

Issue 973 Volume 23, Number 10 Parshas HaChodesh Vayakhel-Pekudei | Shabbos Mevarchim March 18, 2023**The China-Iran-Saudi Arabia Deal Might Be Less Than Meets the Eye****By Bobby Ghosh****bloomberg.com****March 11, 2023****Riyadh still has many reasons to fear Tehran.**

The image is calculated to impress. At a media event in Beijing, China's top diplomat mugs for the cameras, as the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council and Saudi Arabia's national security adviser shake hands. With Chinese encouragement, Iran and Saudi Arabia, the Middle East's oldest rivals, agreed to resume diplomatic relations.

The underlying message is calculated to surprise: China, long reluctant to involve itself in other people's problems, is finally prepared to take on the peacemaking responsibilities of a world power. Diving directly into the diplomatic deep end, Beijing is tackling one of the world's most intractable enmities.

Who could complain about any of this? Even the Biden administration, which is deeply suspicious of China's growing global ambitions, was compelled to welcome the announcement. "We support any effort to de-escalate tensions there," said White House spokesman John Kirby. "We think it's in our own interests."

But there is less to this tableau than meets the eye. On closer examination, the mediator's role is overstated, as is the substance of the agreement. The Iranians and Saudis had been working toward a détente for two years, aided by several intermediaries — notably Iraq and Oman. China entered the picture late, after the terms had been agreed. But it suits Tehran and Riyadh to allow Beijing to supervise the final crossing of t's and dotting of i's—and to hog the credit. After all, China is the world's biggest buyer of what Saudi Arabia and Iran have to sell.

The Chinese stamp of approval gives the deal more gravitas than an Iraqi imprimatur, say. An American sign-off was never on the cards, given the longstanding US-Iran animosities, but the Saudis kept the Biden administration appraised of progress throughout.

Progress toward what, exactly? The two sides have agreed to reopen embassies, the better to "clear up misunderstandings" (as Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's security council, put it) and cooperate over regional

Why Mizrahi Jews in Israel Tend to Vote the Way They Do**By Lyn Julius****fathomjournal.org****March / 2023****And the pitfalls of overstating the "shared culture" of Jews and Arabs in the Middle East.**

Can a shared love of 'Arab culture' be a force for moderation? More to the point, can it stop the 'Second Israel' from voting for the right-wing Benjamin Netanyahu and his 'reckless, anti-democratic' schemes? Sam Shube thinks so. His Hagar Association runs various initiatives bringing Arabs and Jews together, 'leaving politics behind'.

Shube correctly identifies Bibi's supporters as overwhelmingly of Mizrahi background — Jews from Arab and Muslim countries, who form over half the Israeli Jewish population. His solution: remind them of their

security in the Persian Gulf. The first of these is the most certain, ending the standoff that began with the 2016 torching of the Saudi embassy in Tehran by Iranian mobs.

But the presence of full-fledged ambassadors in Tehran and Riyadh did little to ameliorate antagonism in the past. As for regional security, the greatest threat to the Gulf is posed by Iran's attacks — mostly through proxies in Yemen and Iraq — on Saudi targets. The fox can hardly be trusted to cooperate in the security of the henhouse.

For the agreement to have any substance, the Iranians would have to call off their surrogates in Yemen, where Saudi Arabia has been bogged down in a conflict with the Tehran-backed Houthi militia. That the announcement in Beijing wasn't preceded, or even accompanied, by an openly stated Iranian promise to this effect is a measure of Riyadh's desperation to extract itself from the quagmire. It is conceivable that secret assurances have been given, but the Saudis will know not to trust the word of the party holding the catspaw.

The Saudis will also be keenly aware of the direct threat from Iran, whether through its nuclear ambitions (its uranium enrichment program is now within a whisker of weapons-grade output), its production of ballistic missiles of progressively longer range and its reported purchase of state-of-the-art Russian fighter jets. That is why Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom's de facto ruler, is now seeking a US security guarantee and access to more American weapons, in exchange for normalization of relations with Israel.

