



# AIPAC HIGH HOLIDAY

## RESOURCE GUIDE

—5773—



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# Welcome

Welcome to AIPAC's High Holiday Resource Guide. Within these pages are materials designed to help you craft a sermon that addresses the most important issues affecting the U.S.-Israel relationship. This guide provides background information, source materials and articles relating to the following three themes:

▶ **The Threat from Iran**

Iran is a state that represses freedom at home and supports terrorism abroad. There can be no doubt that a nuclear-capable Iran would pose a grave threat to the United States and our interests in the Middle East.

▶ **Activism Matters**

As Americans who are committed to Israel's security, we must be the ones to educate our elected officials about the necessity of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship.

▶ **Shared Values and Mutual Interests**

Both the United States and Israel are committed to democracy, the rule of law, freedom of religion and speech, and human rights. It is these values that underscore the close relationship between the two allies.

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We appreciate your feedback and taking the time to send us sermons or other writings that you create based on this material. Please send samples, questions or comments to [synagogue@aipac.org](mailto:synagogue@aipac.org).

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## | The Threat from Iran

# Background

**Iran's domestic repression and foreign acts of terror make clear that Tehran's acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability would mark a significant new regional danger. Iran would be able to use its status as a nuclear-capable state to increase its power and threaten U.S. national security.**

**To stop Iran from becoming a nuclear threshold state, the United States must dramatically quicken the pace and scope of sanctions while bolstering the credibility of its option to use force. The United States cannot rely on a policy that seeks to contain a nuclear Iran.**

## Iran Stifles Freedom at Home

Ever since the Islamic Revolution in 1979 Iran has been led by a government that opposes Western values. In the last seven years, under the administration of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, ethnic and religious minorities have faced even more widespread discrimination and Iran's human rights record "has deteriorated markedly" according to [Human Rights Watch](#).

In 2011, [a report](#) was released by the U.N. special rapporteur on human rights in Iran stating that human rights abuses in the Islamic Republic appear to be increasing, and that hundreds of prisoners have been executed in Iran "without the knowledge or presence of the inmates' lawyers or families and without prior notification to those executed." The total number of people executed by the state in Iran increased from 86 in 2005 to more than 600 in 2011. The report also listed several alleged abuses by the Islamic Republic justice system: torture, degrading treatment of detainees, the status of

women and the imposition of the death penalty in the absence of proper judicial safeguards.

Iran's constitution allows for unequal treatment of religious minorities, banning them from holding senior government positions and granting different punishments to Muslims and non-Muslims for the same crime. In addition, it is prohibited to convert from Islam to another religion in Iran—a crime that is punishable by death.

Iran is also one of just seven countries in the world that applies the death penalty for homosexual acts. In 2007, Ahmadinejad spoke at Columbia University and asserted that homosexuality does not even exist in Iran. Human rights activists claim that since 1979 between 4,000 and 6,000 gay men and lesbians have been executed in Iran for crimes related to their sexual orientation.

Discrimination against women is also enshrined in Iran's legal code, which gives lower value to legal testimony by women than men and limits punitive damages in cases of wrongful injury or death of a woman to half of that of a man. In fact, the World Economic Forum ranked Iran 125 out of 135 countries in its 2011 "[Global Gender Gap Report](#)," a study of how successfully countries have closed the gaps between women and men.

As a result of Iran's inequality of rights based on religion, sexual orientation and gender, the country was ranked lower than China, Sudan and Syria—159 out of 167 countries—in the [Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index for 2011](#).

## Iran Exports Terror

While the brutality of the Iranian government is plainly demonstrated by the way that it treats its citizens, its aggression does not end at its borders. Through its

support of terrorist organizations like Hizballah in southern Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Iran’s influence has been a major obstacle to peace efforts in the Middle East, and its interference in the affairs of its Arab neighbors undermines regional peace and stability.

For years Iran has provided an array of security assistance to Syrian President Bashar Assad. That support has continued throughout Assad’s brutal crackdown over the past year and a half. [Iran has provided weapons and tools to repress the Syrian opposition](#), including guns and ammunition, electronic surveillance systems, technology designed to disrupt efforts by protesters to communicate via social media, and Iranian-made drone aircraft for overhead surveillance.

In addition, Iranian security officials have traveled to Damascus to advise Assad’s entourage how to counter dissent, and some Iranian officials have stayed on in Syria to advise Assad’s forces. Iran’s aid to Syria appears to have helped Assad’s government in its increasingly violent campaign to hold on to power in the face of the protest movement. Estimates suggest that more than [17,000](#) people have been killed in the conflict, with as many as [96,000](#) more displaced and as many as [1.5 million](#) people need help getting food, water or shelter.

Moreover, Iran—the world’s leading state sponsor of terror—has [backed](#) insurgents in [Iraq](#) and [Afghanistan](#) who are responsible for the deaths of many Americans. Over the past year, Tehran also sponsored terrorism against the U.S. and its allies including a [plot](#) to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in Washington, D.C., failed attempts to kill diplomats in [India, Thailand and Georgia](#), and a foiled attack in [Kenya](#).

Iranian regime officials have called repeatedly for the annihilation of Israel and for a “world without” the United States. In a joint statement, British Prime Minister David Cameron, Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that Iran threatens the “[peace and security of us all](#).”

### A Nuclear Iran and America

**W**hen considering how Iran treats its own citizens, and its willingness to kill civilians in other countries, it is clear that the Iranian government is a belligerent actor. Now, the Islamic Republic is attempting to shield itself from international rebuke and continue its murderous foreign policy by developing the most deadly weapons known to man.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) released an unprecedented and detailed [report](#) in November 2011 that provides the agency’s first public confirmation that Iran is closing in on the capability to produce nuclear weapons—a stark

## KEY POINTS

- 💡 The inequality of rights based on religion, sexual orientation and gender is enshrined in Iran’s legal code.
- 💡 In just the past year Iran has sponsored numerous terrorist plots throughout the world, including in the United States, India, Thailand, Georgia and Kenya.

wake-up call that time to prevent Iran's nuclear breakout is fast running out.

Since then the IAEA has released a new report, which according to [The Jerusalem Post](#) states that "Iran almost doubled its stockpile of 20-percent medium-enriched uranium to 145 kilograms from 73.7 kilograms in February." Enrichment to this level represents 80 percent of the work needed to produce fissile material for the core of a weapon.

The effects of a nuclear-capable Iran would greatly impact us here in America. Iranian leaders have called the United States a "satanic power" and have issued calls for our country's destruction. Tehran would be able to provide nuclear materials and knowledge to its terrorist proxies as well as its allies in Venezuela, Nicaragua and Bolivia, bringing the threat of nuclear terror close to America's shores.

In addition, the prospect of a nuclear Iran would directly affect the price of oil. Tehran would be able to manipulate the cost of oil by coercing other oil-exporting nations to reduce their crude production. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) collectively holds 75 percent of the world's conventional oil reserves. While Saudi Arabia and other like-minded countries wish to keep prices stable in order to maintain long-term demand, Iran consistently presses for the highest possible prices. Iran with a nuclear weapons capability could dominate OPEC causing the global price of oil to skyrocket and forcing us to pay more for gas, groceries and other consumer goods.

Furthermore, American soldiers stationed in the Middle East would be directly threatened. The Islamic Republic has proven willing to target U.S. troops by providing weapons and funding to groups fighting our soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. A nuclear-capable Iran could feel that it can dramatically increase its support to such groups.

Iran with a nuclear capability would be in a position to further challenge American values,

interests and concerns. The Islamic Republic could ratchet up its belligerence, continuing to ignore the demands of the international community without paying any price and threaten America's position of leadership in the Middle East and its sway around the world.

Under pressure from Tehran, Arab countries could be hesitant to cooperate with the United States in advancing regional peace and stability. America would be weaker and our influence would diminish as Iran's would soar.

### The Impact of Sanctions

**D**espite the danger and the advancements that Iran has made, there is still time to stop Iran without the use of force. But that time is running out quickly. For the sake of peace and stability the United States must continue to lead international efforts to impose and enforce crippling economic sanctions to prevent Tehran from furthering its nuclear program.

Sanctions are already having a broad impact on the Iranian economy. They are causing slower growth, higher unemployment and rampant inflation. Tehran's rial has shed [50 percent](#) of its value since last summer. Many analysts now believe Iran in 2012 will experience negative GDP growth for the first time in 20 years.

According to a Government Accountability Office [report](#), since U.S. sanctions targeting Iran's refined petroleum imports passed, the number of companies selling oil to Iran has dropped to just four. Every major Western energy firm has ceased investing in Iran's energy sector. Without Western technology, Iran cannot develop its oil and natural gas resources.

In fact, in 2011 Japan's crude imports from Iran fell 11.7 percent due to decreased demand and an effort to diversify supply. South Korea is importing record levels of crude from West Africa, especially Angolan and Nigerian grades, to begin replacing Iranian imports. The central banks of the United

## KEY POINTS

💡 A nuclear capable Iran would be in a position to further challenge American interests. America would be weaker and our influence would diminish as Iran's would soar.

💡 Sanctions are causing slower growth, higher unemployment and rampant inflation in Iran—putting pressure on the regime in Tehran.

Arab Emirates and Qatar told local lenders to cease financing trade with Iran. These nations had provided a key source of credit and payment settlement for Iran in the aftermath of U.N. and Western sanctions.

In addition, the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications (SWIFT), a major financial-services network, blocked 30 Iranian banks from receiving its services. SWIFT's decision—a result of U.S. pressure—virtually eliminates Iran's access to the international financial system.

### **More Sanctions Needed**

**C**learly the Iranian regime is more isolated than it has ever been. But sanctions have not yet compelled the regime to end its nuclear weapons pursuit.

