Israel—and that of its greatest writers and poets, such as Chaim Nachman Bialik, Shmuel Yosef Agnon, Yehuda Amichai, Aaron Applefeld and Oz—are among the most remarkable achievements of Zionism and Israel.

One of the real failures of modern American-Jewish life has been the inability of Jewish institutions to sufficiently promote the study of Hebrew in day schools and synagogue programs. All too many Jews, including many who love Israel, remain ignorant of the language that is the lifeblood of modern Jewish life. Oz's books teach much about Israel, but though they can be enjoyed in translation, it's axiomatic that it is only in the original Hebrew that the magnitude of his achievement and its worth can be appreciated.

That's why instead of rehashing sterile political arguments, we should honor Oz's memory by supporting Jewish and Zionist education that prioritizes the study of Hebrew. In doing so, we will be helping to reinforce the sadly declining sense of Jewish peoplehood among young Jews, as well as giving them a precious gift.

You don't have to agree with everything Oz said or wrote to respect the integrity of his views and his life, or to understand the importance of his writing and why it worked to explain so much about the many dilemmas Israelis faced. You can appreciate it because it helped

depict Israel, in all its brilliance and blemishes, to readers around the world in more than 40 languages. May his

## **Britain Shouldn't Drop Its Alliance with Saudi Arabia**

**By Ed Husain**

[blogs.spectator.co.uk](http://blogs.spectator.co.uk)

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**But it also shouldn't stop pushing behind the scenes for reforms.**

For more than a decade, I have been a public critic of Saudi Arabia. I should, therefore, be applauding recent global efforts to cast the Kingdom into pariah status and punish the Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman (MBS). But I fear that such calculations are flawed, short sighted and will weaken the West. Instead, Britain should be the voice of sanity and take a longer view. Such a move would be warmly welcomed by our Arab allies.

Across the Middle East, there are daily skirmishes and battles, but there is a much larger war underway for the future of Islam and the type of region that will emerge in three or four decades. A regional war of ideas is being fought now and the winners will shape the lives and attitudes of 1.8 billion Muslims around the world. The stakes could not be higher.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, amidst the rise of al-Qaeda, it was clear who had the upper hand in the Middle East: extremists of all hues. The Saudis were funding the spread of Wahhabism; and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood was thriving. Yet today, for the first time since the 1960s, neither the Muslim Brotherhood nor Wahhabism can rely on Saudi financial support. Both are on the defensive, struggling for long-term survival, and have been forced to change. But there are other, more entrenched enemies. Iran champions the forces of theocracy, imposing a hard-line religious interpretation through use of government force. Isis might have lost territory yet Iran is a much more sophisticated operator. The revolutionary ideology of wilayat al-faqih – the occupation of government by clerics until the return of the long-awaited Mehdi, a mythical end-of-days figure, who will wage war with the West – might sound like gobbledegook, but it is deeply held religious creed to Tehran. Unlike anytime since the 1979 Iranian revolution, when wilayat al-faqih was imposed on Iranians, today the clerics have command over multiple Arab capitals: Beirut, Damascus, Sana'a, Baghdad. They also provide financial and logistical support for Hamas, Hezbollah, and a range of others who fought in Syria against Sunni Arabs. There is now a firm Iranian crescent in the Middle East surrounding Israel and Sunni Arabs.

This threat makes it vital that we don't turn our backs on the Saudis. So if we felt wronged when watching MBS high-five Putin at the G20 summit earlier this month, worse is yet to come if we lose the trust of our Gulf Arab allies.

A hundred years ago, Lawrence of Arabia understood strategic objectives instinctively. In the desert during the First World War, he witnessed Prince Faisal kill an innocent Bedouin beside the well for encroaching on a

memory be for a blessing.

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rival's territory and drinking water. That skirmish did not make Lawrence turn away from the need to strengthen ties with the Arab tribes to win the war for the West. He reprimanded Faisal in private. Then, working with Arab tribes, he blew up 79 locations that the Central Powers – including the Ottoman Empire – could have used. Such was the focus of a winner.

Today's Arab tribes remember Lawrence, but they also see Britain differently to any other nation. We have characteristics that make us deeply distinctive. Too often, we forget that Britain's monarchy is a source of pride for the Gulf and other Arab monarchs. Prince Charles' warm relationship with Gulf monarchs gives Great Britain privileged status that no American, German, or French president can rival. It is because of Britain's special place and attraction that Sandhurst and our private schools have had more future Arab leaders in training for a century than any other institution. Our education system is still the envy of the Arab world; tens of thousands of Saudi students study in the English-speaking world. Our laws and liberties reflect the natural law tradition of moderate Islam, the spirit of the sharia in its higher objectives of preserving life, property, family, providing security and religious freedom. These are known as maqasid al-sharia.

The billions of pounds that have been invested in Britain by the sovereign wealth funds of every Gulf government, the popularity of Dubai as a premier British holiday location, the Emirates football stadium, Ascot, and much more point to a relationship that is deep and reciprocal. Where the Americans wobble and lose sight of the strategic objective, we in Britain must be the brains to American brawn.