And then there are commercial considerations: Iran's sanctions-busting exports of crude to China eat into the Saudi share of that market.

Given these hard realities, the agreement announced in Beijing is unlikely to greatly alter the risks of conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia. But it does give China ownership of a problem nobody else wants. Good luck with that.

'shared culture' with the Arabs. Celebrating cultural roots that Arabs and Jews share can be the foundation of a truly democratic state.

But there are several fallacies with this line of thinking. My thoughts are informed in part by conversations held recently on a trip to Israel that took in Beersheva, Kiryat Malachi and Arad in the south.

Firstly, what 'shared culture' are we talking about? Despite Arabisation and Islamisation, Arabs themselves do not share a culture — the Arabs of Algeria and Morocco have very little in common with the Bedouins of Saudi Arabia or Jordan. Palestinian Arabic is not the same as

Iraqi Arabic. The Berbers of Libya and Kurds of Iraq do not even speak the same language as their Arab compatriots.

If Arab society has a common denominator, it is a 'shame-honour' culture. According to an Arab friend, Arabs tend to 'sweep under the carpet' inconvenient facts, lest they lose face. Jews, he has observed, are not afraid to expose embarrassing facts. They are driven by guilt, he says. It is a very different way of thinking.

When Arab countries had Jewish communities, Jews interacted with Arabs in business and trade, but each community led siloed lives: Intermarriage was rare. Jews spoke their own dialects of Arabic and had their own, self-contained, rich religious culture.

Secondly, the culture of the Jews of Middle East and North Africa was not monolithically Arab. It is true that Jews and Arabs might share a love for the songs of Um Kalthum or Farid al-Atrash. Egyptian singers and films were very popular all over the Arab world in the 1930s and 1940s. But Jews also flocked to the cinema to see the latest American films. Many Jews living in Arab countries were influenced by Western culture, educated in French-speaking schools, bore European names, and many had a marked preference for Edith Piaf over Um Kalthum. No one took away pure Mizrahi-Arab culture from the Jews of Arab countries because many had lost it before they came to Israel.

It is true that Mizrahi-Arab music was sidelined by the Ashkenazi-dominated establishment in the 1950s and 1960s. (So was Yiddish culture.) But it is no longer true, and has not been true for decades. As early as the 1970s, Yemenite singers like Ofra Haza and Zohar Argov were dominant cultural figures. Today, it is fair to say that Mizrahim have won the cultural wars in Israel when it comes to music and food. And the Netflix sensation *Fauda* has put Arabic-speaking Jews on the map.

Thirdly, Mizrahi Jews are not monolithic. Iranian, Turkish and Afghan Jews do not come from Arab countries and do not speak Arabic. Moreover, among Jews from Arab countries, one should distinguish, on the one hand, between descendants of the North African mercantile elite and the polyglot and highly-educated Egyptian and Iraqi Jews (who resettled mostly in central Israel), and on the other, Jews from the Atlas mountains, for instance, who were sent to populate development towns on Israel's borders.

Mizrahim did indeed suffer from discrimination from institutions fashioned in their own image by the Ashkenazi founders of the state. But discrimination became more a function of class than ethnicity. Poverty and deprivation mainly affected the Moroccan working class of the periphery. They might well have been sent to learn metalwork in trade schools. The instigators of the Wadi Salib riots and the Black Panthers of the 1970s were mostly slum-dwelling Moroccan Jews. This group was handicapped by poverty, lack of education, and lack of

leadership: the Moroccan-Jewish elite had chosen to move to France or Canada.

According to recent statistics, economic gaps between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim have narrowed. The divide is greater between secular and religious. Mizrahim are not an oppressed minority: they have held every ministerial office except Prime Minister and there have been several Mizrahi IDF Chiefs of Staff.

But Mizrahim have been less successful in two areas – media and academia. These are the last redoubts of Ashkenazi supremacy. If there is systemic bias, it is in the 'Eurocentric' curriculum taught in schools which neglects the roots and history of Israelis from the Middle East and North Africa. All schoolchildren learn about the Kishinev pogrom of 1903, while few have heard of the 1941 Farhud in Iraq. This is a glaring hole in education which desperately needs to be filled.