We need tough, principled diplomacy coupled with devising and implementing the strongest possible sanctions. The United States must consistently sanction international firms that continue to work with designated Iranian entities, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or conduct international financial transactions with Iranian banks, including the Central Bank of Iran. We must also continue to press buyers of Iranian oil to look elsewhere for supplies.

Finally, the United States must immediately sanction any companies working in Iran's energy sector or providing Iran refined petroleum, and any shipping firms utilizing ports under the control of Iran's Revolutionary Guard.

President Obama has rightfully rejected the idea of containing a nuclear Iran, citing the dangers the country would pose to U.S. security. "Iran's leaders should understand that I do not have a policy of containment; I have a policy to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon," the president said. Our government must continue to reject any policy that seeks to contain a nuclear Iran.

At the same time, Washington must speak with one voice to persuade Iran that the United States will take all steps necessary—including a military option if needed—to prevent Iran from going nuclear. We must make it absolutely clear that we will not permit the Islamic Republic of Iran to acquire a nuclear weapons capability.

History shows us that when this Iranian regime was scared, it froze its nuclear program. When in 2003, there were American soldiers to Iran's east and west, in Iraq and Afghanistan, Iran, fearing that it would be next, stopped work on developing a nuclear weapon for two years. But when the mullahs' fear diminished, Iran resumed its nuclear activities and has been at it ever since.

The time necessary to prevent Iran from achieving nuclear weapons capability is quickly expiring. The United States and its international partners must continue their efforts to ensure that under no circumstances can Iran, a country that represses its own people, is the world's leading state sponsor of terror, and threatens Israel's very existence, acquire the capability to produce the most deadly weapons known to man.

*For more on Iran, including the most up-to-date memos, bill summaries and resources, visit [www.aipac.org/Iran](http://www.aipac.org/Iran).*

# Judaic Texts and Teachings

## Context

In our American judiciary system, there is a type of evidence called “character evidence,” generally offered by a defendant to show that they are a very, very good person, and would never have done the terrible thing that they are accused of doing. In essence, using character evidence is an attempt to put things in context. Don’t just look at what you see in the details of the case. Rather, look at the broader picture, because only when you see the whole picture can you make a proper judgment.

While lawyers can generally only use character evidence as an argument for the defense and never for the prosecution, in everyday life we use character evidence all the time.

Think about it this way: a person walks into your business looking for a job. The first thing that you do is ask for references. What have you done before? Who can I call? What in your past gives me an indication that you’ll be a good, reliable employee? All of these questions are an attempt to assess the applicant’s character and establish a context to answer a simple question: *How do I know that you will be an asset to my business?*

But what if someone is asking for forgiveness instead of a job? When someone wrongs us; when a person sins against me but then asks me for forgiveness, I am supposed to forgive. After all, we cannot expect God to absolve us for our sins if we won’t do the same for our fellow man. The Talmud (Shabbat 133b) explains that we actually glorify God when we emulate Divine attributes:

מה הוא חנון ורחום, אף אתה חנון ורחום.

*Just as God is compassionate and forgiving, so must you be compassionate and forgiving.*

But before we forgive, we look for character evidence. Does the offending person truly feel badly about what they did, or is their apology one of those “I’m sorry if anyone was hurt by my actions” apologies that we so often get from celebrities? More importantly, has that person changed? If they are asking for forgiveness for speaking slander about me immediately after telling me a juicy piece of gossip about someone else, how much have they changed? How authentic can their *teshuvah* really be?

The Talmud (Taanit 16a) states:

אמר רב אדא בר אהבה: אדם שיש בידו עבירה ומתוודה ואינו חוזר בה, למה הוא דומה? לאדם שתופס שרץ בידו, שאפילו טובל בכל מימות שבעולם—לא עלתה לו טבילה.

*Said Rav Ada bar Ahavah: A person who [continues to commit] a sin and confesses but does not repent, to what is he compared? To one who holds an impure animal in his hand—even if he immerses in all of the water in the world, his immersion cannot purify him.*

Our Sages called someone who repents while still committing the very sin they are repenting a *tovel v’sheretz b’yado*: one who immerses in the *mikveh* while holding an impure, defiled animal. How can the water purify if you’re still holding something impure? It cannot. *Teshuvah* doesn’t work if you’re still sinning. You cannot say that you’ve changed if you’re still behaving in a sinful manner.

In matters of judgment, context is critically important. God does not just look at what we say, but how we act in all areas of our life. Our actions truly speak louder than words.

As concerned Jews, we have watched as responsible governments have worked tirelessly to isolate Iran for its nuclear ambitions. And yet, despite these efforts, Iran continues to profess innocence. Iran claims its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes; it claims that there's no cause for alarm.

And yet, if we judge Iran the way that we would judge anyone else, by looking at the context, the evidence is damning. Iran is still the world's leading sponsor of international terrorism. Through its proxy armies of Hizballah and Hamas, as well as its insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Iranian regime is supporting terrorists carrying out daily attacks on American troops and Israeli civilians. Claiming that its nuclear research is for peaceful purposes in this context, and in light of International Atomic Energy Agency reports to the contrary, is laughable—or it would be, were it not so dangerous.

### Pushing Away and Drawing Close

In America, while we cherish our personal freedom, sometimes this sense of autonomy also leads to a feeling of disconnectedness. We mistakenly equate independence with a lack of mutual responsibility. We at times think that because our friend, family member or neighbor has the right to act as he pleases, we have no right to interject ourselves into the choices that they make.

Jewish tradition teaches us otherwise, instructing that not only must we say something about a fellow person's sinful behavior, but should we fail to do so, we too bear a measure of responsibility. In Leviticus (19:17) we read:

לא תשנא את אחיך בלבבך; הוכח תוכיח את עמיתך ולא תשא עליו חטא.

*You shall not hate thy brother in your heart; you shall surely rebuke your neighbor and not bear sin because of him.*

Commenting on this verse, Chizkuni makes the obvious connection between the notion of rebuke and the bearing of sin, explaining that “If you do not rebuke him, you will bear the burden of sin because of him.” Put simply, if I see someone sinning and I don't speak out, then I myself bear some level of responsibility for that sin as well.

And yet, to rebuke another individual seems so foreign to us in our day and age. Who am I—far from perfect as I am—to tell someone else how to act? Moreover, how do I do it? How do I convince someone to change in a manner that they might heed? What's the most effective way to help someone change? The Talmud (Masechet Sotah 47a) offers a suggestion:

תנו רבנן: “לעולם תהא שמאל דוחה וימין מתקרבת.”

*Our Rabbis taught: “A person should always push away the sinner with the left [generally the weaker] hand, but hold him close with the right [generally the stronger] hand.”*

This, in essence, is the key to proper rebuke. On the one hand, we push away. We tell the sinner that his behavior is not acceptable in our midst, that the type of activity they are engaging in does not belong in our community. At the same time, with our right hand—our stronger hand—we hold them tight, unwilling to let go. We clearly communicate the message that they belong in our community, and that we care deeply about them, and that our rebuke is an expression not of anger or malice, but of care and concern.

These lessons apply to us as individuals—as members of a close-knit community. Sometimes, *not* saying something is a sign of indifference. After all, if we really do care about our friend then we cannot watch them make destructive choices while remaining silent. Sometimes, the hardest thing to do is to intervene, rebuke or criticize. But these actions can also be the greatest signs that we care.

But what if the rebuke doesn't work? What if the sinner is simply not willing to listen? Do we cast her out of our community? The funny thing about Judaism is that it is a lifelong membership. We do not, and cannot, throw people out. What then do we do? If I am responsible for you, but you simply won't listen to reason, what can I do to coerce you to change?

Judaism enshrined a powerful tool for just such a situation. Should a person ignore community admonitions and requests, continuing to act in a sinful and dangerous manner even after a series of warnings, traditionally the *beit din* has the power to institute a *cherem*—a boycott on that individual—in order to isolate, sanction and coerce them to choose to change their ways. The Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 334:2) writes:

והמוחרם...לא נשכר ולא נשכרין לו.

*Regarding an individual who is placed in cherem...one may not hire him, nor may one be hired by him.*

Essentially, we isolate the sinner religiously, but perhaps even more importantly we isolate the sinner economically, until it just does not pay to keep acting against the wishes of the community. It is interesting to note that Maimonides (Laws of the Study of Torah, chapter 6) presents a list of 24 infractions for which the court imposes this ban on an individual. On that list (number seven) we find:

מי שיש ברשותו דבר המזיק, כגון כלב רע או סולם רעוע, מנדין אותו עד שיסיר היזקו.

*Someone who has in his possession a dangerous item, like a wild dog or a dilapidated ladder, we place a ban on him immediately until he removes the dangerous item.*

For several years now the international community has been working to convince Iran to abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons, recognizing that just as each of us is responsible for one-another, the

nations of the world bear mutual responsibility as well. We cannot just ignore Iran's nuclear program because in the end we will all suffer for Iran's devious behavior.

What then is the best way to coerce Iran to change course? It seems that the path we've already begun is the one that Judaism advocated many centuries ago. On the one hand, we must "push away the sinner with the left," using the sting of crippling sanctions and the pain that Iran is now feeling to convey that a nuclear Iran is simply not acceptable to the world. At the same time, we cannot forget the importance that we also act to "hold him close with the right." Iran must understand that our desire is to have it demonstrate responsible behavior and join the community of nations dedicated to world peace and prosperity.