We now have a once-in-a-century opportunity to shape the future of a global shift towards peace and co-existence. MBS has weakened the extra-legal religious police in his country, removed extremist clerics from many mosques, and allowed for musical concerts. Yes, he is an authoritarian reformer. Our conversations, therefore, with him in private should not be about the last skirmish, but the next reform: Where are his female advisors? When will school textbooks be revised? After religious extremism is uprooted, how can secular Saudis engage in a parliament within a constitutional monarchy? When do Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs who live and work in Saudi Arabia worship with their own, new religious institutions?

Lawrence of Arabia, few recall, was also the Arab affairs advisor to Sir Winston Churchill. Ardently pro-Jewish, both men ensued that Chaim Weizmann met with Arab leaders with a view to allowing this ancient and mistreated people a home in their ancient lands surrounding Jerusalem. MBS has been brave in recognising

Jewish claim to land in Israel. We in the West should help him make peace between the children of Abraham a reality. This helps remove the recruiting sergeant of abusing the Palestinian cause by the Labour left and the Islamist right.

## Widespread Unrest Poses a Real Danger to the Iranian Regime

By Alireza Nader

nypost.com

January 1, 2019

Washington can and should aid the protesters.

A year ago, Iranians poured into their streets to denounce -Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and call for an end to his brutal -regime. Protests have continued -unabated since, though these are smaller in number and less visible to foreign -media.

The Tehran regime's grip on power is no firmer now than it was then. Still entrenched and viciously clinging to life, the Islamic Republic is nevertheless more vulnerable than it has ever been since the 1979 revolution.

Today, unpaid factory workers, teachers, farmers and truck drivers are some of the most organized and motivated anti-regime forces. The southwestern city of Ahvaz experienced anti-regime labor protests last month. Truck drivers were also on nationwide strikes for much of 2018, blocking major roadways and access to gas stations over low pay and rising tolls.

Farmers in Isfahan, in central Iran, have turned their backs against regime clerics during Friday prayers and chanted: "Our back to the enemy, our faces to our nation." Another favorite slogan: "They say our enemy is America, when the real enemy is right here" — meaning the mullahs. Meanwhile, many Iranian women have been shedding the compulsory hijab in public, a gesture that was unthinkable even two years ago.

The sources of popular anger vary, from water shortages to economic collapse to frustration with social restrictions. Most important, recent years disabused Iranians of the illusion of "reform" peddled by so-called moderates like President Hassan Rouhani. The people have learned that such rhetoric only masks the country's environmental, economic and social devastation -under the mullahs.

The Islamic Republic's demise has been predicted many times, of course. Iran's theocracy has survived tough challenges before, from the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s to the massive Green uprising that followed 2009's fraudulent presidential "election." But today the -regime confronts a crisis without precedent, owing to the sheer breadth of social discontent.

Even insiders such as former President Mahmoud -Ahmadinejad believe that the -Islamic Republic may soon face a complete revolution.

## Syria is the wrong issue for a pro-Israel fight with Trump

By Evelyn Gordon

evelyncgordon.com

January 3, 2019

Like most pro-Israel commentators, I'm appalled by U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to

MBS needs the West, particularly Britain, to help win the war of ideas. By helping him triumph and reform toward modernisation, we save our country and civilisation too. Skirmishes and battles must not distract us from winning the long war.

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Senior cleric Ayatollah Abdollah Javadi-Amoli recently expressed fears of a popular revolt that "will push us" — that is, the clergy — "into the sea." Faezeh Hashemi, the "moderate" daughter of one of the regime's founders, has described the -Islamic Republic as a "failed" theocratic system.

Still, the Islamic Republic enjoys a core base of support among the population, sustained with ideological indoctrination and financial and political -patronage. Moreover, Khamenei, the supreme leader, still retains control over the fearsome security apparatus, including the Revolutionary Guards and the basij paramilitary forces. The people are outgunned, and while it is ultimately up to them to bring fundamental change to Iran, Washington has an important role to play.

Instead of seeking to tweak the Islamic Republic's behavior, the US should strongly and unequivocally support the Iranian people's right to self-determination. President Trump shouldn't engage the regime diplomatically, or lift sanctions, until the mullahs permit peaceful demonstrations and -respect the right to organize political parties that favor a free, secular and democratic Iran.

The US should also focus on combatting the regime's propaganda machine by creating new Persian-language media that -bypass the aging and ineffective Voice of America and Radio Farda, US-taxpayer-funded outlets that too often broadcast the regime's worldview to Iran. Private TV broadcasts, such as the enormously popular Manoto TV based in London, can be a powerful tool in strengthening US interests in Iran.

Likewise, America should provide moral and material assistance to domestic forces combatting the regime. Washington should pursue some of the same policies that proved successful in defeating Communism during the Cold War, such as clandestine aid to Solidarity in Poland. The Islamic Republic will never change for the better. The Iranian people are awake to this reality. Whatever the wisdom of Trump's recent Syria pullout, America and its interests in the region will never be safe until Khamenei's -regime is gone. Washington's best allies are the Iranians bravely fighting injustice every day.

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withdraw American forces from Syria. Nevertheless, this is the wrong issue for pro-Israel activists to pick a

fight over. Criticizing the decision on grounds unrelated to Israel—of which there are many—is fine. But to imply that U.S. troops should remain in Syria for Israel’s sake is to betray the fundamental tenet of the American-Israeli alliance: Israel will defend itself by itself; it will never ask America to put soldiers in harm’s way for its sake.

