

## Chuck Schumer's Indefensible Attack on the Israeli Government

By Elliott Abrams

cfr.org

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**The senator doesn't understand what Israelis want.**

What is a colony? The dictionary definition is "an area over which a foreign nation or state extends or maintains control."

Today Sen. Chuck Schumer tried to turn the State of Israel into one—an American colony.

In a Senate speech he demanded new elections in Israel and said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is an "obstacle to peace." Schumer also decided that "The Netanyahu coalition no longer fits the needs of Israel after Oct. 7." Schumer concluded that "The world has changed - radically - since then, and the Israeli people are being stifled right now by a governing vision that is stuck in the past."

Israeli voters, then, do not have the right to decide when to have elections and whom to choose as prime minister. That is the right, apparently, of politicians in Washington. Vice President Harris said recently that "It's important for us to distinguish or at least not conflate the Israeli government with the Israeli people." Schumer's rant is more of the same: an attack on a democratically elected government, unprecedented and indefensible especially in the middle of a war.

Schumer seems deeply confused about what Israelis want. Prime Minister Netanyahu is very unpopular and may well lose the next election—or be tossed out sooner if

he loses his majority in the Knesset. But his unpopularity is tied to accusations of corruption and last year's judicial reform battle, not to "peace." In fact the Israeli populace supports the actions of the current war cabinet. As the Israeli journalist Amit Segal write in the Wall Street Journal on March 13,

Yes, there is a significant disparity between Israel's leadership and its citizens—but it's the opposite of what people in Washington assume. The Israeli public is far more "right-wing" than the policies of its government. While Mr. Netanyahu has previously voiced support for a Palestinian state, a February survey conducted by Midgam for Channel 12 News found that 63% of the Israeli public strongly opposes such a state under any circumstances. While the cabinet implicitly agreed that a renewed Palestinian Authority would control Gaza, 73% of those who expressed an opinion in the survey opposed it.

Israelis are notoriously outspoken and have a vibrant democracy. In the middle of a war the very last thing they need is for a Democratic Party politician to elevate his own party's electoral needs over Israeli national security and over Israeli democracy. This speech, coming after the Vice President's, appears to signal a continuing campaign against Netanyahu. It's a shameful and unprecedented way to treat an ally, and an unconscionable interference in the internal politics of another democracy.

[Ed. Note: The following message was delivered to the OU email list on March 15]

## The Guardian Slumbers: Responding to Senator Schumer

By Rabbi Moshe Hauer

ou.org

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**The senate leader's epic reversal.**

Leader Schumer's speech to the Senate yesterday, Thursday, March 14th, was profoundly disappointing and concerning. While Leader Schumer claimed to speak on behalf of a silent majority of Jewish Americans, he did not speak for a great many of us.

Over many years, Senator Schumer has been a critical partner for the Orthodox Union in many of our efforts on behalf of our community and the people of Israel. We appreciate this.

Earlier in this crisis, on November 29, 2023, the Senator gave a speech that we encouraged "every Jew and every American" to "read and absorb," describing it as epic, thorough, thoughtful, educational, moving, and personal, but above all "plainly and simply a Jewish speech." This week's speech was also epic, but in all the wrong ways.

His call for elections to replace Israel's elected leaders and his threats of intervention should they not be replaced

were – in the words of Minister Benny Gantz, PM Netanyahu's leading rival – "counter-productive and unacceptable." We can only imagine Leader Schumer's reaction were PM Netanyahu to call upon the US Senate to replace its leadership for clearly echoing the talking points, proposals, and threats of Senators Van Hollen, Sanders, and others who – unlike Senator Schumer – focus virtually all their efforts on criticizing Israel.

At a time of great danger to Jews in Israel, the United States, and the world, the Senator who consistently invokes his role and responsibility as Shomer Yisrael – a guardian of the People of Israel – accused Israel of attitudes and behaviors that give ammunition and fuel to the campaigns of our enemies in international forums, his party in Congress, and the streets of New York.

In a speech that derided those who insanely do the same thing over and over and expect a different result and who have a governing vision that is stuck in the past, the Senator advocated for immediate progress towards the two

state solution, a step that the vast majority of Israelis – including 99 of the 120 members of Israel's Knesset – have roundly rejected as insanely stuck in the past, in the delusional and widely discredited worldview of October 6th. Israelis know that there is no responsible way to consider advancing Palestinian statehood absent a clear commitment on the part of the Palestinian leadership and people to deradicalize, disavow terror and violence, and educate their children and society to recognize the Jewish state and seek a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The speech was neither thorough nor thoughtful as, while expressing much sympathy for the plight of Israeli victims, it faithfully repeated the biased critiques and caricatures of Israel and its government's harshest critics. It cast opponents of immediate progress towards two states – the vast majority of Israelis and their leaders – as bigoted, while claiming without basis and contrary to every public opinion poll that the vast majority of Palestinians innocently crave peace with Israel. And while there are constant references to Israel's extremists, the Palestinian Authority that pays to slay are not murderous terrorists; they merely “incite instability through the martyr payment system.”

This is not the speech of a Shomer Yisrael.

Jews treat each other as family.

We reject Secretary Blinken's formulation that Israel's “first priority” should be the protection of innocent Gazans. Every nation is morally bound to prioritize the protection of its own people. Israel is duty-bound to defend and protect its citizens by irreversibly destroying and dismantling Hamas and bringing the hostages home. Both its values and strategic considerations move Israel to do everything it can to protect and to minimize the harm to Gazan civilians, innocent or not, while not compromising on its “first priority” to protect its people.