### Appeasing the Aggressor

Our Sages divide the sins that we have committed over the past year into two distinct categories: sins that we have committed against God and sins we committed against our fellow man. In a way, the former are more easily addressed and corrected than the latter. This is because when we sin against God, in order to do *teshuvah* we need only regret the past, commit ourselves to improve and beseech God for forgiveness. Yet, when we sin against someone else and harm them in the process, feeling sorry isn't enough. The Mishnah (Yoma 8:9) teaches us:

...עבירות שבין אדם למקום יום הכפורים מכפר, עבירות שבין אדם לחבירו אין יום הכפורים מכפר עד שירצה חברו.

*...for sins between man and the Creator—Yom Kippur brings atonement, for sins between man and a fellow man—Yom Kippur cannot offer atonement, until he appeases his friend.*

I cannot just feel sorry for hurting someone else and expect atonement. If I sinned against another

individual, I must approach that person, express remorse and hope for their forgiveness.

Yet, what if I didn't sin against another person, but instead, someone else sinned against me? Should I initiate an attempt at reconciliation, or is it their problem if they don't ask for forgiveness? While tradition does not obligate a person to seek reconciliation from a person who has wronged him, the Talmud (Yoma 87a) relates two stories which point us in the right direction.

רבי זירא, כי הוה ליה מילתא בהדי איניש הוה חליף ותני לקמיה ומציא ליה, כי היכי דנתי וניפוק ליה מדעתיה.

*When R. Zera had any complaint against any man, he would repeatedly pass by him, showing himself to him, so that [the person] might come forth to [pacify] him.*

Rav Zera clearly felt that while he might not be obligated to confront the person who had wronged him, simply presenting himself before the individual would prompt the person to seek reconciliation.

The Talmud then relates a similar important story about asking for, and not receiving forgiveness:

רב הוה ליה מילתא בהדי ההוא טבחא. לא אתא לקמיה. במעלי יומא דכפורי אמר, "איהו איזיל אנא לפיוסי ליה." פגע ביה רב הונא אמר ליה, "להיכא קא אזיל מר?" אמר ליה, "לפיוסי לפלניא." אמר, "אזיל אבא למיקטל נפשא." אזל וקם עילויה. הוה יתיב וקא פלי רישא, דלי עיניה וחזייה. אמר ליה, "אבא את זיל! לית לי מילתא בהדרך!" בהדי דקא פלי רישא, אישתמיט גרמא ומחייה בקועיה וקטליה.

*Rab once had a complaint against a certain butcher [who had sinned against him], and when on the eve of the Day of Atonement he [the butcher] did not come to him, he said: "I shall go to him to pacify him." R. Huna met him and asked: "Where is the Master [you] going?" He said, "To pacify so-and-so." He thought: "Abba [Rab] is*

*about to cause someone's death." He went there and remained standing before him [the butcher], who was sitting and chopping an [animal's] head. [The butcher] raised his eyes and saw [Rab], and said: "You are Abba, go away! I will have nothing to do with you!" While he was chopping the head, a bone flew off, struck his throat, and killed him.*

What a strange story! Rashi explains that the butcher had sinned against the great sage Rab, yet on the eve of Yom Kippur the butcher had yet to appear before the rabbi to ask for forgiveness. Rab decided to approach the man himself, hoping that the man would recognize the error of his ways and apologize. However, instead of asking for forgiveness, the butcher continued to act disrespectfully towards the rabbi and suffered a tragic end.

Should one attempt to placate an aggressor? It seems clear that the answer is yes; we should all seek peace and if someone who wronged you cannot bring himself to approach you and ask for forgiveness, then it is worthwhile, even laudatory, to seek reconciliation on our own. But Rab did not realize that doing so carries a warning as well. Should the person who sinned remain so stubborn that they refuse to reconcile, even after being approached by the person who was wronged, that continued obstinacy and defiance brings with it great danger.

Today, the world finds itself confronted with an aggressor who acts dangerously against the interests of the international community. Using the funds from its oil sales, Iran promotes and sponsors terrorist groups, supports a violent and brutal Syrian regime, and most alarmingly, has been working feverishly to develop nuclear weapons. It is, without a doubt, an aggressor that threatens America and our interests around the world.

Like the great Talmudic scholar who tried to reconcile with the butcher, instead of responding to Iran with aggression the international community has sought ways to peaceably convince Iran to end

its nuclear weapons program. We have negotiated, we have enacted and enforced sanctions and we have sought to undermine their work. These efforts were not meant to convince Iran to apologize, but to simply change course for the benefit of its citizens and the world.

Yet, despite these efforts, Iran, like the butcher in our story, remains defiant. The regime must realize that the best way to help its people is to adhere to United Nations regulations and resolutions, and abandon its illicit nuclear program.

### Choosing Between Bad and Worse

At their core, the High Holidays are all about making choices. Have I made good decisions over the past year? Have we—as a family or community or even as a people? And do we choose, here and now, to continue to make those same choices? Or, do we need to make a different choice this year than last year, and do things in a different way?

On Rosh Hashanah we traditionally read Torah portions that portray events from the life of our patriarch Abraham. If we were to wonder: “Of all the travails that Abraham endured during his lifetime, which did he find the most difficult?” we might think that it was the commandment to slaughter his son, Isaac. Or, perhaps it’s plausible that the very first commandment issued to Abraham—to abandon his family and his homeland and start his life over at the age of 75—was the most challenging. Yet, according to the Midrash, the instruction Abraham found most difficult came not from God, but from his wife Sarah.

On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, we read chapter 21 of Genesis which records the birth of Isaac. Surprisingly, the majority of the portion does not deal with the joyous birth of a new child, but with the banishment of Abraham’s firstborn son, Ishmael. Sarah, seeing behavior from Ishmael that would hamper and perhaps even destroy Isaac’s spiritual growth and development (see Rashi on Genesis 21:9), makes an almost impossible demand on her husband:

גרש האמה הזאת ואת־בנה כי לא יירש בן־האמה הזאת עם־בני עם־יצחק.

*Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, with Isaac.*

Abraham did not agree. “And the thing was very grievous in Abraham’s eyes on account of his son” (21:11). The Midrash comments:

ומכל הרעות שבאו על אברהם היה קשה ורע בעיניו הדבר הזה מאד.

*From all of the difficulties that befell Abraham, this was the most difficult and painful in his eyes.*

We can readily understand Abraham’s point of view. Sarah saw Ishmael as a threat; Abraham saw him as a son. How can a father banish his son from his own home? Even if, as the Midrash notes, Ishmael engaged in terrible, destructive behavior, Ishmael was still Abraham’s son who he loved dearly.

Ultimately we read that God sided with Sarah, instructing Abraham to follow through on her demand and banish Ishmael from the home, “For in Isaac, shall seed be called to you” (21:12). The nation of Israel, the spiritual legacy of Abraham, would be built only through Isaac. Ishmael’s presence would endanger that future, so he had to be sent away.

In essence, Abraham worried about his family, while Sarah worried not just about the “here and now,” but also about the future and Abraham’s legacy. And yet, when we examine the choice that Abraham faced, we can recognize that neither option was good. He was forced to choose between a bad choice, sending Ishmael away, and the even worse option of allowing Ishmael to remain and negatively affect Isaac.

Wouldn’t things be great if life offered only one good choice against a bad one? It would make

things easy. Who in their right mind would choose a bad option over a good one? But, as we know so well, it's usually more complicated. A new job opportunity is almost always great. But sometimes we must choose between the excitement of that new job and the relationships and benefits the old job still offers.

And that's when we're lucky. Oftentimes, we're not choosing between two good options, but two bad ones. How many of us have had to choose whether to end a difficult relationship. There are no good choices, whether we're talking about ending a business, a marriage, or a friendship. In these cases, the challenge is to decide which choice is only bad, and which is worse.

This is the very type of decision that leaders of the international community may have to face in the not-so-distant future. If, despite repeated efforts to negotiate an end to Iran's illicit nuclear program, despite sanctions meant to convince Iran to change course and non-violent measures meant to slow the Islamic Republic's progress, Iran remains intransigent, force may be necessary to prevent the world's leading sponsor of terrorism from acquiring the most deadly weapons known to man.

That's not the preferred option. Yet, specifically because the consequences of a nuclear capable Iran are so dire to international peace, no options should be taken off the table.

# Quotable Quotes

“We are dealing with a regime which has hegemonic ambitions. The continuing effort by the Iranians to extend their influence and to use terror as a tool to do so extends to our hemisphere and all the way to East Asia. So the threat is real.”

– [Secretary of State Hillary Clinton,](#)  
[June 12, 2012](#)

“Nuclear ambition is pursued by Iran to dominate, to subjugate, to obliterate. A nuclear Iran is...a problem for America, and it’s a problem for the world...It’s profoundly irrational to suggest that the Ayatollahs think the way we do or share our values. They do not.”

– [Republican Presidential Nominee Mitt Romney,](#)  
[March 6, 2012](#)

“You’re talking about the most volatile region in the world. It will not be tolerable to a number of states in that region for Iran to have a nuclear weapon and them not to have a nuclear weapon. Iran is known to sponsor terrorist organizations, so the threat of proliferation becomes that much more severe.”

– [President Barack Obama,](#)  
[March 2, 2012](#)

“Iran sentenced hundreds of people to death and carried out hundreds of executions without due process. It cracked down on all forms of dissent, arresting and detaining activists, opposition leaders, lawyers, journalists, artists, and academics. It executed juveniles, tortured political prisoners and detained more journalists than nearly any country in the world.”

– [U.S. Department of State’s Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011](#)  
[May 24, 2012](#)

“As long as America exists, we will not rest... We must raise public hate against the despotic powers and create the environment for the destruction of America.”