It’s worth underscoring just how unique this makes Israel among American allies. America has fought to defend Europe repeatedly. It fought for South Korea in the 1950s, South Vietnam in the 1960s, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in 1991. And there’s an understanding, often anchored in bilateral or multilateral treaties (such as NATO), that America would fight for many other allies if necessary, like Japan, Canada or Australia.

But with Israel, the agreement has always been that Israel would see to its own defense, while America would provide it with the means to do so. That arrangement suited both sides. For America, it was much less costly in terms of both lives and money than having to defend Israeli militarily (a point I explained in detail here). And for Israel, it satisfied a deeply ingrained lesson of Jewish history: Relying on others for protection always ends badly for the Jews.

In that sense, Trump was right, but only partly so, when he rejected claims that the withdrawal would hurt Israel by saying, “We give Israel \$4.5 billion a year. And they’re doing very well defending themselves.” Enabling Israel to defend itself is indeed why America gives it such generous aid (\$3.8 billion annually, plus \$700 million for missile defense in 2018). If Israel relied on American troops to defend it, that aid would have no justification. But money alone isn’t enough to enable Israel to defend itself. In fact, it’s far less important than two other critical needs.

The first is a reliable arms supplier—one not only willing to sell Israel top-quality weaponry in peacetime, but also to keep the supplies coming during wartime, when they’re most needed. America is irreplaceable in this regard, as Israel has learned through bitter experience. France, for instance, famously halted arms shipments to Israel during the 1967 Six-Day War. Britain has done so repeatedly, most recently by threatening an arms embargo in 2014 if hostilities in Gaza resumed. This, even more than the fact that most American aid must be spent in America, is why Israel buys little military equipment from either country.

The second is support in the diplomatic arena, where Israel is highly vulnerable. Every time Israel fights, it comes under tremendous international pressure to stop immediately before it can defeat or even damage the enemy. Moreover, it’s routinely threatened with international sanctions over issues ranging from spurious war-crimes’ allegations to the settlements. America’s diplomatic umbrella, especially but not exclusively at the United Nations, is thus critical both to buying Israel the time it needs to fight and to protecting it from sanctions.

This brings us to the second reason why a pro-Israel fight with Trump over Syria seems counterproductive. Though Israel benefited significantly from the American troop presence in Syria, its most pressing needs are diplomatic support in general and support for its ability to defend itself in particular. And on both, Trump remains a vast improvement over his predecessor.

Granted, Israel hasn’t fought any wars since he took office, so there’s no guarantee of how he would act. But there’s no reason to think that he wouldn’t provide the needed support, given his administration’s staunch defense of Israel at the United Nations to date.

In contrast, Israel did fight a war while Barack Obama was president, so it knows what it’s like to be without American support. During the 2014 Gaza war, Obama’s administration famously refused to resupply Israel with Hellfire missiles. It sought to pressure Israel into a cease-fire agreement that met all of Hamas’s demands and none of Israel’s. It issued an endless stream of condemnations of Israel during the fighting, rather than supporting Israel’s right to self-defense against the thousands of rockets Hamas fired at Israeli cities.

Then, in 2016, Obama also stripped Israel of America’s diplomatic protection. The U.N. Security Council resolution against the settlements, which he allowed to pass, laid the groundwork for international sanctions against Israel and even prosecution at the International Criminal Court.

And that’s without even mentioning the minor detail that it was Obama who abandoned Syria to Iran and Russia to begin with. Tehran financed its massive Syrian intervention with the billions of dollars it reaped from Obama’s flagship act of diplomacy, the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. And Moscow entered the Syrian war only after waiting more than three years to make sure that America wasn’t planning to get involved. By the time Trump took office, Russian-Iranian domination of Syria was a fait accompli to which America’s scant 2,000 troops could make little difference.

None of this justifies the Syria withdrawal. It’s a terrible idea, and not only, or even primarily, because Israel benefited from having American troops blocking Iran’s long-desired land route through Syria to Lebanon. It further empowers Russia, Turkey and Iran—none of which wish America (or Israel) well. It also may enable a resurgence of the Islamic State, just as America’s withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 did. Abandoning the Kurds to Turkey’s tender mercies after they have been America’s best foot soldiers against the Islamic State for years is not only a moral crime, but a strategic one, as it will undermine America’s ability to recruit local allies in the future. And America will save little in terms of either lives or money by ending this low-cost, low-casualty mission.

But from a pro-Israel perspective, none of this changes two basic facts. First, there are things Israel needs from Trump more than troops in Syria. And second,

asking America to keep soldiers anywhere for Israel's sake violates a sine qua non of both the Israeli ethos and the bilateral alliance—that Israel defends itself by itself.

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## **Too many challengers: Israel's opposition could defeat Binyamin Netanyahu—if they united**

**By The Economist**

**economist.com**

**January 3, 2019**

**But nobody wants to be number two.**

According to polls, most Israelis do not want Binyamin Netanyahu, their prime minister, to serve another term. Many are fed up with the corruption allegations that have been swirling around him for months. He may soon be indicted on charges of bribery and breach of trust. Yet Mr Netanyahu's Likud party is still on track to win the next election, which he has called for April 9th (seven months earlier than originally scheduled), in part to head off the charges.