Mizrahi voting patterns cannot convincingly be explained as a reaction to discrimination by the Ashkenazi establishment. Integration into Israel was not conditional on rejection of the 'Levantine' component of their identity. Indeed, it is undeniable that Israel has since become much more Middle Eastern. Relieved to have fled the Arab world, many Mizrahim hebraised their names by choice (as did Ashkenazim – for instance, one David Ben-Gurion, born David Green). To claim that Mizrahim 'internalised a hostility towards anything Arab because it is hardwired into the system, a system built by the Zionist left itself' is to deprive Mizrahim (and Arabs) of agency, as if the conflict was an invention of the Labour-dominated establishment.

Mizrahi mistrust of Arabs, or what Shube calls 'anti-Arab racism', is real and not the result of Ashkenazi gaslighting. It is borne of bitter experience – a hostility Mizrahim brought with them from Muslim countries. This is the elephant in the room, ignored or downplayed by the Ashkenazi left: the subliminal memory of Arab and Muslim persecution experienced by parents and grandparents – violent riots, arrests, torture, even executions in the recent past, coupled with the atavistic fears of a vulnerable and servile minority at the mercy of an unpredictable majority. Mizrahim view the Palestinian jihad against the Jews of Israel as just the latest chapter in a long story of Arab and Muslim antisemitism.

And here is another fallacy about 'shared culture.' it will not save you from missiles, or a mob which wants you dead, or a government hellbent on scapegoating your people. A 'shared culture' did not save the 'Arabised' Jews of Iraq, any more than acculturation saved the German Jews from the Nazis.

There is a place for joint Arab-Jewish projects – but culture is no substitute for politics. The Mizrahi who danced in the aisles to Um Kalthum can simultaneously hold anti-Arab political opinions.

Ultimately, politics, not culture, dictates voter behaviour. The 66 per cent of voters who backed Likud in

Beersheva fear a breakdown of law and order in the south. The Bedouins are becoming increasingly radicalised. They no longer serve in great numbers in the IDF. They are marrying women from Gaza. The rape of a six-year old Jewish girl by a Bedouin who had broken into her home had sent shock waves through voters. At least one man we spoke to was applying for a private gun licence – because he did not feel safe in his Negev kibbutz. Alarmed at the unprecedented outbreak of riots during the May 2021 Gaza war, Jewish residents in mixed cities voted for Likud

Backgrounder: 5 ‘New’ Terror Groups Threatening West Bank Intifada

By Akiva Van Koningsveld

honestreporting.com

March 15, 2023

In justice reform controversy, Israel's Left is winning the battle of the narrative.

Violence in Israel and the West Bank has once again spiked as Palestinian terror groups attempt to propel the region into a third intifada.

Terrorism against the Jewish state continues to evolve, with genocidal groups like Islamic Jihad and Hamas making common cause to attract young Palestinians. The emergence of new terror militias that are centered around territory rather than political affiliation, like the Lions’ Den and the Jenin Battalion, increasingly poses a threat to Israeli security forces.

Here are five new anti-Israel terror groups:

1. Lions’ Den (Nablus) Founded: August 2022

Links to: Fatah’s Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, Islamic Jihad, Hamas, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine

Background:

Perhaps the most infamous “new” terror organization plaguing Israel and the West Bank, Nablus-based Lions’ Den (“Areen al-Usood”) publicly announced its existence in August 2022 following the death of co-founder Mohammed al-Azizi a month earlier. Azizi reportedly also served as an operative in Fatah’s Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades.

Its members, estimated at around 10-50 gunmen as of March 2023, moreover include Palestinians affiliated with Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Within months of its founding, the Lions’ Den gained notoriety as it launched a wave of attacks against both Israeli soldiers and civilians, including a shooting in October 2022 in which IDF Staff Sergeant Ido Baruch was murdered.

According to Israeli intelligence assessments, Iran-backed Hamas initially provided the Lions’ Den with weapons and ammunition worth \$1 million. In a voice note released in August 2022, founding member Ibrahim al-Nabulsi thanked Hamas for its support.