[– Head of Iran’s Basij Paramilitary Force Mohammad Reza Naqdi, March 15, 2012](#)

“Iran presents the most significant regional threat to stability and security. Its reckless behavior and bellicose rhetoric have created a high potential for miscalculation. I anticipate that we will need more maritime missile defense, anti-fast attack craft capabilities, amphibious ships and mine-countermeasure capability, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets.”

[– Head of U.S. Central Command General James Mattis, March 6, 2012](#)

“Iran wants to destroy Israel and it is developing nuclear weapons to fulfill that goal... Against this malicious intention, leading world powers need to display determination and not weakness. They should not make any concessions to Iran. [The P5+1] need to make clear and unequivocal demands that Iran stop all of its nuclear enrichment activity, remove from Iran all the material that has been enriched until now and dismantle the underground nuclear facility near the city Qom.”

[– Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, May 19, 2011](#)

“We now have the opportunity—indeed, the duty—to confront Iranian leaders with the unambiguous choice never posed to the Nazis. The Iranian regime can either abandon its military nuclear program or face truly crippling sanctions and a credible military threat.”

[– Israeli Ambassador to the United States Michael Oren, April 19, 2012](#)

# Select Articles

## [Iran urged to halt executions for alcohol consumption](#)

*Los Angeles Times - Alexandra Sandels*

*June 29, 2012*

BEIRUT -- Human Rights Watch has urged Iran to scrap the death penalty for citizens convicted of drinking alcohol following reports that the nation's judiciary has upheld two such sentences.

The watchdog called on Iranian authorities to end capital punishment for "crimes that are not considered serious and exceptional under treaties that bind it."

The prosecutor general of Iran's Khorasan Razavi province confirmed that Iran's Supreme Court had upheld death sentences against two people convicted of consuming alcohol, the Iranian Students' News Agency recently reported.

The prosecutor was quoted as saying that the two persons "had consumed alcoholic drinks for the third time" and that officials were "in the process of making the necessary arrangements for the implementation of the execution order," according to Human Rights Watch.

"Sentencing Iranians to death for consuming alcohol is a scary signal of how little Iran's judges value Iranian lives and how casually they can make a decision to end them," the group's Middle East director, Sarah Leath Whitson, said in a news release. "Iran's courts apparently have nothing better to do than harass and even kill Iranians for engaging in dubious 'crimes.'"

In the Islamic Republic, drinking alcohol is considered a hadd offense, or a crime against God, and receives specific punishment under Islamic law. Usually, a person caught drinking alcohol gets 80 lashes, according to Human Rights Watch. But an article in the Iranian penal code stipulates that persons will be sentenced to death on their third conviction.

If alcohol violators repent following conviction of the "crime" based on their own confessions, a court is allowed to seek clemency from the nation's supreme leader or his representatives. But if a conviction was based on witness testimony, clemency is not applicable.

Despite the prospect of severe punishment, alarmed Iranian officials warn that alcohol use is increasing.

Earlier this month, Deputy Health Minister Alireza Mesdaghinia reportedly bemoaned "abnormal behaviors such as alcohol consumption" apparently being on the rise. Also this month, Iranian newspapers said that the amount of confiscated booze had gone up by 69% just in the last year.

## [Iran's Trail of Terror](#)

*Politico - Joel Brinkley*

*April 12, 2012*

When world leaders meet with Iranian leaders in Istanbul Friday, topic No. 1, of course, will be Iran's nuclear program. But a variety of present and former security officials, members of Congress and others say **the United**

States and other western nations are paying too little attention to a problem of near-equal gravity: Iran's open support of terror and criminal groups all over the world.

Not since the fall of the Soviet Union has any nation so aggressively pursued alliances with bad actors in so many places worldwide, acknowledged Reuel Marc Gerecht, a former CIA officer who focused primarily on Iran. "Their outreach is bolder than it used to be" and is "pretty disturbing" given "their proclivity for nefarious activity."

"They're fighting basically a shadow war every day," Marine Gen. James Mattis, head of the military's Central Command, told a Senate hearing last month. And now Iran is turning significant attention to the Western hemisphere – including the U.S.

"We know they are in Mexico, we know they are in Canada, we know they are in Central and South America," said Michael Braun, former chief of operations for the Drug Enforcement Administration. "Who's better poised to carry out operations on the homeland than they are?"

Late last month, Rep. Peter King, (R-N.Y.), chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, told Congress: "Most disturbingly, we learned" that "there are hundreds of Hezbollah operatives already inside this country" including some who were apprehended "with military training and combat experience in Lebanon."

In the early 1980s, Iran created Hezbollah, a terror group based in Lebanon, and now Tehran sends its operatives on covert missions worldwide.

Gerecht and others described King's claim as perhaps exaggerated. Asked about that, King said: "Committee staff conducted a months-long investigation on the threat posed by Iran and Hezbollah to the homeland, assessing it not only from what we heard in official briefings but leveraging extensive counterterrorism sources and contacts. In addition, during our hearing on this threat, witnesses testified that they agreed with this number."

Abbas Milani, head of Iranian studies at Stanford University, put it this way: "I have no doubt that they have operatives in this country. But would they actually attempt something in this country now? I don't think so" – partly because he and others believe Iran may not be competent to carry out a successful attack.

Milani and others shake their head as they look at the proposed meeting in Istanbul this week.

The Iranians "are extremely comfortable talking about their nuclear program," Gerecht said, and "the focus on the nuclear program has been so intense" that it allows them to escape discussion of their foreign misadventures and human rights abuses at home.

As Milani put it, "it's the wrong policy, the wrong politics, to talk only about the nuclear program. That's what they want. It plays to their strength."

Certainly most everyone knows that the U.S. and Europe classify Iran as a state sponsor of terror, supporting militant groups in Lebanon, Syria and Gaza. But what's not so widely appreciated is that Iran's operatives have been at work in Thailand, Malaysia, Gambia, Yemen, Sudan, India, Georgia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Azerbaijan and numerous other places – including Latin America. There, by many government accounts, Hezbollah is in bed with drug traffickers in Mexico and other places, earning money and making covert, criminal allies.

“The security challenges facing our nation by this threat are not being appropriately and adequately addressed,” Braun told Congress late last month.

“There are going to have to be some tough policy measures made, possibly at very high levels,” he added in an interview. “We’re very much behind the curve. It’s just a mess.”

Many in Congress agree.

“I’m very, very concerned about Iran’s influence in the Western Hemisphere,” said Rep. Jeff Duncan (R-S.C.) who co-sponsored legislation intended “to counter Iran’s growing presence and hostile activity in the Western Hemisphere,” the bill says. It passed the House Foreign Affairs Committee last month but appears to be hung up in the full House. Still, in an interview Duncan said: “I think the bill will get some traction. We need to focus our State Department on this. Iran has no historical ties to this region, so it really makes you raise your eyebrows.”

Last year, in fact, the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center published an essay by Norman Bailey of the University of Miami titled “What Are the Persians Doing Over Here?” It says “this interest in the hemisphere represents the first time in the 5,000-year history of Persia” that “such interest has been demonstrated.”

At a press briefing, acting Assistant Secretary of State Michael Hammer said “we at the State Department follow” Iran’s activities in Latin America “very closely.”

Gerecht and Milani agree with these concerns, but they also offer some notes of caution. Right now, Iran remains the favorite boogeyman for American government officials. There’s no political cost for standing up to make florid accusations about the state.

“It’s a free-for-all,” said Milani, an Iranian-American who is spiteful of the current regime. “You can say whatever you want about Iran. But irresponsible rhetoric does help those guys,” solidifying their political positions at home.

But he and Gerecht point to something most people don’t talk about: Iran’s foreign operatives are generally incompetent. We know about their recent operations in Azerbaijan, Thailand, Yemen, India, Gambia and South Africa because in every case they were caught.

For example, last year the U.S. Treasury Department sanctioned the Lebanese Canadian Bank in Beirut for laundering “hundreds of millions of dollars” that Hezbollah had earned in the Latin America drug trade, the department said. And late last month, Treasury sanctioned an Iranian airline and a Nigerian trading company for cooperatively attempting to ship weapons to Syria.

“The regime, since its earliest days, has been on a mission,” Gerecht said. “They really do see a clash of civilizations, and they see themselves as the cutting edge for one side, the Muslim side. And for them, the first cut for dividing the world is: ‘Are you opposed to the United States? Are you the enemy of the U.S.?’ If so, the Iranians will look upon you fondly.”

But “the truth is,” he added, “they’re pretty sloppy about what they do. They probably have plans, but execution would probably be problematic.”

Last fall, the Justice Department accused Iran of plotting to murder Saudi Arabia's ambassador in Washington, using paid assassins from a Mexican drug cartel. The assertion was greeted with healthy skepticism in Washington, but then most of the critics were probably not fully aware of Hezbollah's rich connections to Mexican drug traffickers.

"There's not just strong intelligence behind this, but also judicial evidence that would stand up in any court," Braun asserted.

But once again, we know about the operation because the plotters were caught in the act.

One big problem for Iran, Gerecht noted, is how little its security officers actually understand the West. In the regime's early years, many officials had already spent time in the U.S. or Europe, going to college or serving in the embassy. But most of those people have retired, and now "fewer and fewer of the elite actually have any firsthand knowledge of the West," Gerecht said. "They can quite easily completely misjudge situations."

Nonetheless, numerous present and former government officials are warning that Iran may be planning an attack on America.

Early this year, James Clapper, director of National Intelligence, told the Senate Intelligence Committee that Iranians "are now more willing to conduct an attack in the United States in response to real or perceived U.S. actions that threaten the regime." Bailey's essay on the Army Combined Arms Center website opined that Iran's principal reason for building its presence in Latin America "is to retaliate against the U.S. if attacked."