Mr Netanyahu can boast of peace and prosperity on his watch, but if he remains prime minister it will be in large part because the opposition is hopelessly divided. Since the election was announced on December 24th, five new opposition parties have been formed. They join an already crowded field. The new party leaders include disaffected ministers, two former army commanders and a rabble-rousing activist. All speak of replacing Mr Netanyahu. Not one of them has a real shot.

Under Mr Netanyahu, Likud has never received more than a quarter of the national vote. Yet it has dominated Israeli politics with the help of smaller nationalist and religious parties. Moderates, meanwhile, spread their votes more evenly and widely. In this election they can choose between no fewer than six vaguely centrist parties, none of which gets more than 13% in the polls. Were they running as one they would probably gather 40% of the vote, overtaking Likud. But none of the party leaders is prepared to serve as number two.

That is the case even though the leaders seem to have few discernible differences over policy—or much of an agenda at all. They offer no new solutions to Israel's intractable conflict with the Palestinians. The most popular new party, Israel Resilience, is led by Benny Gantz (pictured), a decorated former general. He has so far

## **Belgium Bans Kosher Slaughter**

**By Jpost Editorial**

**jpost.com**

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**So much for Europe's commitment to human rights.**

Last week, a new law went into effect in Flanders, the northern region of Belgium, banning shechita, kosher slaughter. A similar law will go into effect in southern region of Wallonia in September, covering the entire country.

The law states that animals must be stunned before slaughter. Jewish law stipulates that meat can only be kosher if the animal was healthy before being slaughtered, and stunning constitutes an injury rendering the meat no longer kosher. The law also in effect bans on slaughter according to Islamic law, as well as the Hindu and Sikh methods of meat production.

Visit [suburbanorthodox.org](http://suburbanorthodox.org) for the most recent weekly issues. Click on Israel Action tab.

refused interview requests, saying his party's aim is "to strengthen the state of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state in the spirit of the Zionist vision". Other party leaders offer similar bromides on the need for unity and re-ordering national priorities.

The Labour Party has long dominated Israeli politics, espousing a socialist ideology. In recent years, though, it has tacked towards the centre and formed an alliance with Hatnuah, another centrist party, re-branding themselves the "Zionist Union". On January 1st the allies split. Labour, which has had a series of lacklustre leaders, has lost most of its support. It has not led a government since 2001 and now attracts under 10% of the vote, according to polls.

The other centrist parties are younger and built around ambitious leaders, such as Moshe Kahlon, the finance minister, who heads the Kulanu party, and Orly Levi-Abekasis, a three-term Knesset member, who leads the Geshet party. They hope to create their own power base. Many of Mr Netanyahu's opponents seem to be waiting, not for the election, but for the legal system to bring him down. In the coming months the attorney-general is expected to hold pre-trial hearings over whether to charge the prime minister.

Mr Netanyahu says he will not step down if indicted. An election victory would give him some political cover to stay on. But his opponents believe this is the beginning of the end of his time in office, which in July would surpass the record set by David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister. Some on the right spy an opportunity. On December 29th Naftali Bennett and Ayelet Shaked, the education and justice ministers, announced the formation of a new party, called the New Right, which will field religious and secular candidates. Mr Bennett, at least, thinks that Mr Netanyahu's job is up for grabs.

Antwerp, in Flanders, is home to Europe's largest Orthodox Jewish community, which will now have to import its meat from countries that have not yet banned shechita. Neighboring France, home to Europe's largest – but dwindling – Jewish population, will likely experience a boom in its kosher businesses.

The impact of the Belgian kosher ban will go far beyond its local Jewish communities. Swedish journalist Annika Hernroth-Rothstein took to social media last week to lament that she can no longer have meat shipped in from her usual source: "I'm looking for a new kosher butcher/supermarket that delivers to Sweden," she tweeted, calling herself "a Jew in Europe who

LITERALLY just wants to live a Jewish life, but Europe seems to have other plans.”

Many other Jews around Europe will be similarly impacted.

Many of the replies to Hernroth-Rothstein’s tweet were telling her to move to Israel. While that would be one way to get easy access to kosher meat, those responses are missing the point. All Jews are and should be welcome to live freely in Israel, but that does not give other countries a carte blanche to discriminate against their Jewish citizens. This Belgian ban on kosher slaughter is illiberal and oppressive, and a blatant impingement on the religious and human rights of that country’s minorities.

This law, like many others proposed and passed in Europe, was written on the basis of humane treatment of animals, but a generous dose of anti-Muslim sentiment helped steward it into the law books. The government in Belgium recently fell apart as a result of a dispute over its refugee policy, so issues related to minorities are a hot topic in Brussels and Antwerp. As often happens when xenophobia spreads on the Continent, even when it’s not originally meant to target Jews, they suffer the consequences.

Of course, bans on shechita have historically meant to target Jews as well. There is a long tradition of European antisemites using animal rights to ban kosher slaughter. In Switzerland, which uses a system of referendums to decide

### **Iran’s Quest for Nuclear Weapons Continues Apace** **By Farzin Nadimi**

[washingtoninstitute.org](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org)

#### **Testing missiles made for carrying nuclear warheads.**

On January 3, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warned Iran not to conduct any planned satellite launches using rockets that share commonalities with intercontinental ballistic missiles. The warning followed his December 1 revelation that Iran had test-fired a ballistic missile “designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons” to the entire Middle East and parts of Europe. Those words were carefully chosen—UN Security Council Resolution 2231 calls on Iran “not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches.” Yet the resolution does not expressly prohibit such activities, a point well taken by Iran.