## The west's abandonment of the Jews

By Melanie Phillips

**Human rights culture has mainstreamed Hamas lies.**

With every day that passes, it becomes ever clearer that western civilisation is no longer civilised.

Israel's war of defence against a genocidal enemy is an inflection point in the seismic battle between civilisation and barbarism. The west is failing that test.

This was illustrated at the Oscars. Numerous Hollywood stars sported red pins supposedly backing a ceasefire in Gaza. The pin depicts the palm of an orangey-red hand on a red background with a black heart in the middle.

For some Israel supporters, this image channelled the infamous picture taken in 2000, when a Palestinian terrorist involved in the savage lynching of two Israeli soldiers in Ramallah triumphantly displayed his two bloody palms to the frenzied mob.

The group that distributed the pin, Artists4Ceasefire, claims that the hand image “conveys the beautiful community of people from all backgrounds that have

Jews humbly and respectfully follow our sages’

admonition that we not judge our fellow until we stand in their place. We recognize that we American Jews are not more principled than the Israelis; we are just in a safer place. The peaceful future that we dream of must take a back seat to the nightmares of our Israeli brethren.

Jews stand up for each other. Yes, we offer each other constructive criticisms, argue with each other vigorously over the correct path forward, and refuse to defend the indefensible even within the family. But when Israel is under attack from so many fronts, we are both morally and viscerally committed to standing up for them. West Point military historians declare that the Israeli army has done more to prevent civilian deaths than any army in history, while the highest-ranking Jewish elected official in American history seems to be embarrassed by them. To us, that is not the Jewish way.

Israel is a state that was founded and continues to operate based on the highest principles of morality. We admire Israel's continued commitment to its values despite the vicious attacks of many enemies that have constantly sought its destruction. Israel needs no lectures from us on ethics. It does need and deserve our humble respect for the difficult work ahead as it fulfills its primary moral obligation of providing safety and security for all Israelis.

Senator Schumer occupies a historic role at a critical inflection point in Jewish and American history. We need him to use his voice to cut through the lies and the caricatures rather than amplify them. We need him to help Israel and its duly elected government project more loudly and clearly the core values and considerations driving its actions. We need him to stand up for the Jewish people, to be Shomer Yisrael, for as Mordechai told Esther in the Purim story, it is for this moment that he has been placed in this historic role.

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come together in support of centring our shared humanity” and that the heart is an “invitation for us to lead with our hearts”.

This asinine froth does not convince. The palm of a hand does not denote community; hand symbols are usually white, a heart is usually red and a red hand signifies a bloody one.

A black heart, meanwhile, commonly denotes evil. And the 2000 lynching involved ripping the heart out of one of the Israeli corpses and holding it exultantly in a Palestinian hand.

Conversely, the image could have been reflecting the symbol used in countless anti-Israel demonstrations to signify that Israel has blood on its hands: a symbol that grotesquely paints the Israelis fighting to defend themselves against genocide as wanton killers of the innocent.

The Oscars ceremony also featured an attempt to transform Israeli suffering into Israeli oppression by

Jonathan Glazer, director of the much-lauded Holocaust movie "The Zone of Interest".

Standing with his two backers, Glazer said, "Right now we stand here as men who refute their Jewishness and the Holocaust being hijacked by an occupation which has led to conflict for so many innocent people." The victims of the October 7 pogrom and the inhabitants of Gaza, he said, were "all the victims of this dehumanisation".

His ignorance was staggering. Apart from no land being illegally "occupied" by Israel, the cause of the conflict is the century-old attempt by the Palestinian Arabs to eradicate the Jewish presence in the Land of Israel and then the Jewish state. And to accuse Israel of dehumanisation, when it's going to greater lengths than any other army in the world to minimise civilian casualties, was simply malevolent.

Far worse, though, was Glazer's abuse of Judaism and the Holocaust to claim that Israel had hijacked both. He implied that Israelis were like Nazis and that their behaviour went against Jewish principles.

This to describe a war caused by the worst atrocities against Jews since the Holocaust and Israel's attempt to ensure that a second Holocaust does not happen again.

The obscenity of Glazer's comments can scarcely be exaggerated. The belief that demonising Israeli Jews somehow represents Jewish values is, however, a pathology that has twisted the minds of many liberal American Jews. It is being fed by a venomously distorted presentation of Israelis as child-killers in Gaza that's being ruthlessly pumped out by western media.

This accusation, of course, channels a paranoid antisemitic trope. It's also based on Hamas propaganda claims that are patently untrue.

In a notable article in Tablet, Abraham Wyner, professor of statistics and data science at the University of Pennsylvania, has used basic statistical analysis to suggest that the Hamas casualty figures of 30,000 dead Gazans, of whom 70 per cent are said to be women and children, are fake because the daily totals increase too consistently to be real.

Other problems with these figures are that they include as children the many teenagers who are committing Hamas atrocities, as well as the civilians killed by thousands of rockets falling short into Gaza.

Why, though, do so many believe these patent untruths propagated by Hamas? One reason is that the false premises of "intersectional" identity politics automatically turn Israelis into "oppressors" and the Palestinians into their "victims". This doesn't explain, however, why so many subscribe to the demonstrably ludicrous belief that Israel is committing "genocide."

For decades, the Palestinians have accused Israelis of being "Nazis" and committing "genocide" to obscure the fact that their own Holocaust denial runs in tandem with their declared intention to kill every Jew.

This "genocide" smear has been taken up by the

Palestinians' western supporters largely through the influence of human rights culture.

In total contradiction to its foundational ideals, this culture has turned into a vehicle for singling out certain human rights for extinction: the rights of the Jewish people to live in their own ancestral homeland.