The Lions’ Den became popular among Palestinian youth due to its prominent presence on social media, including TikTok and Telegram. In February 2023, thousands of Palestinians joined a march in support of the Lions’ Den, with polls indicating that over 70% of the public backs the group.

in their droves.

If tax drivers are a barometer of the national mood, those I spoke to (before the controversy over judicial reform broke) – including one Druze – expressed the wish for a strong man to lead the country, a man who would stand up to terrorism and restore their sense of security. That man is Bibi. On several occasions I heard the sentiment – for once a shared Arab-Jewish value – ‘Arabs do not respect weakness.’ Singing Um Kalthum together will not bring greater security, sadly.

While the Western-backed Palestinian Authority (PA) claims it asked the Lions’ Den to lay down its weapons in return for immunity from prosecution, the PA has taken little concrete action. In some cases, senior PA officials have even praised the terrorist organization, necessitating Israeli raids on Nablus.

Attacks:

- The terror murder of IDF Staff-Sgt. Ido Baruch in an October 11, 2022 attack near Shavei Shomron in the West Bank.
- On September 9, 2022, Israeli security forces thwarted a large-scale attack in Tel Aviv, arresting a Lions’ Den operative carrying a rifle, explosives, and the terror group’s flag.
- In two separate West Bank shootings on October 2, 2022, the Lions’ Den injured an Israeli taxi driver and an IDF soldier.
- The organization has taken credit for indiscriminate gunfire directed at the Jewish community of Har Bracha, located south of Nablus.
- The Lions’ Den is also believed to have been responsible for placing a bomb at the Kedumim gas station in the fall of that year.

2. Jenin Battalion (Jenin) Founded: May 2021

Links to: Islamic Jihad, Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, Hamas
Background:

The Jenin Battalion was founded after the Hamas-was initially set up as an Islamic Jihad chapter in Jenin’s refugee camp, terrorists from other groups, mainly the Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades and Hamas, soon joined.

The Battalion comprises around 150 terrorists (December 2022) organized into different cells. No command hierarchy exists, and every cell and gunman can operate independently. Islamic Jihad reportedly pays teenagers in Jenin \$300 for every Israeli soldier they shoot and \$100 if attacks do not result in injuries to the troops.

The Jenin Battalion allegedly receives millions of shekels in funding from legacy terror groups like Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard

Corps, allowing it to purchase weapons, ammunition, and surveillance cameras used to monitor IDF activity.

In November 2022, the Jenin Battalion made headlines by kidnapping Tiran Fero, an Israeli-Druze teenager who was critically injured in a car crash near Jenin. According to Fero's family, terrorists murdered him by disconnecting life support equipment and subsequently snatched his body. The remains were eventually returned to the Jewish state.

Jerusalem has also charged the Jenin Battalion with killing Noam Raz, a veteran of the elite Yamam police unit, during a May 15, 2022, counterterrorism operation.

In various statements, the Battalion has stressed the connection between Jenin and the Gaza Strip, warning that if Israel "crosses the line" in the West Bank, there would be a terrorist response from the Palestinian coastal enclave.

Attacks:

- After Israeli-Druze teenager Tiran Fero was critically injured in a car accident near Jenin on November 22, 2022, Jenin Battalion terrorists stormed Fero's hospital room, disconnected him from life support, and seized his body, making demands of Israel in exchange for it.
- During a May 15, 2022 arrest raid, the Jenin Battalion allegedly shot and killed Noam Raz, an officer in the Yamam counterterror unit.
- On March 7, 2023, Jenin Battalion operatives targeted Israeli forces seeking to arrest a wanted Hamas terrorist with gunfire and explosives, leaving three Israeli counterterror officers in fair-to-serious condition.
- On multiple occasions, the group has claimed to have opened fire at the West Bank community of Shaked and Meirav, a kibbutz in northern Israel.