Braun said, "if they decide to hit us, they don't need a nuclear weapon. They could hit two or three shopping malls, and they will shut retail sales down. That and a few car bombs."

"You know," said Gerecht, "they're not Darth Vader; they do make a lot of mistakes. But they define themselves by the great unending battle with the United States. They can direct aid to militants who want to blow themselves up — and blow up Americans."

"That's a real concern we shouldn't belittle."

*Joel Brinkley, a professor of journalism at Stanford University, is a Pulitzer Prize-winning former foreign correspondent for The New York Times.*

### **Sanctions squeeze forces Iran to cut oilfield flow**

*Reuters - Peg Mackey and Alex Lawler*

*July 10, 2012*

LONDON (Reuters) - Tough Western sanctions are forcing Iran to take drastic action and shut off wells at its vast oilfields, reducing production to levels last seen more than two decades ago and costing Tehran billions in lost revenues.

Iran struggled to sell its oil in the run-up to the European Union ban on July 1, yet it managed to sustain oilfield flows at lofty rates above 3 million barrels per day (bpd) by stashing unwanted barrels in tanks on land and on ships in the Gulf.

But oil sales have now slumped to half the rate of last year and storage is running out. As a last resort, Tehran is carrying out “enforced” maintenance at its ageing reservoirs, say Iranian and Western oil sources, dropping output below 3 million bpd.

It’s a step that could make Tehran look as if it is caving in to the West and, in any case, leaves it trailing former rival Iraq in the ranks of the world’s top oil producers. And if a big volume of oil is closed down, it will be difficult to bring it back online when it’s needed, say Western oil experts.

“We’re now in a situation where we are being forced to reduce production - so we will prolong the rehabilitation of our oilfields,” said an Iranian oil source, who requested anonymity due to the sensitivity of the information.

“But it’s a mistake to think this will make us put our hands up. Iran will not surrender.”

Nor will Iran say very much, if anything. Oil sales began to slow in March due to the rigorous restraints imposed by the United States and European Union, but Iran only conceded in June that exports had fallen significantly.

As for lower production, an inevitable result of a sustained slowdown in exports, the Islamic Republic has gone further into lock-down mode - making it exceedingly difficult to obtain precise information.

“In operations - upstream or downstream - maintenance is not something unexpected,” said an Iranian oil official, who insisted on anonymity. “It is very normal to have some maintenance.”

He declined to comment on whether Iran had taken the opportunity to work-over its oilfields with exports now running about 1 million bpd below last year.

Western oil experts reckon tight storage and plunging oil sales may have forced Tehran to turn down the oilfield taps by at least several hundred thousand barrels a day.

“I would guess that (oilfield) shut-ins will be more than 25 percent - if not already, then very soon,” said a European oil executive whose company has invested in Iran.

Adding a further layer of complexity, there are changing faces among the top brass at the National Iranian Oil Co. (NIOC). On the job for just a year, Mohsen Qamsari, head of international affairs, has just been replaced by Mohammad Ali Khatibi, Tehran’s representative on OPEC’s governing board.

“The pressure is definitely on, but it’s difficult to know the details,” said a senior Western oil executive. “What is clear is that the situation is extremely complicated and delicate and things are not being said in public.”

## EXPORTS FALL

Oil shipments have declined steadily as buyers cut imports to comply with U.S. and European Union sanctions imposed due to concerns the country is attempting to build a nuclear bomb. Iran says its nuclear activities are peaceful.

Last month, Iran acknowledged that exports had fallen sharply - down 20-30 percent from normal volumes of 2.2 million barrels daily.

A National Iranian Oil Company official, Mohammad Ali Emadi, put the decrease down to oilfield maintenance and not sanctions imposed on Iran's nuclear program.

When pressed for further details on the oilfield overhauls, three senior Iranian officials declined to comment. There is no end of speculation among Western executives and policy-makers.

"I have heard that some fields are shut in and just by looking at the numbers, I believe that's correct. I don't think they have much more space to put oil," said an industry source who tracks Iranian production and exports.

"But I am sure they don't want to admit it or give away any ideas on which fields."

In April, shipping sources said Iran had been forced to deploy more than half its fleet to store oil at anchorage in the Gulf, equating to 33 million barrels. The country is expected to store at least a further 8.3 million barrels this month.

Those who track the oil shipments of Iran and other members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries say there is precious little available storage in tanks onshore.

"It's full up. It got full quite quickly before the floating storage started getting filled up," said the industry source.

#### LONG-TERM DAMAGE?

While oil industry experts say that shutting in production is beneficial to Iran's hard-worn reservoirs, a prolonged closure of high volumes would not be desirable.

"The more production is shut in, the harder and longer it is to bring back production when it is needed," said Peter Wells of geological consultancy Neftekh Petroleum.

Iranian engineers have been battling for years to get the best out of Iran's oilfields, for decades deprived of easy access to cutting-edge technology designed to maximize flows due to successive rounds of U.S. sanctions.

Output from Iran's ageing fields has slumped from 3.9 million bpd in 2005, according to OPEC, as recovery rates are relatively low due to Western restrictions on technology transfers needed to counter production declines or tap trickier discoveries offshore.

Iran is meanwhile dipping deep into savings to fund investment in its energy industry, while increasing its refining capacity for the home market, reporting giant new oil or gas finds, and even touting investment in renewable energy as a possible solution to dependence on oil.

On July 3 - two days after the EU embargo on Iranian oil took effect - Oil Minister Rostam Qasemi signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for his ministry to tap the National Development Fund, a sovereign wealth fund largely filled with oil revenues accumulated in better days, for \$14 billion.

The fund, now valued at around \$35 billion, is the successor of a fund set up in 1999, when oil was below \$10 per barrel, to save money for a rainy day.

Qasemi said the move “indicates that the country has enough financial resources to fund projects”. The ministry will also issue bonds to raise cash.

The government could be in for a long haul.

“There is an increasing desperation,” said a Western oil executive. “It seems very unlikely they will get any relief from sanctions any time soon.”

*Additional reporting by Daniel Fineren in Dubai; Editing by Peter Graff*

### **Faulty assumptions on Iran**

*The Washington Times - Peter Huessy*

*April 20, 2012*

Has the endgame on the Iranian nuclear program finally arrived? Is a deal in the cards? A broad swath of the foreign-policy cognoscenti, including Newsweek’s Fareed Zakaria, the National Interest’s Paul Pillar, The Washington Post’s Walter Pincus, Esquire’s Richard Barnett and a host of others, seems to think so. They are optimistic about the current round of negotiations between Iran and the West and confident that - even if negotiations should somehow break down - Iran will not, indeed cannot, pose a real threat to the United States.

The conventional wisdom underpinning this new consensus, being played out on the editorial pages of the nation’s leading newspapers and journals, is based on seven very shaky pillars.

One, that Iran would never use a nuclear weapon, even if it possessed one. Two, that Iran is simply trying to defend itself from American bullying and attempts at regime change. Third, that the use of a nuclear device by any foreign nation (including Iran) would be detected easily. Fourth, that Iran’s ballistic missiles similarly are simply a deterrent needed in a bad neighborhood, and their use would be readily attributed to Tehran. Fifth, should Iran decide to build a nuclear warhead, U.S. intelligence will readily detect such a move. Sixth, there are no real options open for the United States and its allies other than “diplomacy.” And seventh, a U.S. policy of prudent deterrence combined with enforcement of the terms of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) are all that are needed to keep Iran’s pursuit of nuclear energy a peaceful endeavor.

Are these points true? Is talk of an Iranian nuclear threat simply hype by those who allegedly are seeking to “fight another war,” as one newly published assessment claims? To understand why the new conventional wisdom is so profoundly wrong, it’s useful to take these arguments one by one.

First, Iran’s possession of a nuclear weapon would be anything but peaceful. Regime officials have called repeatedly for the annihilation of Israel and for a “world without” the United States. Its leaders have actively advocated a new world order and sought to harness terrorist proxies to remake the Middle East in its radical image. A nuclear capability would greatly expand the ability of Iran’s regime to do so.

Second, Iran isn’t simply pursuing a defensive strategy. As its meddling in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere makes all too clear, Iran is actively attempting to tilt regional politics in its favor and away from the United States. A nuclear-armed Iran surely would expand those efforts, to our great detriment.

Third, a nuclear attack wouldn’t necessarily be readily attributable to Iran. While we have made significant progress in the science of “nuclear forensics” in recent years, we still do not have the ability to accurately

detect the origin of a nuclear explosion. Other modes of attack - such as an electromagnetic pulse blast triggered by Iran - would be even harder to detect because it would not leave any debris for analysis.

Fourth, history tells us that Iran's ballistic missiles are a tool of hegemony rather than defense. They are instruments of terror and blackmail, tens of thousands of which have been transferred to proxies such as Hamas and Hezbollah. They also are a growing threat to the United States and its allies.

Fifth, U.S. intelligence suffers from serious - and systemic - gaps. Here, the history bears repeating. Since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. intelligence community has failed to detect and predict a string of key strategic developments, from North Korea's ballistic missile tests in the late 1990s to Syria's covert development of a nuclear program late last decade. Iran promises to be no different; Western nations still possess an incomplete picture of Iran's nuclear development. In fact, major elements of the Iranian nuclear program were discovered not by Western intelligence sources but by Iranian dissidents who then shared the information with the West.

Sixth, diplomacy, despite its obvious appeal, lacks a logical endgame. What would such a deal look like? How would it contain Iran's menace? The Iranian regime has proved itself at war with the West, and negotiations are likely to delay rather than solve difficult questions about how Iran can and should be stopped. Indeed, the current negotiations under way with the Iranian regime are nothing if not a nuclear kabuki dance, buying Iran's ayatollahs much-needed time to achieve their aim of nuclearization.