In the 1970s, radical idealists who were disillusioned after the discrediting of European socialism alighted upon "human rights" as another universalising creed promising to bring about utopia.

As the ultimate particularist culture, Judaism is in the way of all universalising creeds; and so Israel, the particularist Jewish state, had to be dumped. The stage was set for the demonisation of Israel tied to the increasing dominance of international human rights doctrine.

A living example of this is Samantha Power, head of the US Agency for International Development and the Obama administration's US ambassador to the UN.

A noted expert on genocide, Power has long said the United States bears a unique responsibility to prevent mass atrocities.

It was therefore an irony that, earlier this year, Power was attacked by current and former USAID employees for belonging to an administration providing military support to Israel in the war against Hamas. Although she told these officials it was "very important that what happened on October 7 never happen again," she failed to push back against their claim that Israel was committing "genocide" in Gaza.

Given her history, this perhaps wasn't surprising. In 2002, she was asked as a "thought experiment" what she would advise the US president to do about the Israel-Palestinian problem "if one party or another [starts] looking like they might be moving towards genocide".

In response to this already disturbingly loaded question, Power said that something should be put "on the line" to help the situation. This might mean "alienating a domestic constituency of tremendous political and financial import... It does require external intervention".

Power wasn't talking about preventing the Palestinians from committing genocide against the Jews of Israel. She was talking about invading Israel to prevent an Israeli genocide against the Palestinians.

She was suggesting that Israel might commit atrocities against people who themselves make Israel the victim of precisely such atrocities: the vile smear being used against Israel today.

She also suggested that the only people who might be alienated if the US invaded Israel for this purpose would be American Jews, who she said exercised tremendous political and financial power over America.

The antisemitism of this remark aside, the thinking here was that Jews can't be allowed to get in the way of the human rights doctrine that state power is always used to make victims and never to protect people from becoming victims in the first place.

Israel is fighting a desperate battle for its survival. Its people are in a state of ever-deepening trauma, grief and anxiety. Some of their families and friends are still hostages in Gaza meeting unthinkable fates. The death toll among their conscripted children and grandchildren fighting to defend their country is steadily ticking upwards.

They understand that genocidal savages intend to continue their attacks until they have destroyed the Jewish homeland and slaughtered every Jew.

## There's No Such Thing as a Ramadan Truce

By Robert Satloff

**"The month of jihad and victories."**

With the start of Ramadan, millions of Muslims around the world begin a month of introspection, worship, service and renewed commitment to community. But we should not overlook another aspect of Ramadan that has been a tradition through the ages — the holy month as a time for war.

This has special relevance this year, when so many well-meaning observers will call on Israel to suspend its military operations against the Islamist extremists of Hamas, who — of all segments of Palestinian society — will appreciate the history of Muslim armies waging war during Ramadan and the irony of asking non-Muslim combatants to respect some sort of "Ramadan truce."

The 1973 Arab-Israeli war may be known to Jews as the Yom Kippur War, but it is widely known in the Arab world as "Harb Ramadan" — the Ramadan War — given that Anwar Sadat dispatched Egyptian forces to cross the Suez Canal during the holy month. But it is only a relatively recent example of Arab or Muslim armies waging war during this month.

The Saudi newspaper Arab News provided a helpful primer on the topic in 2014: "While much literature has been written on Islamic conquests focusing on strategy, many victories occurred during Ramadan due to the focus of the Ummah on Allah Almighty and this removed fear from the hearts of the Muslims. This is why some of the greatest victories in Islam occurred during Ramadan ..."

Starting with the seminal battle of Badr in Year 2 on the Islamic hijri calendar, corresponding to the year 624 A.D., the list of historic victories in Ramadan cited in this article includes "the conquest of Makkah (8 Hijri), the conquest of Rhodes (53 Hijri), the successful landing of Muslims on the coast of Spain (91 Hijri), the victory by Tarik Ibn Zayed against the King of Spain (92 Hijri), the victory of Salahuddin against invading crusaders (584 Hijri), and Mamluk's victory versus invading Tatars in the battle of Ain Jiloot (650 Hijri)."

More recently, take a look at the bloodthirsty Ramadan record of the Islamic State. As a Washington

In this truly desperate situation, what's even worse is that the so-called "civilised" west — which also wants the Jews removed from its headspace and its conscience — is accusing them of the crime of which they are the present and intended victims.

That is an unspeakable abandonment of the Jewish people, and to the west a source of ineradicable shame.

*Ms. Phillips is a British journalist and author of a personal and political memoir, Guardian Angel; and a novel, The Legacy.*

thehill.com

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Post reporter noted, a spokesman for the terrorist group exhorted followers in 2016 "to make it a month of calamity everywhere for nonbelievers" — and indeed they did, with gruesome Ramadan attacks against civilians from Kuwait to Syria to France to a nightclub in Orlando, Florida.

And, as my Washington Institute colleague Patrick Clawson pointed out in 2004, naive non-Muslim governments have been disappointed when they appealed to their Muslim foes for ceasefires during Ramadan: "Modern proposals for Ramadan ceasefires by secular governments — the Soviets in Afghanistan, Saddam Hussein when fighting the Islamic Republic of Iran — were uniformly rejected by the Islamist side, which usually intensified fighting during Ramadan."

Again, none of this is to diminish the reverence that millions of Muslims have for the holiness of this month, their commitment to solemn prayer and, when the evening break-fast comes, family and communal festivity. But Hamas is far more in the ISIS mold than those millions of peaceful worshippers.

For Hamas and their fellow travelers, waging war during Ramadan — including sacrificing fellow Muslims as pawns in the fight against Israel, inciting tensions at Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque to trigger violence at that holy site and launching terrorist attacks against civilians — are all acceptable military tactics, as valid during Ramadan as they are the other months of the year.