3. Balata Brigade (Balata) Founded: October 2021

Links to: Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades

Background:

Following Islamic Jihad's success in instigating deadly violence in Jenin, the Balata Brigade was founded by members of Fatah's Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades in the Balata refugee camp outside Nablus.

Analysts have noted that the group currently shows "some signs" of organization, naming Musab Awais and Mahdi Hashash as recognized operatives of the Balata Brigade. In a December 17, 2022 interview with the Jerusalem Post, a member said the group counts "dozens" of gunmen, including many children.

On November 8, 2022, the organization issued a missive saying it would "confront" a coordinated visit by Israeli worshippers to Joseph's Tomb, a Jewish holy site under Palestinian control. Hours later, the Balata Brigade launched an all-out assault on the complex with gunfire and explosive devices, leaving a 15-year-old terrorist dead after an IED exploded in his hand.

Attacks:

- In November 2022, terrorists ambushed Jewish worshippers visiting Joseph's Tomb in Nablus, leaving one Balata Brigade operative dead after an IED exploded prematurely.
- Balata Brigade leader Musab Awais shot at an Israeli counterterror unit on February 22, 2023, before being neutralized.

4. Jaba' Battalion (Jaba') Founded: September 2022

Links to: Islamic Jihad, Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades

Background:

Jaba', a Palestinian village located some eight kilometers (five miles) southwest of Jenin, is set to become the latest battleground between Palestinian terrorists and Israeli security forces.

According to unconfirmed sources, the Jaba' Battalion is made up of approximately 40-50 terrorists from Islamic Jihad and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, with the former terror group financing the purchase of assault weapons.

Although little is known about the Jaba' Battalion, Israeli intelligence suggests that the group is responsible for a December 2022 shooting attack that targeted an Israeli civilian bus.

Attacks:

- On December 18, 2022, suspected Jaba' Battalion gunmen fired at least seven bullets at a bus carrying a group of civilians, including Israeli parliamentarian Limor Son Har-Melech.
- The Jaba' Battalion reportedly took responsibility for a drive-by shooting at an army checkpoint near Homesh.
- During an IDF arrest raid in Jaba' on March 9, 2023, the organization claimed to have shot down an Israeli surveillance drone over the village.

5. Tulkarm Battalion-Rapid Response (Tulkarem)

Founded: February 2023. Links to: Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, Islamic Jihad

Background:

The latest terror formation to emerge in the West Bank, the Tulkarm Battalion-Rapid Response, was named after slain Fatah terrorist Raed al-Karmi. According to residents of Tulkarm, located near the security barrier with Israel, Karmi went by the nom de guerre "Rapid Responder" due to his quick and deadly "retaliations" against Israeli forces.

The Fatah commander was involved in the murder of at least 10 Israelis during the Second Intifada (2000-2005), almost all innocent civilians.

Unnamed sources inside the newly-formed Battalion told Arab media that the formation of the new organization in February 2023 completed the restoration

of the “Triangle of Terror”, Jenin-Nablus-Tulkarm, which existed during the British Mandate and the early 2000s.

The group, which reportedly consists of a handful of gunmen from Fatah and Islamic Jihad, has carried out several attacks in the first weeks of its existence, including on the civilian community of Bat Hefer, a town bordering Israel and the West Bank.

Unlike Jenin and Nablus, Tulkarm has been relatively quiet in recent months, and Palestinian Authority security forces have also taken swift action against the Rapid Response group in accordance with Ramallah’s legal obligations under the Oslo Accords. In response, the organization has issued thinly-veiled threats to the PA

police.

Attacks:

- In March 2023, the Tulkarm Battalion-Rapid Response “confronted” IDF forces operating in Tulkarm, hitting an Israeli military vehicle using gunfire and explosives.
- The organization attacked West Bank security checkpoints on at least five occasions in the first two months of 2023.
- The Tulkarm Battalion has furthermore targeted Israeli civilian communities, including Avnei Hefetz and Bat Hefer.

Iran’s Theocracy Has Bred Secularization

By Shay Khatiri

providencemag.com

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Those in the West seeking religious revival shouldn’t look to the state.