Finally, yes, deterrence often works. But it often does not. We had a mutual-assured-destruction (MAD) relationship with the Soviets. But the Cold War ended because President Reagan adopted a policy of collapsing the Soviet regime, not because he passively accepted perpetual Soviet nuclear blackmail. The same holds true with regard to Iran. Despite international pressure, the Iranian regime is not deterred from attacking Americans in Afghanistan. It was not deterred from attacking us in Iraq over the past decade or in Beirut in the 1980s. These incidents and many others occurred when Iran was still far from the nuclear threshold. How, then, is an Iranian regime emboldened by nuclear acquisition likely to behave?

Without question, the choices confronting the United States and its allies in dealing with Iran are difficult. But blithely relying on conventional wisdom about containment, deterrence and diplomacy in dealing with the Iranian regime doesn't make us any safer. In fact, it may very well do the opposite.

*Peter Huessy is senior fellow in national security affairs at the American Foreign Policy Council.*

## | Activism Matters

# Background

**Educating members of Congress about the U.S.-Israel relationship is critical to supporting America’s strongest ally in the Middle East, Israel. The high congressional turnover and shifting demographics of the past several years means that we in the American Jewish community must begin the education process anew with many of our representatives. Coupled with increased efforts to delegitimize the state of Israel, our work to build relationships with America’s elected officials, policy makers and opinion leaders is needed now more than ever.**

## Pro-Israel Activism Matters

**B**ecause we in the Jewish community care so deeply about the safety and security of the state of Israel, and because of our ability as Americans to participate in the political process, we have a special opportunity and responsibility to educate elected officials, policy makers and opinion leaders; to help them better understand the U.S.-Israel relationship. In fact, it is imperative that individuals who care about the U.S.-Israel relationship get involved in pro-Israel political activism.

Although becoming a political activist may feel intimidating, our involvement is essential. Most members of Congress are not thinking about the safety and security of the Jewish state. They get sent to Washington based on their views about social and economic policy. Because foreign policy, particularly issues relating to Israel, is not necessarily part of their thought process, it is up to us to focus their attention on this crucial issue.

We must be the ones to remind members of Congress that U.S. support for Israel is not just an act of friendship; it is an act of national self-interest, a key component of our broader efforts to

secure the region and a wider world. And, while Congress has traditionally been very supportive of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship, that support does not occur in a vacuum. It requires the pro-Israel community—individuals who care about the future of America and the Jewish state—to constantly educate policy makers about the issues that move us. Active involvement in pro-Israel politics is the most effective way that we can advocate for something we already care so deeply about.

This process must be ongoing because in Washington, D.C., battles never stay won. Each new vote that affects Israel, each new piece of legislation relating to Israel that Congress approves, requires pro-Israel activists to reach out to members of Congress and explain the significance. This is more important than ever because of recent trends affecting congressional turnover, shifting populations and demographics, and diffuse political concerns.

## Congressional Turnover and Shifting Demographics

**I**n just the last two congressional elections nearly one-third of the House of Representatives and nearly one-third of the Senate have turned over. Due to redistricting and retirements this cycle, we already know that there will be at least 71 new members of Congress (11 Senators and 60 members of the House) next year.

This high turnover rate presents a huge educational challenge for the pro-Israel community, as many of the members of Congress with whom we have worked hard to establish strong relationships may no longer be the decision makers next year.

What’s more, most freshmen enter Congress with little or no background in foreign affairs or a deep understanding of the U.S.-Israel relationship. More pro-Israel activists are essential to begin the

process of educating new members of Congress. And, as new representatives come to Washington there is also an opportunity for new pro-Israel supporters to get involved in the political process.

In addition to congressional turnover, increased involvement in pro-Israel activism is needed because of shifting populations and demographics. Seventy years ago, the [Jewish community](#) comprised nearly four percent of the U.S. population. Today, we stand at just over two percent of the nation's population. According to projections, seventy years from now the Jewish community will be less than one percent of the American population.

Moreover, members of Congress increasingly live where the Jewish community does not and the Jewish community lives where there are [fewer and fewer members of Congress](#). For example, North Carolina, with a Jewish population of 30,000, has more members of Congress than New Jersey with a Jewish population of 500,000. The state of Washington, with a Jewish population of 45,000, has more congressional districts than Massachusetts with a Jewish population of 280,000.

Thus, more people need to get involved in pro-Israel activism, especially people who do not live in areas with a traditionally large Jewish population. If we only pay attention to members of Congress from the large Jewish metropolises,

we will be educating an increasingly smaller number of lawmakers.

This is especially true because 40 percent of the Jewish population in America currently lives in the northeast, an area that contains only 19 percent of the general population. As our community demographics change we must expand the base of pro-Israel activism or risk losing our influence. If the same proportion of our community continues to be involved we will fall behind.

Furthermore, Israel and foreign policy are not at the forefront of American political concern. When voters are asked about the most important issues facing our nation, they are focused on jobs and the economy. In a survey from January 2012 in [The New York Times](#), when asked the most important issue facing our country, 56 percent of the people polled claimed the most important issue was the economy, 15 percent believed it was the federal deficit, 14 percent said healthcare, 5 percent said illegal immigration and 3 percent said abortion. Foreign policy or Israel did not even make the cut.

Therefore, if those of us who care about the issues affecting the U.S.-Israel relationship aren't discussing these issues with members of Congress, who will?

## KEY POINTS

- 💡 Most members of Congress are not focused on foreign policy. It is up to pro-Israel activists to focus their attention on this crucial issue.
- 💡 High congressional turnover rates present a huge educational challenge for the pro-Israel community. Many of the members of Congress with whom we have worked hard to establish strong relationships may no longer be the decision makers next year.

## Delegitimization of Israel

**B**eyond changing demographic trends and other political concerns, the pro-Israel community must increase its involvement in political activism to counter the international campaign to delegitimize the Jewish state. Israel is fighting against slander and lies that are part of an effort to undermine the country's right to exist. From world capitals to university campuses to so-called human rights organizations, Israel is branded with labels usually reserved for the world's worst regimes. Specifically because this campaign is aimed at spreading misinformation, we must be vigilant.

The most effective way to fight the delegitimization campaign is to educate our elected officials and encourage them to stand up for Israel's fair treatment in international bodies, such as the United Nations. The delegitimization movement at the world body is among the strongest, most organized and potentially most impactful. The U.N. has a shameful history of unfair and unwarranted criticisms and condemnations of Israel, and the overall culture and structure of the organization remains deeply hostile to the Jewish state.

The U.N. has passed more resolutions aimed at isolating Israel than resolutions condemning genocide, warfare, and human rights violations throughout the world. Over the past decade, Israel has been included negatively in U.N. resolutions 170 times, a staggering number compared to North Korea's eight times. Additionally, Israel has been subject to 50 resolutions condemning alleged human rights abuses. Sudan—responsible for the tragedy of Darfur—has only had five.

Despite the country's commitment to democracy and peace, due to the campaign of delegitimization of Israel the world seems to believe the lies. David Horowitz, a longtime, well known Israeli journalist and recent founder of a new online publication, The Times of Israel, [noted](#) that delegitimization of Israel is not a potpourri of statements that defame the Jewish state. Rather, it is a clear strategy that represents a significant threat to Israel's well-

being. Those who have been unsuccessful in bringing an end to Israel's physical existence now seek to mortally wound its effective existence.

Thankfully, the United States' resolve has protected Israel from even worse treatment at the United Nations. Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N., recently [laid out](#) a laundry list of ways that the U.S. has defended Israel at the world body, including working to defeat the Palestinian U.N. membership bid outside negotiations with Israel, defeating a resolution in 2010 at the International Atomic Energy Agency General Conference that singled out Israel's nuclear program for rebuke, and fighting the biased structure of the Human Rights Council.

We must remember that the United States' role in the international community makes it the best guarantor of Israel's fair treatment. And the best way that we can help ensure that fair treatment is by educating members of Congress about the impact they can have.

## Getting Involved

**G**iven the challenges to ensuring strong continuing support for Israel's safety and security, each of us must do our part to get involved. Unfortunately, we don't always know how to act. Many people get angry, sad or upset about the media portrayal of the Jewish state, and can feel overwhelmed by the political process.

However we cannot just sit here and bear witness to the threats facing Israel. As Americans, we have countless opportunities to truly impact our political leaders and gain their support for the state of Israel. We must [get involved](#) in the political process. If we forget about the power and influence that we can have, or if we let our representatives who speak on our behalf believe that Israel is not of the utmost importance, then we compromise our voices as American Jews.

Regardless of the size of our community, we must get involved in the political process. Big Jewish communities can generate mass numbers and a large pro-Israel voice to support local

## KEY POINTS

💡 As the demographics of the American Jewish community change we must expand the base of pro-Israel activism or risk losing our influence.

💡 Now is the time to use our skills, resources and passion to exercise our first amendment rights as Americans and help keep Israel safe.

representatives. Small Jewish communities are where our synagogues might be the only voice for pro-Israel activism in our congressional districts.

We must become active in political campaigns so that we can help candidates understand the importance of Israel to American interests and see the growing challenges facing Israel. We must meet and stay in touch with our local members of Congress. We must organize regular office visits to build new relationships and strengthen our pre-existing ones. Ultimately, our representatives look to us to offer up-to-date and reliable information to share with them and their staffs.

We must remind our representatives that there is no better way to understand the challenges facing the state of Israel than to see them in person. We must encourage them and their staffs to travel to Israel and help them find ways to get there. After their trips, there are opportunities to invite the representatives to speak about their experiences here in the synagogue and in the community.