If the U.S. negotiates a "temporary ceasefire" in which Hamas commits to release hostages and stop shielding its gunmen behind innocent women and children, that would be a worthy achievement. But the American government should not fall for well-meaning calls to urge Israel to display one-sided military restraint — or, even worse, suspend military operations against Hamas — out of deference to Ramadan.

Of one thing we can be sure — Hamas (or what's left of it) won't be devoting the next month to introspection, service and worship. Quite the contrary.

*Mr. Satloff is Segal executive director of the Washington Institute.*

## Israel has become a partisan issue. Do American Jews care?

By Jonathan S. Tobin

jns.org

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While Trump is impatient for a complete victory over Hamas, Biden and Schumer wave the white flag in

their party's civil war against Democrats who loathe the Jewish state.

This isn't the direction the 2024 election cycle had to take. But whether Israelis or pro-Israel Americans wanted this to happen, support for the Jewish state has become a partisan issue. That conclusion became impossible to avoid last week when Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer gave a speech that signaled his support for a change in administration policy about Israel's post-Oct. 7 war on the Hamas terrorist organization. Schumer didn't just back up President Joe Biden's smears about Israel's conduct. He also blamed the continuation of the conflict on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu while calling for what amounts to regime change in Jerusalem.

The political context of this broadside was obvious. The speech was coordinated with the White House, which decided it needed a signal from prominent party centrists that they supported his decision to bash Israel. That was appalling in and of itself. But it also made it clear that the increasingly noisy civil war within the Democratic Party over the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians was already over.

It resulted in a humiliating defeat for the remaining pro-Israel centrists that Schumer—the self-proclaimed shomer or “guardian” of Israel in the Senate—was assumed to be leading and a victory for “progressive” leftists who want to punish the Jewish state or have altogether embraced terrorism in the form of Hamas.

#### **Blaming Biden's problems on Bibi**

Rather than confronting the antisemitism that has become commonplace on the left, Biden's campaign—no doubt influenced by the strong anti-Israel sentiment among party activists—has become convinced that he must act to force Israel to end the war before Hamas is completely defeated if he is going to survive.

Some on the Jewish left may think that Schumer's speech represents a new definition of “pro-Israel.” Such a view asserts that American Jews should override the will of the Israeli people, who may be divided about Netanyahu but overwhelmingly support the war effort against Hamas and are opposed to a postwar solution that will reward the Palestinians for terrorism. While that argument might have garnered some support before Oct. 7, the attempt to “save Israel from itself” simply isn't viable after the Hamas atrocities and the subsequent surge in American antisemitism.

Schumer should have been telling Biden and his staff that there were a lot more votes to be lost in the center among independents—very much in play this election year—than among leftists who are likely to back the president against Trump in November despite their anger about Israel. Instead, he was meekly going along with the intersectional faction among Democrats who despise both Biden and Schumer as representatives of a fading generation of elderly politicians whose vestigial ties to the Jewish state they intend to replace sooner or later.

Biden's decision to appease the intersectional wing of his party became obvious in the lead-up to the Michigan

primary. Faced with a challenge from Arab-American voters who were outraged by the president's initial strong support for Israel after the Oct. 7 massacres, Biden began a slow retreat from that position. It was highlighted by increasingly hostile statements about the Jewish state and then the astonishing decision to send a high-ranking delegation of policymakers to apologize to the pro-Hamas mayor of Dearborn, Mich.

In the primary, Biden easily defeated an “uncommitted” slate that was represented as a protest vote against Israel. Yet somehow his 81% to 13% victory, with much of the anti-Biden vote being coming from Arab-Americans in the greater Detroit metropolitan area, was interpreted as a sign of his weakness. As polls continued to show him losing both the national vote and battleground states like Michigan to Donald Trump, the assumption that this was due to a lack of enthusiasm in the party's left-wing base because of their anger at Biden for his failure to do something to end the war against Hamas began to take hold.

Indeed, even normally sober political observers associated with the party's moderates—like James Carville, who earned his reputation as a political guru by guiding President Bill Clinton to victories in the 1990s—started to echo this conventional wisdom. Carville claimed on MSNBC that if Democrats were losing to Trump, it was Netanyahu's fault. Activist filmmaker Michael Moore seconded those notions on the same cable-news TV station in describing how he helped lead the push for the “uncommitted” vote in the Michigan primary.

It's true that Biden is losing ground among younger voters who are more likely to be hostile to Israel. But Democrats are wrong to think that the Gaza war is their biggest problem. Trump is currently ahead because he's making huge inroads among working-class voters, as well as Hispanics and African-Americans, whom Democrats took for granted. The Democrats have become a party that is both dominated by and solely interested in the concerns of credentialed elites who are in denial about the way Biden's policies on the economy and illegal immigration have hurt many Americans. If he loses Michigan, it will be because auto workers and Teamsters vote for Trump on those issues, not because campus radicals and Arab Americans hate Israel.

The contrast with the Republicans couldn't be greater.

#### **Trump wants Israel to win quickly**

In recent decades, the GOP has become a lockstep pro-Israel party. That's due in part to the influence of evangelical Christians who are ardent Zionists and the fact that even more secular conservatives rightly see Israel as a stalwart American ally, as well as the only democracy in the Middle East.

There are some exceptions. A few stray libertarians, like Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.), oppose all foreign alliances, even if they aren't hostile to Israel. More troubling are the antagonistic voices on the right coming from

commentators like former Fox News show host Tucker Carlson and increasingly open antisemites like Candace Owens, who have tilted even farther against Israel since the Oct. 7 atrocities. But almost all GOP officeholders agree that the man they are backing for president—Trump—can justly claim the title of the nation’s most pro-Israel president.