The characteristics Pompeo referred to on December 1 match those of the Khoramshahr, a relatively new medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM) unveiled in September 2017 and test-fired on at least three occasions. Although known details of the missile are scarce, it is believed to be Iran’s first departure from the generic Scud-B design, and more similar to the North Korean BM-25/Hwasong-10 first delivered to Iran around 2005.

Iranian officials quickly dismissed Pompeo’s remarks and emphasized that their missile program is defensive and deterrent in nature, does not violate Resolution 2231, and will continue despite international objections. The commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Aerospace Force (IRGCASF), Brig. Gen. Amir Ali Hajizadeh, characterized the U.S. reaction as “anxious and

on individual policies, the first such vote was on banning shechita, which was prohibited federally in 1893. Norway banned slaughter without stunning in 1929, and Sweden followed in 1937. And, of course, Nazi Germany instituted such a ban, which spread to its Axis allies Italy and Hungary; all three were overturned. Today’s ban is being imposed despite the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms guaranteeing “the right to freedom... to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance,” which “shall be subject only to such limitations as... are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.”

There seems to be a contradiction between the guarantee of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Europe and the new bans on kosher slaughter.

In fact, the only way to understand the current situation is that, in banning shechita, these EU states are saying it is a reasonable interpretation of the law to consider protecting the age-old traditions and religious rights of Jews, Muslims and other minorities to be a lower national priority. These states claim to be taking a moral stand, when in fact, all they’ve done is the exact opposite, the immoral and undemocratic act of violating their citizens’ basic freedom of conscience.

**January 4, 2019**

selective,” claiming that Iran “conducts over forty to fifty missile tests a year.”

Evidence from various sources indicates that Hajizadeh’s claim could be an exaggeration, however. In a December 9 report, German newspaper Die Welt noted that Iran had test fired only seven MRBMs and three short-range missiles in 2018, according to “documents from Western intelligence sources.” Similarly, the Foundation for Defense of Democracies cataloged only four test launches in the first seven months of 2017. If these numbers are accurate, Iran is more likely to fire its missiles in offensive operations than in “defensive” test launches—last fall alone, it fired six of them against Kurdish groups in northern Iraq (September 28) and six more against Islamic State targets in Syria (October 1).

**Precision Vs. Payload** On December 5, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif argued that Iranian missiles “are only designed for a conventional role because they have precision strike capability,” echoing his claim in a New York Times op-ed a year earlier: “Nuclear weapons do not need to be precise—conventional warheads, however do.” Yet such claims do not hold water because there is ample precedent for high-precision, nuclear-capable ballistic missiles. For example, the Pershing II of the 1980s could deliver a reduced-yield nuclear warhead to targets with an accuracy of less than 50 meters.

Zarif’s “precision” claim also seems odd given the specifications of the test missile that spurred his remarks.

The Khoramshahr can reportedly carry a far heavier payload than would be required for a weapon whose purpose is pinpoint accuracy—its claimed 1,800 kg warhead would make it the largest in Iran’s arsenal.

One possibility is that this extra capacity is designed to carry multiple warheads. When Khoramshahr was first unveiled, Hajizadeh claimed that a single missile could hit “several targets.” If Iran has in fact successfully tested such a capability for the first time, it would be an alarming milestone, since multiple warheads have a better chance of defeating missile defenses.

The Khoramshahr’s large payload would also make the job of mating it with a first-generation nuclear warhead relatively easy, at least in theory. One rule of thumb among experts is that any missile capable of carrying a 500-1,000 kg warhead can be mounted with a nuclear device. Khoramshahr reportedly offers twice that capacity—a troubling figure given the fact that miniaturizing a warhead is arguably one of the most daunting tasks in nuclear weapons design.

Aside from its theoretical nuclear capability, Khoramshahr could also fill a distinct place in Iran’s missile doctrine. Assuming its claimed specifications are true—2,000 km range, 1,800 kg warhead—it can offer either a multi-warhead configuration with the potential capability of defeating missile defenses, a unitary conventional warhead to cause very significant damage over a wide area (without precision guidance), or the ability to defeat some hardened targets (with precision guidance).

**Threat To Europe** Iran has made clear that it has the potential to continue extending the reach of its ballistic missiles, raising questions about the 2,000 km range limit set by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and other officials in the presumed hope of assuaging Western fears and forestalling additional sanctions. During his remarks last month, Hajizadeh declared, “We can build longer-range missiles, 2,000 is no magic number for us. We face no technical or legal hurdles with regard to the range of our missiles.” This mindset has been in place for some time—in a November 2014 interview, for example, acting IRGCASAF commander Gen. Seyed Majid Mousavi admitted that Iran’s Space Research Center had developed satellite launch rockets “mainly to advance missile

## **Assad’s Victory and Hamas’s New Tactics Have Changed Israel’s Strategic Reality**

**By Maj. Gen. (res.) Gershon Hacohen**

**besacenter.org**

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**Under these circumstances, withdrawing from the West Bank would be more dangerous than ever.**

Major wars tend to produce clear and visible strategic turning points. But less dramatic events often generate no lesser shifts, albeit in a subtler and less detectable fashion. Such were the two major turning points in Israel’s security situation that took place in 2018.