There’s a new phenomenon in Iran: young men and women posting videos of themselves flipping the turbans off clerics’ heads. Their parents and grandparents, too old to do it themselves, proudly share these videos in person and on social media. In similar fashion, a few years ago an audio clip went viral in Iran: a father recorded his son, maybe not even a teenager, asking to go to mosque. The father wouldn’t let him, responding “go drink alcohol instead.” A nation that wished for the integration of mosque and state four decades ago got its wish and has come to hate it.

Iran is not an Islamic society anymore. Octogenarians who performed their religious duties for decades are embracing atheism, and Islam is the fastest-shrinking religion. Underground churches are instead popping up, mostly due to the attraction of “the West” and anything associated with it. People are calling themselves Zoroastrian, not because they believe in it but to disassociate themselves from Islam and instead embrace the one Persian religion. It’s less an expression of religiosity as much as an embrace of national heritage. But, according to the only public opinion survey available, nones—atheists, agnostics, spiritual, and irreligious—now form a plurality at 44 percent. Shi’ites, once the predominant majority, stand at 32 percent. Mosques are the emptiest since modern Iran embraced political Islam. So, the Iranian national character has ceased to be Islamic.

This turn against religion isn’t merely personal, but also political. Two in three Iranians reject religion as a basis for law in any form. But perhaps most telling is Iranians’ attitudes toward political figures, the most popular of whom today is Reza Shah, founder of the Pahlavi dynasty, who brought enormous progress to Iran while also brutally cracking down on the clergy—Iranians believe with good reason, that, in this case, correlation is causation. Once condemned for banning the hijab in public, he is now the most celebrated Iranian since Cyrus

the Great. While the 1979 revolutionaries were grieved by Reza Shah’s assault on public Islam, the 2022 revolutionaries chant: “Reza Shah, may your soul be happy!”

The reaction against Islam has also turned Iranians away from what American conservatives call family values. The fertility rate is 1.7, below replacement. Fewer people are getting married each day. Instead of traditional religion, the growing nihilism among younger Iranians has made pagan ideals popular. Just for a couple of examples, orgiastic sex parties are popular, and the public attitude toward out-of-wedlock birth is in transition from openness to celebration, both expressions of “the Western openness” of Iranian minds.

In sum, trends American conservatives worry about as signs of a declining civilization are being embraced by increasingly secular Iran as a demonstration of their “open-mindedness” against “rotten” religious mentality. The logic is as follows: whatever Islam stands for is bad, and so the opposite must be good. The integration of Islam and government has meant that Iranians associate the religion with totalitarianism. They don’t just see Islam in its political form as problematic, but Islam in itself.

The Roman Catholic integralist movement in the United States must be careful about what it seeks. Is it sheer power or a religious revival? If the latter, particularly given that a leading member of this movement, Sohrab Ahmari, is a fellow émigré from Iran, the integralists would be wise to consider the Iranian nation as a cautionary tale.

The integralists are correct to say that religion is an important ingredient for a well-functioning society. Indeed, many of America’s contemporary problems are partially the result of the decline in religious practice. The hope for religious revival is a noble one, but using the heavy hand of the state is the best way to accelerate, not reverse, current trends toward secularism. In Iran, religion became the ideology of a failing and oppressive state. Therefore, Iranians want to punish the mosque because it is a symbol of tyranny.

The late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks articulated why politics and religion cannot be integrated: in politics, compromise is a necessity, while in religion it's a sin. The integration of politics and religion in Iran has led to absolutism in government and compromises in the mosque, making the former tyrannical and the latter corrupt and hypocritical, ultimately making both unpopular and unjust. Religious people believe that their religion is incorruptible because it is divine, yet everyone can agree that the clergy are not because they are men and flawed. This tale is hardly exclusive to Iran or Islam; indeed, little differentiates it from the fall of L'Ancien Régime and the rise of laïcité in France.

Some degree of interaction between religion and politics is not only inevitable but also desirable. Every political question is inherently an ethical one. Therefore, the formation of a moral citizenry, most commonly done

Orthodox pitcher Jacob Steinmetz strikes out 3 Big Leaguers in World Baseball Classic performance.