And finally, we must speak up for Israel; we must never let the delegitimization of Israel go unchallenged—we must write letters to the editors and call our representatives. As a synagogue we have numerous opportunities. From a mission to Washington, D.C. to lobby to participating in synagogue letter writing campaigns to representatives to distributing educational information on our synagogue's website or in the bulletins.

We should always be aware that we are reminding our representatives of ways that we can make sure

that our most reliable ally in the Middle East, Israel, is safe and secure—ultimately helping strengthen our borders and our country. Members of Congress are receptive and appreciative of the information that you're sharing with them. And they will come back to you, their Jewish constituents, as a resource in the future.

As individual American Jews, we care about Israel. But, when we become politically active as a group, our voices are more powerful because we've banded together. Now is the time to use our skills, resources and passion for the Jewish state to exercise our first amendment rights as Americans to lobby the government on an issue that is incredibly important to Jews all over the world.

And pro-Israel activism gets results. It ensures that legislative initiatives relevant to the U.S.-Israel relationship have the full support of Congress, from Israel's security assistance to joint U.S.-Israeli programs in fields such as energy and missile defense.

Given the results we achieve when we get involved, each of us should redouble our commitment to be active in the political process and do our part to secure the U.S.-Israel relationship.

*For more on how to get involved in the political process visit [www.aipac.org/TakeAction](http://www.aipac.org/TakeAction).*

# Judaic Texts and Teachings

## All Hands on Deck

As we sit here in synagogue on Rosh Hashanah, we tend to think of this solemn time as personal and individual. What have I done? How have I acted? In what ways will I change? Yet, while individual growth is certainly central, Judaism emphasizes the importance of how we affect those around us as well.

Commenting on the verse, “And they shall stumble upon one-another” (Leviticus 26:37), the Midrash (Sifra) states:

אינו אומר איש באחיו אלא איש בעון אחיו מלמד שכל ישראל ערבים זה בזה.

*It does not just [mean to say that one stumbles] upon his brother. Rather, a man [stumbles] on the sin of his fellow man. From this we learn that all of Israel is responsible for one-another.*

Empirically, we know this to be true. If someone here today acts inappropriately, sinfully, or even dangerously, that person doesn’t just affect themselves. That person affects their family—their spouse and children. Their friends suffer. Ultimately, the entire community suffers from their behavior.

The Midrash offers a powerful image to illustrate the level of responsibility we have for each other:

שכל ישראל נקראו נפש אחת...ואם חטא אחד מהם—כולם ערבים זה בזה. למה הדבר דומה? לבני אדם שהיו באין בספינה, נטל אחד מקדה והתחיל קודח תחתיו. אמרו לו: שוטה! אתה קודח תחתך, והמים נכנסין וכולך אבודין!

*For all of Israel are called a single soul...and if one of them sins—they are all responsible for one-another. To what is this comparable? It is like a group of people sitting in a boat. One of them takes*

*a drill and begins to drill under [his seat]. They said to him: Fool! You might be drilling under your own place, but the water will enter [the boat] and we will all be lost!*

When my friend sins, not only does he stumble, but we all fall together with him. Therefore, I cannot simply watch my friend fall apart, whether materially or spiritually. I must take action. I must bear the burden of lifting him up as well.

And, what is true in the negative is equally true in the positive. When my friend performs a *mitzvah*, he of course raises himself spiritually, personally and morally. But he also affects those around him. Through his individual action he elevates his entire community.

We find a very clear example of this phenomenon of positive mutual responsibility in the laws of blessings. As we know, before we perform many commandments we recite a *brachah*. Before we shake a *lulav* and *etrog*, before we light Shabbat candles, we recite a blessing. The Talmud notes that hearing the sound of the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah, which is also a *mitzvah*, requires a blessing as well. Yet, we do not each recite the blessing upon hearing the sound of the *shofar* individually. Rather, the *ba'al tokea*—the person who blows the *shofar*—recites the blessing for all of us collectively. After all, if he is reciting it for himself, he can include me in his blessing at the same time.

Here the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 29a) adds an additional detail to this discussion:

תני אהבה בריה דר' זירא: כל הברכות כולן, אף על פי שיצא מוציא.

*Taught Ahava the brother of Rabbi Zeira: For all of the blessings [on the performance of*

*commandments] even though one has already fulfilled his own obligation, he can recite the blessing on behalf of others.*

Yet, this only begs the further question: how can I recite a blessing for a commandment that I've already performed? If I have already heard the *shofar* this morning, I am not commanded to hear it twice. I've already heard it! How then can I bless God for fulfilling this commandment? Rashi answers this question with a simple comment, explaining:

שהרי כל ישראל ערבים זה בזה למצות.

*For all of Israel is responsible for one another in the fulfillment of mitzvot.*

As we contemplate the past year, and commit ourselves to a new year of promise and growth, perhaps this should be the source of our commitment for the coming year. What *mitzvah* will I share? What is my passion? What good works do I perform that bring me a sense not only of joy and accomplishment, but a feeling that I am doing something important spiritually, and on behalf of the Jewish people?

Many of us here today work hard to support the Jewish people by promoting America's strong relationship with Israel. That work is wonderful. It is critical, and necessary, and literally life-saving. Yet, too often, the people who do the most critical work keep their *mitzvot* to themselves. But tradition teaches us that we are responsible for each other's good works. We can and must share, and we must spread the *mitzvot* that we do and encourage those around us to get involved as well.

There is much to be done. Anyone active in the pro-Israel community knows that there are many, many holes in the boat. From the anti-Israel sentiment in the United Nations, to the ongoing work to encourage our elected officials to keep the U.S.-Israel relationship strong, to simply writing letters to the local paper when bias creeps into the media—the boat is by no means secure.

It really is all hands on deck. And the people of Israel—those here and especially those living in the Jewish state—are counting on us to answer the call.

## **The Fast of Inaction**

We are all familiar with the fast that concludes the Ten Days of Repentance, Yom Kippur. But, we may not be as familiar with another minor fast that falls during the Ten Days of Repentance called the Fast of Gedaliah. What is the Fast of Gedaliah and why do we observe it? Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov writes in his "Book of the Heritage" (vol. 1, pp. 63-64):

*When the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, he killed or exiled most of its inhabitants and appointed Gedaliah, son of Achikam as governor of the now-Babylonian province of Judah. Many Jews who had fled to Moab, Ammon, Edom, and other neighboring lands returned to Judah, tended the vineyards again, and enjoyed a new respite after their earlier suffering. The King of Ammon, however—hostile and envious of the Judean remnant—sent a Judean, Yishmael Ben Netaniah, to assassinate Gedaliah. In the seventh month (Tishrei) of 582/1 BCE (some four to five years following the destruction of the Temple), a group of Jews led by Yishmael came to Gedaliah in the town of Mitzpa and was received cordially. Gedaliah had been warned of his guest's murderous intent, but refused to believe his informants, having the belief that their report was mere slander. Yishmael murdered Gedaliah, together with most of the Jews who had joined him and many Babylonians whom the Babylonian King had left with Gedaliah. The remaining Jews, fearing the vengeance of the Babylonian King (seeing as his chosen ruler, Gedaliah, had been killed by a Jew) fled to Egypt. The surviving remnant of Jews was therefore dispersed and the land remained desolate. In remembrance of these tribulations, the Jewish sages instituted the "Fast of the Seventh" (see Zechariah 8:19) on the day of Gedaliah's assassination in the seventh month...*

Why did the Sages institute a day of fasting specifically on this day? According to Rabbi Kitov:

*Concerning this fast day, the Rabbis have said that its aim is to establish that the death [i.e. murder] of the righteous is likened to the burning of the House of God. Just as they ordained a fast upon the destruction of the Jewish Temple, likewise they ordained a fast upon the death of Gedaliah.*

Still, there have been numerous calamities over the centuries of Jewish suffering. As tragic as it may be, if we searched through our history hard enough, we could probably find a righteous Jew murdered on most days throughout the year. Why did they institute a fast day to commemorate this specific event, and what lessons must we derive from this historic tragedy?

The story of Gedaliah is described in detail in the book of Jeremiah (40:15-16). There we read that while Gedaliah was warned about the plot to assassinate him, he refused to accept that Yishmael could or would kill him. Moreover, he had the opportunity to secretly send an emissary to eliminate his would-be assassin, and he refused to do so.

ויוחנן בן-קרח אמר אל-גדליהו בסתר במצפה לאמר, "אלכה נא ואכה את-ישמעאל בן-נתניה, ואיש, לא ידע; למה יככה נפש, ונפצו כל-יהודה הנקבצים אליך, ואבדה, שארית יהודה?" טז ויאמר גדליהו בן-אחיקם אל-יוחנן בן-קרח, "אל-תעש (תעשה) את-הדבר הזה: כי-שקר אתה דבר, אל-ישמעאל."

*Then Johanan the son of Kareah spoke to Gedaliah in Mizpah secretly, saying: "Let me go please and I will slay Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no man shall know it; why should he take your life, that all the Jews that are gathered to you should be scattered, and the remnant of Judah perish?" But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said unto Johanan the son of Kareah: "You shall not do this thing; for you speak falsely of Ishmael."*

Gedaliah was warned what would happen and yet he did nothing. He welcomed the assassin together

with 10 other men into his home without taking any precautions to at least protect himself. It is a tragedy that not only could have been avoided, but should have been if only Gedaliah had taken the necessary action. It is wonderful to have a positive outlook and to see the best in every situation, but there is a difference between seeing the good and failing to recognize reality and dealing with it in the proper, appropriate manner.