Trump hasn’t said much about the Hamas war in the last five months, though he made his differences with the president obvious in interviews given over the weekend in which denounced Biden’s and Schumer’s stand on Israel, and said Netanyahu should “finish the problem” in Gaza. Rather than trying, as the administration has been doing, to hold back an Israeli offensive, Trump thinks they should just get it over with.

Nor is he wrong to believe that the current war probably wouldn’t have happened if he were still president. The calculations of Hamas and their funders in Tehran were clearly impacted not just by their mistaken belief that political divisions inside Israel had made it soft, but because of Biden’s weakness and pivot away from Trump’s policies towards the Jewish state, Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Trump’s transactional approach to relationships with leaders has overshadowed his record to some extent. He has been vocal about his resentment of Netanyahu because the latter congratulated Biden for beating Trump in 2020, even though it was his obligation to do so as the head of his country. And his impatience with Israelis who understand that they have to deal with the Democrats when they’re in power in Washington is as great as is his ongoing bitterness about the fact that most American Jews didn’t back him in spite of his pro-Israel policies.

But as his comments illustrated, Trump intends to reverse the Biden policy of appeasing Iran that helped make Oct. 7 possible. His talk about “getting back to peace” seems also to indicate that—as was the case during his presidency—he won’t waste time, as Biden intends to do, on trying to reward Palestinian intransigence and terrorism. Instead, he will return to a policy of trying to continue expanding the Abraham Accords in which the Arab world normalizes relations with Israel.

### **A dying consensus**

For the last 25 years, Democrats have reacted with outrage about Republicans claiming to have a better record on Israel when asking for Jewish votes, claiming that even raising the issue undermined a longstanding bipartisan pro-Israel consensus. The idea of that consensus was always more aspirational than a reality, but it did reflect the fact that for the most part, Congress members understood that most Americans supported Israel and that it was in their personal political interests, as well as that of the country, to support the alliance.

Though the pro-Israel lobby AIPAC labored valiantly to preserve the myth of that consensus—and was smeared by Israel’s antisemitic opponents for doing so—it had already begun to fade by 2018 when the first members of

the left-wing “Squad” that openly opposed the Jewish state were elected. Democrats were prepared to tolerate the open antisemitism of people like Reps. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.) and Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.), and resisted GOP attempts to hold them accountable. But after Oct. 7 and the surge in antisemitism around the country that followed the largest mass slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust, that toleration has turned into appeasement and a belief that Israel’s foes represent the future of their party.

The administration’s about-face from support for the eradication of Hamas is rooted in their belief that Democratic voters will not tolerate a policy of total support for Israel. Republican candidates have no such fears. That still begs the question as to whether this will impact enough Jewish votes to make a difference.

Up until now, the answer has always been “no.”

Neither consistent GOP support for Israel nor Trump’s historic policies have made much of a dent in the Jewish vote. Most Jewish voters may support Israel, but the overwhelming majority of them who are Democrats do not prioritize the issue. Only Orthodox Jews and political conservatives, who make up less than a third of all Jewish voters, tend to treat Israel as a litmus test for their support.

That’s probably still the case with most Jewish Democrats both because they despise Trump and regard Republicans as tribal culture-war enemies on issues like abortion as much as they are political opponents. In the past, it was only Orthodox Jews like those living in places like Brooklyn, N.Y., where violence is directed against them from minority communities, that felt the impact of antisemitism. As most college campuses became hostile environments for Jews, it’s now non-Orthodox liberals who are also in the cross-hairs of the Jew-haters.

Whether they are scared enough to vote for a party that is unabashedly pro-Israel is still very much in doubt. But though Biden is still likely to win the Jewish vote in November no matter what happens, it may be that even a slight increase in defections to the GOP could impact the election in swing states like Pennsylvania.

Whether or not that happens, the one thing recent events have made clear is that there is no covering up the fact that talk of a bipartisan consensus on Israel is over. Yet even if Republicans win in 2024, that’s troubling since a future in which their opponents are dominated by Israel-haters will make it inevitable that the next Democratic administration won’t be just critical of Jerusalem but an open opponent of the Jewish state, no matter who is running it. Schumer’s decision to throw in with Biden in bashing Netanyahu because of his policies, which happen to be supported by the overwhelming majority of Israelis, makes it obvious that the Democrats’ problem is with the Jewish state and not its leader. The partisan divide on Israel is no longer a matter of conjecture. It is now the reality of American politics in 2024.

*Mr. Tobin is editor-in-chief of Jewish News Syndicate (JNS).*

## David Bernstein and the Argument about Israel He Wishes He Hadn't Won

By David Bernstein

jewishinsider.com

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**October 7 has, unfortunately, vindicated the well-known professor's antipathy to Israel's critics.**

Over my 20+ years of blogging at Volokh, commenters have often questioned why I focused my attention on what I saw as unfair attacks on Israel, rather than on Israeli policies I disagreed with that might be obstacles to a future peace deal. My response was consistent: debates over specific Israeli policies were a sideshow. Israel's harshest critics simply wanted Israel to cease to exist, and given that this goal could likely be achieved only via genocide, I chose to focus my attention on that. My commenters were also pretty consistent, arguing that I was being paranoid, that the vast majority of critics, even the harshest ones, wanted a two-state solution, not to eliminate Israel.

We have had something of a test of this debate since 10/7. Hamas is a terrorist theocracy with explicitly genocidal goals. It carried out a taste of those goals on 10/7, and its leaders promised to repeat those atrocities again and again until the "Zionists" were driven from Israel.