By Jacob Gurvis

jta.org

March 14, 2023

The final wasn't pretty for Israel, but it almost didn't matter. This night belonged to Jacob Steinmetz.

The 19-year-old Woodmere, New York, native and the first Orthodox Jew to be drafted into Major League Baseball, Steinmetz was the starting pitcher for Team Israel against the Dominican Republic Tuesday in a 10-0 loss in the World Baseball Classic.

The Dominican lineup features big league superstars including Juan Soto, Manny Machado, Rafael Devers and others. Steinmetz entered the game with only scant playing time in the minor leagues. He became the fourth-youngest player to start a WBC game.

You wouldn't know it. Steinmetz struck out three batters — Machado, a six-time All-Star; two-time All-Star Gary Sánchez; and Jeremy Peña, the 2022 World Series most valuable player. He gave up two hits and one run in an inning and two-thirds while facing the Dominicans' entire lineup.

Steinmetz's performance was on par with that of a previously unsigned pitcher, Duque Hebert of Nicaragua, who nabbed headlines on Monday when he struck out three Dominican Republic players, including Soto and Devers — then immediately landed a contract with the Detroit Tigers. Steinmetz already has a contract with the Arizona Diamondbacks organization and plays in the Arizona Complex League.

"It was awesome," Steinmetz said after the game. "Coming out here in front of a sold-out stadium, with all the Dominican fans and the Israel fans, was something that I'll never forget."

Steinmetz said he felt nerves while warming up and coming out to the field. But once he stepped onto the mound, "it's just a regular baseball game."

Steinmetz stands out on Team Israel as well as in Major League Baseball as the only Orthodox player. Other players have credited the team for strengthening their

through religion, is a necessary feature of a functioning democracy. But, as Greek philosophers taught us, moderation is a virtue. Too much religion in politics becomes repulsive and leads to a society that blames religion for the shortcomings of the state and adopts nihilism to punish the clergy.

For 22 years, I grew up in a place where religion was corrosive; where stupidity and religion, rotten minds and piety, had a direct relationship. It took almost a decade of observing religious practice in the United States to realize that religion is not intrinsically malformative, and that piety and enlightenment can coexist. Even so, though I have changed my position and become pro-religiosity, the scars of those 22 years have made me irredeemably irreligious. I don't wish this curse upon my fellow Americans and will never understand why the integralists seem to.

connection to their Jewish identities. Steinmetz, by contrast, is the son of Yeshiva University's men's basketball coach, graduated from Jewish day school on Long Island and has made provisions in his professional play so that he can observe Shabbat, which traditionally includes refraining from driving.

Steinmetz's performance ignited Jewish baseball Twitter, with fans marveling at the opportunity to watch the Orthodox prospect on national television. The Israel Baseball Twitter account churned out post after post about the young pitcher.

"It was just unbelievably surreal to watch a kid from our community pitching to those caliber of players on such a big stage," said Simmy Cohen, an Orthodox sports fan from New Jersey. "I think a lot of the fans were more nervous than he was. But he kept his composure and showed excellent stuff. I was extremely impressed."

Steinmetz said the support means a lot to him. "Just seeing all that is awesome, knowing there will always be people behind me," he said.

Team Israel manager Ian Kinsler said the start was an important confidence booster for Steinmetz.

"You saw the talent that he has tonight," Kinsler said. "It's a good experience for him, the loudest environment he's ever going to pitch in."

Tuesday was otherwise a forgettable night for Israel. Held to only one hit a day after being no-hit, Israel lost in seven innings in a second consecutive game ended early by the WBC mercy rule. Israeli batters struck out 10 times.

Israel will face Venezuela tomorrow at 12 p.m. ET in its final WBC game, with Robert Stock starting.

With Nicaragua's loss earlier on Tuesday, Israel will officially finish above last place in Pool D, meaning it won't advance in this year's tournament but will automatically qualify for the 2026 WBC.

"That's big for the organization," Kinsler said.