The first relates to the growing threat to the northern front posed by the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis. The recovery of the Assad regime and the reassertion of its control over

technologies under the guise of a civilian space program, especially to circumvent the self-imposed 2,000 km limitation on range.”

Iran’s 2,000 km missiles may already pose a threat to the southeastern margins of Europe, while longer-range versions of the Khoramshahr could expand that threat to the entire continent (presumably at the expense of payload weight). On November 27, IRGC deputy commander Brig. Gen. Hossein Salami spoke of the “strategic logic” behind such range extensions, warning that “the Europeans will become a threat if they try to meddle in our missile affairs and do not recognize our defensive missile power. We will then increase the range of our missiles to reach Europe.” In fact, the liquid-fuel Khoramshahr may have been developed with the European theater in mind; according to Hajizadeh, Iran prefers solid-fuel missiles like the Sejil for the Israeli theater (perhaps due to their superior survivability).

**Upcoming Provocations?** Western countries should prepare for the possibility of more Iranian MRBM tests or the unveiling of new designs, especially if hardliners decide to muster a defiant stance during next month’s celebration of the Islamic Revolution’s fortieth anniversary. According to deputy defense minister and IRGC general Ghasem Taghizadeh, Iran is also expected to launch a satellite into orbit by February, a plan that Hajizadeh has alluded to as well. Although Tehran may view this option as less confrontational than a ballistic missile test, it would undoubtedly raise further international outcry against the missile program, as Secretary Pompeo made clear this week.

More broadly, the international community should not forget that the program remains a central pillar of Iran’s strategy for dominating the region. Although Tehran became less public about its missile advancements following the nuclear deal, there has been no substantive halt in the program’s progress. Most troubling, the latest test indicates that the IRGC is moving forward with the Khoramshahr, a ballistic missile design that may already have the capability of lifting a heavy payload to targets anywhere in the Middle East or southern Europe.

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most of the country has brought the Syrian army back to the Golan Heights, where it was joined by Iranian and Hezbollah forces, as well as by Tehran-backed Shiite militias. The situation was further complicated by the Russian military presence in Syria and the constraints it imposed on Israel’s operational freedom, especially after the September 2018 downing of the Russian plane (by Syrian air defense forces).

The second turning point was the Hamas-initiated months-long confrontation along the Gaza-Israel border,

in which the Islamist terror group reverted to calculated and well-executed brinksmanship tactics (including massive missile attacks on Israel's population centers) that tested the continued relevance of Israel's military superiority vis-à-vis the organization.

These turning points challenge the underlying assumptions of Israeli security thinking over past decades. Since the conclusion of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in 1979, the IDF has been geared towards a decisive victory on the northern front on the assumption that existing geopolitical circumstances would enable the concentration of effort in that direction. The Oslo process was similarly based on the belief that threats from the prospective Palestinian entity in the West Bank and Gaza would remain highly limited, enabling the IDF to continue focusing on the northern front.

It is here that the main significance of the recent Gaza events lies. For while the security threat that has evolved in the Strip is still secondary to that of the northern front, it has nevertheless cracked the Israeli conception regarding the use of force. Thus, for example, Hamas exploited Israel's overwhelming preoccupation with the northern front to escalate the situation to the brink of war while keenly recognizing the constraints that would prevent an Israeli decision in favor of a large-scale operation. In doing so, Hamas successfully changed the strategic equation with Israel in its favor.

This (temporary?) strategic shift becomes all the more relevant given the dogged insistence of most former members of Israel's military and security establishment on the need for complete IDF withdrawal from the West Bank as part of an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. In their view, the very act of separating Israelis from Palestinians and setting an internationally recognized border between them will bring about peace and stability. In the improbable situation in which the nascent Palestinian state will prove to be a security threat to Israel, they reason, the IDF will readily bring its overwhelming

## **In Attacking Birthright, J Street Drops Its Pro-Israel Pretensions**

**By David M. Weinberg**

[israelhayom.com](http://israelhayom.com)

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### **Throwing the baby out with the bathwater.**

When it was founded 11 years ago, J Street claimed to be a pro-Israel and pro-peace organization. That was taken to mean partnering with the mainstream Israeli political Left to build support in Washington for a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians. Or so we were led to believe.

Since then, alas, J Street has become something else altogether: an organization that spends almost all its time and money besmirching Israel, smearing the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and other leading American Jewish organizations, boosting U.S.-Iran relations and backing political candidates for whom promoting the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement is a badge of honor.

Its campus arm, J Street U, has become a primary vehicle for conveying the most poisonous messages against

superiority to bear and remove this security threat within days.

This assumption couldn't be further from the truth. Since the onset of the Oslo process in 1993, the balance of power between Israel and the Palestinians has substantially changed in the latter's favor, as starkly demonstrated by Hamas's above noted successes. No less important, the nature of warfare has undergone substantial changes in recent decades, notably the relocation of the fighting to the civilian urban space with the active participation of the local population, which makes conventional military operations far more difficult and complex. The operational difficulties faced by the Western armies in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, especially in densely populated, built-up areas, illustrate the callousness of ignoring the potential security-strategic threats attending total West Bank withdrawal. If it took the US-led coalition forces nine months of fighting to clear Mosul of ISIS forces, how realistic is it to expect the IDF to capture a heavily militarized Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza within days?