So whatever one thinks of Israeli policy, or Israel's eventual response to 10/7, one would think, based on my interlocutors' position, that critics of Israeli policy would nevertheless agree on one thing: Hamas must be deposed, one way or another. There is no plausible two-state solution with Hamas in power; the harsh critics are almost all self-styled progressives, and there is nothing progressive about Hamas's policies toward freedom of religion, alt lifestyle rights, women, militarism, antisemitism, and so on, nor its constant theft of humanitarian aid. Hamas's rule in Gaza is essentially every Progressive's worst nightmare.

Yet, ever since at least 10/10, when it became clear that Israel's reaction to Hamas's atrocities was not going to be to capitulate, the harsh critics have been all but unanimous in calling for Israel to essentially surrender ("immediate ceasefire") with Hamas still in power, and

have almost to a person not called on Hamas to surrender and abdicate. (And self-styled human rights organizations have felt free to make up human rights law, including contradicting their own past public positions in other conflicts.)

I have to admit that I underestimated the mendacity of these people. As much as I knew that they hated Israel much more than they were concerned with the well-being of Palestinians, I didn't imagine that they would be willing to run interference for, if not outright support, Hamas, certainly not after Hamas put its brutality and genocidal intentions on display for all the world to see. I would have expected something more like "immediate ceasefire, but the world has to work on replacing Hamas with something else."

Of course, there are those who take the latter position, or the Biden position, which is to support Israel but be critical of specific wartime policies and the lack of a long-term plan. But the remarkable thing is that I have yet to see even this position among the harder left: "I wish Hamas would surrender and release the hostages, because that would be good for all sides, but since I don't think it's possible to get Hamas to surrender, I think Israel needs to desist for humanitarian reasons."

Indeed, if you ask prominent folks on X, people who are complaining the loudest about civilian suffering in Gaza, "would you prefer the war go on, or that Hamas release the hostages and surrender," basically no one is willing to say publicly that he or she would prefer Hamas to surrender. Israel losing is more important than ending civilian suffering in Gaza, than any sort of peaceful resolution of the conflict (which obviously requires an end to Hamas rule), than innocent hostages being released, or anything else. If you are a progressive and you find yourself carrying water for a truly reactionary, genocidal organization like Hamas, maybe it's time to do some soul-searching.

## Saar Flies Gantz's Coop

By Avi Blum, Esq.

mishpacha.com

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**Saar's stormy exit sinks Gantz's chances.**

**1. Benny Gantz is feted in Washington and London as Israel's prime-minister-in-waiting,** the polls give his party an incredible 40 seats in the next Knesset, and he tops incumbent Binyamin Netanyahu by double digits. But a bird in the hand is worth more than a flock in the bush, and one of the two birds in his hand has now escaped.

Israeli politics took a dramatic turn last week with Gideon Saar, Benny Gantz's number two, announcing the dissolution of their political alliance. This makes Saar the fourth key ally to ditch Gantz in four years, joining Yair Lapid, Gabi Ashkenazi, and Moshe "Bogie" Yaalon. But the timing might make this desertion the most damaging

yet.

Saar is one of the savviest politicians in Israel. A former senior Likud figure and close ally of Netanyahu, Saar left the party with a door slam after the latter accused him of conspiring with then president Ruvi Rivlin to oust him. His new anti-Bibi center-right party, "New Hope," was joined by fellow Likud defectors Zeev Elkin and Yifat Shasha-Biton, and made Netanyahu's removal from power its primary objective—a goal accomplished, albeit fleetingly, with the formation of the Bennett-Lapid government.

After that government's collapse, Saar united with Gantz and Gadi Eisenkot under the big tent of the National Unity Party. But ever since the party joined the

coalition at the start of the war—a move Saar pushed by midday of October 7 — Saar’s relationship with Gantz cooled, even as his relationship with Netanyahu thawed.

As we’ve reported in these pages, Saar and Netanyahu were often seen exchanging notes during government meetings, and in a recent interview with Mishpacha, Saar ruled out returning to Netanyahu’s Likud but pointedly refused to rule out serving in a future government beside him.

Saar has grievances with Gantz, who reneged on his early agreements to hold internal primaries. Saar even blames Gantz, rather than Bibi, for his exclusion from the war cabinet. As Saar sees it, Gantz passed him over to choose party number-three Eisenkot to sit beside him in the war cabinet.

Saar may not be a former IDF chief of staff like Eisenkot, but he’s the politician with the second-most cabinet experience in the country, after Netanyahu. In a rookie mistake, Gantz simply ignored him. They hadn’t held a private conversation since Gantz joined the cabinet, and their factions stopped meeting together. This carelessness cost Gantz a third of his 12 seats in the current Knesset, no less.

## **2. Why did Saar decide to jump ship now, of all times? The answer is complex.**

First, there’s the security situation, with Saar viewing Gantz’s presence in the war cabinet as an obstacle to the occupation of Rafah and as the key factor in Israel’s overly generous humanitarian aid. In his recent sit-down with Mishpacha, Saar harshly criticized the uncontrolled flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza, which has allowed it to be seized by Hamas.

But security considerations weren’t the only factor behind Saar’s decision. As Henry Kissinger famously said, Israel has no foreign policy, only domestic policy. Unlike Gantz, Saar scored big in the Israeli municipal elections this month. Many of the candidates supported by Saar were elected, while most of the candidates supported by Gantz in particular and the “change bloc” in general lost. Gantz’s failure to leverage his polling advantage and his poor choice of candidates in the local elections convinced Saar that while Gantz may be leading in the polls, he doesn’t know how to play his cards.

Saar’s announcement at a press conference last week left Gantz surprised, but hardly shocked, given their frosty relations over the past months. Netanyahu, on the other hand, wasn’t particularly surprised, and some in his circle even hinted that he knew about the announcement in advance.

Saar’s decision injects “new hope” into Netanyahu’s plan for political survival, which we discussed in these pages last week. While the New Hope chair clarified in our interview last month that he has no intention of returning to Likud, he just took a big first step back to the right-wing bloc. Saar, Avigdor Lieberman, Yossi Cohen, and Naftali Bennett will all be jockeying for the “moderate right” lane in the next election, and Saar just stole a march on his competitors.

Saar’s announcement that he intends to remain in the government until the end of the war renders moot Gantz’s threats to quit before the end of the campaign, and strips Ben Gvir of his kingmaker status at the same time. It’s no coincidence that Ben Gvir demanded his own seat in the war cabinet immediately following Saar’s statement.

**3. With 40 seats in the bush and eight in hand, Gantz now finds himself part of a right-wing government that controls 68 Knesset seats without him.** The chareidim, who met with Netanyahu this week on the draft issue, see Saar and Elkin, two of the most formidable problem-solvers ever produced by the Likud, as a lifeline to a breakthrough. At this point, the chareidim hope for nothing more than a vague proposal to buy some time and keep the hot potato of “equality of burden” rolling.

Rav Aharon Leib Steinman ztz”l laid down the strategy of buying time from bill to High Court ruling. While in the past the chareidi parties were able to buy years of quiet at a time, they’re now reduced to buying months and weeks, at an exorbitant price.

But one person who bought all the time he needs last week is Binyamin Netanyahu. The day after October 7, no one could have predicted that six months on, Netanyahu would not only have stabilized his coalition but even expanded it, despite abysmal polling numbers.

The message reverberated abroad as well as at home. Faced with a public call for a change of government from the Democratic administration last weekend, Netanyahu responded by cementing his coalition.

“Israel is not a banana republic but a proud and independent democracy that elected Prime Minister Netanyahu,” the Prime Minister’s Office responded to Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer’s call for new elections.

As usual, Bibi turned American lemons into Israeli lemonade, using his clash with the administration to unify the base. After Saar’s move, coalition figures assessed this week that between Biden and Netanyahu, the latter’s chances of surviving the year politically are better.

## **Glazer’s producer calls his Oscars speech a ‘distraction,’ as Auschwitz memorial defends it.**

By Andrew Lapin

jta.org

Understanding the Jewish political paradox in 2024.

A Jewish executive producer of the Oscar-winning Holocaust drama “The Zone of Interest” said he disagreed with director Jonathan Glazer’s speech at the Academy Awards ceremony criticizing Israel, while the Auschwitz

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Memorial issued a statement in its defense.

They were the latest reactions in what has become a prolonged firestorm over Glazer’s remarks Sunday. While accepting the best international feature award, the British Jewish filmmaker declared that he and his producers were



“men who refute their Jewishness and the Holocaust being hijacked by an occupation which has led to conflict for so many innocent people, whether the victims of October the 7th in Israel or the ongoing attack on Gaza.”

Two of the film’s producers were standing on stage with Glazer: James Wilson, who previously criticized the Israel-Hamas war when accepting an award for the film, and Len Blavatnik, a pro-Israel Ukrainian whose spokesperson declined to comment about Glazer but said he is a steadfast supporter of Israel.

Now, at least one other producer associated with the film has weighed in: Danny Cohen, who appeared Thursday on a Jewish podcast to register his disagreement with the speech and call it a “distraction” from the film’s merits.

“I just fundamentally disagree with Jonathan on this,” Cohen, a former TV executive at the British Broadcasting Corporation, told journalists Yonit Levi and Jonathan Freedland, the hosts of the podcast “UnHoly: Two Jews on the News.”

“My support for Israel is unwavering,” Cohen continued. He called Israel’s ongoing war in Gaza “the responsibility of Hamas, a genocidal terrorist organization which continues to hold and abuse the hostages and which doesn’t use its tunnels to protect the innocent civilians of Gaza but uses it to hide themselves and to allow Palestinians to die.”

The film itself, which won two Oscars, focuses on fictionalized versions of the Nazi Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höss and his family, who carry on their normal lives while living next door to the death camps.

In light of its themes, Jewish groups including the Anti-Defamation League and an organization representing Holocaust survivors in the U.S. have been harshly critical of Glazer’s speech, accusing him of inappropriately comparing Israel to Nazi Germany. A former advisor to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the director a “self-hating Jew.” (Glazer has not issued any public comments since the Oscars.)

Cohen didn’t go that far, noting that Glazer had the

right to say what he wants. But he emphasized that he held a different view.

“I think that the war is tragic and awful and this loss of civilian life is awful, but I blame Hamas for that,” said Cohen, who said Glazer had coordinated his speech with Wilson. “And I think any discussion of the war without saying that for me lacks the proper context that any discussion about the war from my perspective should have.”

For Cohen, who recently spoke out against what he said has been systemic antisemitism at the BBC since the Oct. 7 attacks, Glazer’s comments distracted from the accomplishments of the film itself and could deter those who might have embraced it as a new tool of Holocaust education if not for the political firestorm.

“The film is an extraordinary triumph of filmmaking,” he said. “It’s one of the most remarkable films in decades, one of the truly great films about the Holocaust, and will survive as such for decades. And I think the discussion this week, and this moment of great recognition for the film with two Academy Awards, is not about the film but it’s about the speech. Jon spent 10 years making the film and has made something remarkable, but people are talking more this week about what he said for 30 seconds.”