It is mindboggling how proponents of West Bank withdrawal so cavalierly ignore the likely threats attending this move. So strong is their fixation on the necessity of withdrawal to the pre-June 1967 lines that it has made them totally oblivious to realities on the ground.

Last summer's events in the Gaza Strip should cast serious doubt on the feasibility of complete Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, if only because the proximity of this area to Israel's main population centers and economic/strategic assets ensures its transformation into the main combat zone should it undergo a militarization process similar to that experienced by Gaza and Lebanon. The question is whether the IDF has an effective response to the advent of parallel major threats on several fronts.

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Israel to students and the sapping of support for Israel at American universities.

I hear firsthand more and more about J Street U's venomous campaigning and destructive activities – from young Israeli men and women who serve as Jewish Agency emissaries on campus, and Hillel and Orthodox Union professionals who work with students. Almost every truly pro-Israel activity they try to organize is opposed or disrupted by J Street U hatchet men and women.

About one year ago, J Street launched its "Stop Demolitions, Build Peace" campaign, designed to "challenge our communities to wake up to the omission and erasure of Palestinian perspectives and narratives, which create the environment that makes it easy to ignore demolitions, settlement expansion and occupation."

The younger J Streeters hosted teach-ins and sleep-ins, marched to Israeli embassies and called consulates, formed

coalitions with progressive campus organizations across America, and pressed congressmen to speak out critically against Israeli policy in Judea and Samaria (which, of course, many J Streeters call by its U.N. moniker, the "Occupied Palestinian Territories" or OPT).

Now J Street is on a second phase of its campaign – to undermine the Birthright program because it serves the "right-wing annexationist agenda."

Birthright is one of the American Jewish community's most important and successful initiatives of this generation; a lifeline in the difficult struggle to keep young American Jews Jewish and to give them some Zionist foundations.

But J Street is not happy with Birthright because it, and many other trips that bring some 50,000 students on tours of Israel, are major sources of "omission and erasure," i.e., the trips "omit Palestinian narratives in their programming and erase Palestinians and the occupation from our collective consciousness."

I'm quoting here verbatim from J Street campus propaganda: "Birthright completely ignores the voices and experiences of Palestinians living under occupation in the West Bank. These trips therefore perpetuate the attitudes and politics that help make demolitions and occupation possible." They might, God forbid, lead "our communities to feel no compulsion to speak out on behalf of Palestinian rights."

J Street claims it wants to reform Birthright content, but it hasn't approached Birthright with thoughtful, constructive educational ideas; it's just sought to sabotage the program. Dozens of campus professionals in the field tell me that J Street U activists work assiduously to undermine Birthright recruitment drives. They make life hell for potential participants.

So you see, "bringing home the realities of the occupation and mobilizing our communities to help bring it to an end" is the hostile hobgoblin that J Street has become.

In the name of "our communities" – a term that J Street loves using, denoting a hard-left orbit of Jews and non-Jews for whom haranguing Israel is the psychoneurotic driving force in their lives – J Streeters are prepared to throw the baby out with the bathwater and kill Birthright.

Crushing the "occupation" and promoting Palestinian independence-cum-dictatorship is more important than building basic Jewish identity and core Zionist sympathies. The truth is that in historical perspective we can't be too surprised that members of J Street's younger generation have ended up so distant from Israel. Their elders certainly

laid the groundwork over the past 20 years for such souring on Israel.

Have you ever heard of a place where "fundamentalists and gangs" in a "surging tide of extremism," "spit," "beat," "vandalize," "assault," "attack," "fight" and "brutally abuse" innocent people?

Are you familiar with a country (mention Afghanistan and Iran to hint at its nature) where "religious extremists" seek to "turn back the clock" (mention this three times for emphasis), notoriously practice "discrimination" (repeat four times), and otherwise seek to "impose," "intimidate," "demand," "repress," "coerce" and "dictate" (nine repetitions) their "intolerant" views on a beleaguered society?

Well, that was the language used by the New Israel Fund to describe Israel in a fundraising campaign launched in 1997 to "promote religious pluralism in Israel." Israel was further described as a country that "shows the world a repugnant face of Judaism" and where it is not safe to walk down the street without being "set upon by a gang of angry, enraged men."

All this hyperbolic, radical imagery – which wasn't true then and it's not accurate now either – had the long-term corrosive effect of painting Israel as a dark, extremist place. Think of Israel and think of cancer. Think of Israel and think of intolerance – and occupation. Who in their right mind wants to be associated with such a retrogressive, thuggish place?

It's no surprise, then, that not a few sons and daughters of the Jewish leaders of yesteryear are J Street U, Jewish Voice for Peace and If Not Now leaders today. They are next-generation poisoned fruit, carrying the demonization of Israel a step further.

J Street campaigns love to reference the "character" of Israel; Israel's "soul that is being corrupted," as it were. They're out to save Israel from rot, and they will fight on until Israelis realize just how good American-style religious pluralism really is or how wonderful full-fledged Palestinian statehood would be.

Of course, all Jews on either side of the Atlantic are entitled to their opinions and their political campaigns. But to spuriously malign Israel as medieval and militaristically criminal is beyond the pale. In painting the situation in such dire and apocalyptic terms and by attacking Birthright, hard-left activists are cutting away the limb – love for and identification with Israel – upon which all pro-Israel Jewish community activity must be based.

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## For Israelis, Secular and Religious Alike, Jewishness Is as Natural as Breathing

By Shmuel Rosner

[realeclearpolitics.com](http://realeclearpolitics.com)

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No worries about "Jewish continuity."

There is a new Jew, and she lives in Israel. The new Jew practices Judaism like no Judaism before it, and like no

Judaism anywhere else. It is a Judaism unique to a place and to a time. Israeli-Judaism – an amalgamation of tradition and nationality.

Ask Israelis what is a Jew, and a large majority of them (72 percent) will tell you that it is a person who celebrates Jewish holidays or serves in Israel's army (68 percent). Apply statistics to Jewish behaviors of Israelis – what they consider to be Jewish behaviors -- and almost all of them (97 percent) cite attending a Passover Seder and 60 percent say it is raising the national flag on Israel's Independence Day. Yes, for most of Israel's Jews, the flag – designed to resemble the Jewish prayer shawl -- is a component of Jewishness.

About a year and a half ago, under the auspices of The Jewish People Policy Institute, I teamed with Israel's leading pollster, Tel Aviv University Professor Camil Fuchs, to study Israeli Judaism. Last month we published a book based on our findings, whose subtitle is "A Portrait of a Cultural Revolution."

It is a revolution because of two things: the way Israel revolutionizes Judaism – and the way it revolutionizes its Jews.

The early Zionists strived to create a new Jew. But they argued about what this new Jew should be like. Some wanted to abandon Jewish traditions, others wanted to revive them, still others wanted to create new traditions. The Jews of Israel still debate these questions, but they are in possession of a tool much more powerful than verbal inquiry. Their Judaism is a product of a relatively new historical reality – the reality of a Jewish State.

You can look at this reality every December, when the Jews of the Western world exaggerate Hanukkah to mesh into the spirit of a Christian holiday season.

Hanukkah is a relatively marginal Jewish holiday, and Israeli Jews are well aware of it. Nevertheless, they practice it more intensively than diaspora Jews. Three-fourths of Israelis light candles every night of the eight-day holiday. Why would they practice a marginal holiday with such intensity? Not because they attribute great importance to it, and not because of a need to compete with the shiny holidays of others. In Israel, Hanukkah is king because Israel is the one place in the world that lives by the Jewish calendar. Hanukkah is celebrated there more intensively because schools teach about it, and then go on a break for the eight-day celebration. All children are on vacation and search for entertainment. All supermarkets carry the traditional foods of the holiday (91 percent of us eat the greasy delicacies). In Israel, one is surrounded by Hanukkah and hence must surrender to Hanukkah. No special effort is required.

Then comes Christmas -- in Israel, the holiday of a tiny minority. Then comes a New Year. Israeli Jews are aware of the new year. About a fifth of them even celebrate it in a party. Still, very few (only 6 percent, to be

exact) consider January 1 their "true" beginning of the year. Jews have Rosh Hashanah, sometime in September. This is when our new year begins.

Many of Israel's institutions (such as schools) base their schedule on the Gregorian calendar. Many Israelis remember the Gregorian date and struggle to keep with the Hebrew date. Nevertheless, our culture follows the Jewish calendar. We vacate on Sukkot and wear costumes in Purim (51 percent of adults!); we insist on having family dinners on Friday night (82 percent!) and cannot ignore Shavuot (a spring holiday) because TV commercials remind us to buy the cheese for the traditional dairy meal. The reality of the Jewish State allows us a new culture: Let's call it "no sweat Judaism."

Jews, who used to live as minorities, developed a culture that is highly demanding. There are special laws for food and drink, rules governing family life; there are a lot of prayers, many restrictions; daily, weekly and monthly tasks. Arguably, a less demanding culture could not maintain a small people in a vast and assimilationist world. The Jews who live outside of Israel – most of them in the United States – are familiar with the challenge posed by what some of them call "Jewish continuity." In short: The highly observant pass on their Judaism to the next generation; the less observant do so, too, but it's a struggle. When I lived in the United States and studied and wrote about American Judaism, I was fascinated by the great effort that Jews must invest to keep their tradition. I admired their effort. And still do.

But my current study taught me a lot about the benefit of living in a society in which Jewish continuity is a given. Of course, we have a lot to worry about in Israel – from security issues to our political culture to the never-ending conflict with our neighbors. Still, we are spared the worry about the future of Jewishness. When we asked Israeli Jews about their level of confidence that their children and grandchildren will be Jewish, the outcome was remarkable. The overwhelming majority – 86 percent -- are confident that their children will be Jewish. Nearly as many (79 percent) are confident that their grandchildren will be Jewish. What other option is there?

There is no reason for a Jewish Israeli not to remain Jewish – the obvious choice in a Jewish State. There is not much opportunity for a Jewish Israeli to have a spouse who isn't Jewish. There is no way for a Jew to escape Jewishness, to avoid it, to ignore it. Our survey included more than 300 questions, and what they demonstrate is the extent to which the Jewish tradition is a constant feature of our lives. We breathe Judaism. We breathe it effortlessly.

Israeli Jews are lazy Jews. In a good way.

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**If you see something, send something" –editor**