Yet even as Cohen took Glazer’s speech to task, another major voice in the debate has also weighed in — supporting Glazer. On Thursday the director of the Auschwitz Memorial and Museum in Poland, where Glazer shot portions of the film and where he recently delivered a speech, posted a statement in the filmmaker’s defense to social media.

“In his Oscar acceptance speech, Jonathan Glazer issued a universal moral warning against dehumanization. His aim was not to descend to the level of political discourse,” Piotr M.A. Cywiński wrote. “Critics who expected a clear political stance or a film solely about genocide did not grasp the depth of his message.”

Cywiński did not specifically address Israel in his statement, but concluded, “‘The Zone of Interest’ is not a film about the Shoah. It is primarily a profound warning about humanity and its nature.”

## Matisyahu Won’t Back Down

By Seth Mandel

commentary.org

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**October 7 has, unfortunately, vindicated the well-known professor’s antipathy to Israel’s critics.**

As a visibly Jewish singer whose Judaism-themed reggae and rap songs have found their way into mainstream radio rotation, Matisyahu has become something of a bellwether for American Jewish acceptance in popular culture. It is no secret that this is a fraught place to be, especially since Oct. 7. Yet in talking to Matisyahu, it doesn’t take long for some optimism to appear.

One point the singer made in our interview this week was that the difficult position American Jews are in now is evidence, at the very least, that they care enough to be

pained by the choices society wants to force on them: “If there are so few Jews that really want to stand up for Israel and believe in Israel, understand the history, know their connection to that place, then it seems like there wouldn’t be the crisis that we’re having right now.”

That crisis is most clearly seen in the swirling controversies around Matisyahu’s own performances. Last month, back to back shows were canceled in Sante Fe and Tucson, ostensibly over security concerns but in reality over staff boycotts. Then two weeks ago the House of Blues in Chicago became the third venue to cancel a show of his. Matisyahu isn’t Israeli, he is American born and

raised. So there is no euphemism or flimsy excuse available to the protesters who have followed his tour.

Tonight Matisyahu will play Washington's famed 9:30 Club. Then after shows in Philadelphia and Brooklyn—and a bar mitzvah party for his son—Matisyahu will finish up the tour, appropriately, in Israel.

"Israel's always been a very powerful place for me, a very deep part of my story and my journey and Judaism as well," Matisyahu told me. "That's why I say I feel very blessed to feel really strong in knowing what the right thing is and who I am. And in my life, I haven't always felt that about everything. There's always been lots of questions and murkiness. But on this particular topic, I feel very, very clear about it."

Yet many American Jews, he said, don't find the choice as clear. I asked Matisyahu if that was something his fans specifically sought out at his shows, a jolt of inspiration or strength. "Absolutely," he said. "And not every fan or every person that comes to a Matis show feels that way. But I would say my fans are very unique and very special, Jews and non-Jews alike, that they feel very strong in what they believe and in their support for me as well. So that's been powerful to watch that and to get that energy from the fans and feel that strength from people."

Matisyahu is no stranger to this particular controversy. In 2015, he was dropped from a Spanish music festival's lineup for failing to "clearly declare himself regarding the war" in Israel and the Palestinian territories, according to the organizers. After a backlash, the festival apologized for caving to the pressure from local BDS activists and reinvited him. The whole incident showed not only BDS's anti-Semitic agenda—trying to force an American Jew to denounce Israeli Jews or lose gigs—but how readily much of the music industry cowers before BDS activists. Nine years later, this phenomenon has come roaring into the U.S., but without the apologies or re-invitations.

It's all a bit darkly ironic. One of Matisyahu's biggest hits, and his most-played song on Spotify, is "One Day"—an antiwar track about coexistence. In it, he sings: "All my life, I've been waiting for/ I've been prayin' for, for the people to say/ That we don't wanna fight no more/ There'll be no more wars, and our children will play..."

The message Matisyahu delivers on stage contrasts sharply with that of the demonstrators outside.

Coexistence has fallen into extreme disfavor in so-called "anti-Zionist" protest culture. Genocidal chants like "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" are commonly heard; calls for "resistance by any means necessary" speak for the larger pro-Hamas masses that come out in major cities and demand Israel lay down its arms.

On campus, Jewish students are assaulted and routinely harassed, Jewish speakers canceled and occasionally chased out of the venue by violent mobs. Shops and bars have tried to ban "Zionist" customers. Jewish writers have had events canceled. A sudden jettisoning of all pretense has meant all Jews are open targets of discriminatory policies.

"It's a very dark time and it feels like it's a very violent time and a time when people are taking sides," Matisyahu says.

Still, he has never felt that he or his fans have been put in physical danger at any of the shows. "We have a lot of support and a lot of people on our side, but there's definitely opposition and we're not afraid of it, and we'll welcome it when we come up against it."

At the outset of the tour, Matisyahu visited the kibbutzim in the Gaza envelope that had been devastated by Hamas's attacks on Oct. 7, as well as the site of the Nova music festival where hundreds were killed and dozens more taken hostage that day. He also met with survivors of the massacre. It fueled him and gave even more meaning to the songs he performed. The fans, he says, picked up on that energy, too.

For Matisyahu, and no doubt for many of his fans, "everything kind of changed" on Oct. 7. And despite the growing sense of unease many American Jews feel in the wake of the attacks, and the hostility they are met with in unfamiliar places, Matisyahu's message remains one of resolve: "Some people obviously struggle with it, but there's some very special Jews out there and people who are fighters and have a lot of light and a lot of talent. It gives all these people an opportunity to come together and work towards a common goal. And that is a very, very powerful thing when the Jewish people come together and work towards something like that. So I feel like there is some hope and I don't want people to just feel lost out there."