This perhaps is why the Sages instituted a day of fasting to commemorate the death of Gedaliah specifically during the Ten Days of Repentance. On Rosh Hashanah we eat, drink and celebrate together. It is not a somber holiday in any sense. And yet, we know that Rosh Hashanah is also a time of judgment, and that we have 10 days to get our house in order. But too many of us take Gedaliah's perspective: "Don't worry! It will be all right! There's nothing to worry about," when in reality, nothing could be farther from the truth. The Fast of Gedaliah is a wakeup call; a call to attention and action, to remind us of the great peril in failing to recognize danger when it rears its head.

This year, possibly more than any other in recent memory, the Fast of Gedaliah must also be a wakeup call for every Jew concerned about the welfare of Israel. We know the threats from Iran. We recognize the new dynamics in Egypt. We see the changing landscape in Syria.

This year, the Jewish people cannot afford to hope for the best. Israel has taken, and will continue to take, precautions to defend its citizens from attack, including the deployment of missile defense systems developed together with the United States. And yet, those systems are not foolproof. Even the best missile defense shields cannot guarantee 100 percent accuracy.

Gedaliah hoped for the best, and in doing so allowed those who wished to destroy him to succeed. We cannot make the same mistake. Rather, we must do our part to ensure that our elected officials understand the severity of the situation, and act accordingly. Because we cannot

allow another tragedy for which we will need to institute yet another day of fasting.

## Hearing the Call

On the afternoon of Yom Kippur we traditionally read the story of Jonah and his mission to warn the people of Nineveh of their impending destruction should they fail to repent and abandon their immoral behavior. What message did our Sages wish to convey to us in choosing this text as the final reading as the afternoon of the holiest day of the year fades into darkness?

Obviously, the story conveys the power of repentance; a moment of remorse saves an entire city from devastation. But then we would only need to read the final chapter or perhaps another selection entirely. Why read about Jonah's ordeal as he attempted to evade the command to warn the people of Nineveh?

As we read in the text, when God appeared to Jonah at the outset of our story to send him on the mission, Jonah demurred. He refused to go, and attempted to escape by fleeing on a merchant ship. God sent a massive storm forcing the merchants to throw Jonah overboard, and then sent a great fish that swallowed Jonah whole, keeping him alive until he changed his mind.

Why didn't God just send someone else? Why did God insist that Jonah—and only Jonah—relay the message of destruction to the people of Nineveh? Why send the storm and the fish and go to all that trouble to ensure that Jonah, and no one else, deliver the fateful prophecy? Was there truly no one else?

This question answers itself. There was no one else because if there is someone else once, then there is always someone else.

Elyakim Ben-Menachem (in the introduction to The Da'at Mikra edition of the Book of Jonah p. 5) notes that other biblical figures similarly attempted to avoid fulfilling their divinely appointed mission, including Jeremiah (see Jeremiah chapter 1) and Moses, who initially refused the role of leadership,

offering excuse (they won't listen to me) after excuse (I don't speak well) until Moses finally told God, "send, I pray to You, by the hand of him whom You will send" (Exodus 4:13). In other words, "Send someone else. Anyone but me." Just as God refused to relent then, forcing Moses to carry out his mission, God refused to allow Jonah to avoid his duty as well.

Clearly God doesn't suffer representatives who try to shirk their obligations. In each case the prophet was not told, "Oh, well since you're not personally motivated, I'll see who else I can find." That is not the way it works. There is a job to do, and the person best suited to do that job is expected to step up to the plate and fulfill the Divine mission, no matter how difficult it may be.

God did not convey to Jonah his obligation to act through a direct command, but instead through circumstance. When Jonah attempted to flee his circumstances began to change for the worse. God "rocked the boat," which not only endangered Jonah himself, but all of the other passengers of the ship. In essence, God left the choice to Jonah: do your job and fulfill your responsibility or the consequences that ensue will be on your head.

This point is perhaps the message the Sages wanted to leave us with at the end of a long and trying Yom Kippur day. This is the last time we stand before God with the Gates of Repentance open to us. It is the final opportunity for *teshuvah*; a final chance to recommit ourselves for the coming year.

How did we really do over the last year? When the call came for us to act, did we grab the opportunity and make the most of it, making a difference for ourselves, our community and the Jewish people? Or, like Jonah, did we seek to hide from that call?

Many among us did indeed answer that call over the past year. We got involved, be it by sending an email, calling a Congressman, attending a meeting or convention. But too many of us did not, for all the reasons Moses offered: we can't do it; no one will listen; we're not the right person for the job. Or even worse, like Jonah, we offered no excuse at

all. Yom Kippur is the ideal moment to commit ourselves to hear the message of the book of Jonah; that we will do what we can to make a difference for Israel.

At the end of the book (4:11), God explained to Jonah just why saving the city of Nineveh was so critical:

ואני לא אחוס על נינוה העיר הגדולה אשר יש בה הרבה  
משתים עשרה רבו אדם אשר לא ידע בין ימינו לשמאלו  
ובהמה רבה.

*And should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six hundred thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle?'*

Jonah might not have wanted to save them, but as the text reminds us there was too much at stake. Today, too much is at stake to avoid the call to action. We must take the necessary steps to ensure the safety and well-being of our friend and ally, the state of Israel.

### Consistency

Each year as we return to the synagogue for the High Holidays and the ritual of repentance, many of us find ourselves troubled by a particular aspect of the *teshuvah* process. Maimonides (Laws of Repentance 1:2) ruled that in order to properly repent, one must recite the Viduy and confess their sins to God:

כיצד מתוודה-אומר אנה ה' הטאתי עוונתי פשעתי לפניך,  
ועשיתי כך וכך, והרי ניהמתי ובושתי במעשיי, ולעולם איני  
חוזר לדבר זה.

*O Lord, I have sinned, transgressed and rebelled before You, and have done such-and-such, and I am ashamed by my actions and will never do it again.*

Of course we know that the confession must be sincere, and that we'll never commit the sin again.

Yet, that commitment, to never repeat the sinful behavior, is also the element of *teshuvah* that bothers us so much. We know that we shouldn't commit the sin ever again, and for some major sins we make this declaration with absolute sincerity. But what about the smaller sins: the little bits of gossip that we share; the flash of anger that overwhelms us; the biting, sarcastic remark aimed at a loved one? Can we really declare that we'll never again do these things and mean it? After all, did we not recite the very same confession last year, and here we are today reciting the Viduy yet again?

The answer lies in understanding that repentance, like every meaningful thing that we do in life, is not a one-time action. Rather, it requires constant maintenance. There are people who never take their car in to the shop. They don't change the oil; they never check the air in the tires. And then, one day, they wonder why their car won't start when they need it most.

So much of Jewish practice focuses on this simple but critical principle of consistency. Traditionally, we pray each and every day, reciting the same words on a daily basis. Frankly, not every prayer is a spiritually uplifting event. But, rather than viewing this repetitiveness as wasteful or silly, it is exactly the opposite. The consistency is what makes our prayers meaningful. By maintaining a constant relationship with God, we remain connected, even when we don't feel like we have something pressing to communicate. And then, when we need to turn to God—either in ecstasy or crisis—we have a relationship to count on and connection to tie in to.

*Teshuvah* works exactly the same way. Once a year, we renew our protective spiritual coating, to return to ourselves—who we really are and want to be.

David Brooks, writing this past year in *The New York Times*, described what he calls the “Good Person Construct.” On the one hand, we are pulled by our desires to sin; not major sins, but small minor ones. On the other hand, we tell ourselves

that this is alright because, deep down, we are essentially “good people.” Brooks [wrote](#):

*In this construct, moral life is more like dieting: I give myself permission to have a few cookies because I had salads for lunch and dinner. I give myself permission to cheat a little because, when I look at my overall life, I see that I’m still a good person.*

*The Good Person isn’t shooting for perfection any more than most dieters are following their diet 100 percent. It’s enough to be workably suboptimal, a tolerant, harmless sinner and a generally good guy.*

*Obviously, though, there’s a measurement problem. You can buy a weight scale to get an objective measure of your diet. But you can’t buy a scale of virtues to put on the bathroom floor. And given our awesome capacities for rationalization and self-deception, most of us are going to measure ourselves leniently...*

*The key job in the Good Person Construct is to manage your rationalizations and self-deceptions to keep them from getting egregious... Your moral standards will gradually slip as you become more and more comfortable with your own rationalizations. So step back. Break your patterns and begin anew. This is what Yom Kippur and confessionals are for.*

Repentance isn’t a lie at all. It is a necessary refinishing that protects us from the elements we subject ourselves to throughout the year; from the dishonesty that surrounds us in the working world, from the negativity and hostility to spirituality that permeates our culture and threatens us from within. Even if we know that we might fall prey to the sins of the past, when we recite the Viduy and repent for the sins of the past year, we perform that

spiritual maintenance so critical for a healthy religious life.

This principle of consistency applies not only in our spiritual lives, but in so many other areas of life as well. If we want to be close with our loved ones, we cannot pick up the phone twice a year and expect that to suffice. Only if we invest the time and the energy on a regular basis will we enjoy the benefits of a real, meaningful relationship. If we want to be healthy, fit people, we know that it won’t happen in a day, a week, or even a month. We’ve all tried the tricks, and we know they don’t work. The only effective, long-term solution is consistency: eat less, exercise more. Repeat.

What is true for us as individuals applies to our people as a whole as well. We are blessed to live in a country that recognizes the benefits and strategic importance of a strong friendship with the Jewish state. Yet, in this strength lies the danger of complacency. After all, if support for Israel is so strong, what do I have to offer? Will my contribution—either of time, energy or resources—make that much of a difference?

The answer of course is that Israel enjoys such strong support precisely because of the consistency of the people who realize that every effort really does make a difference—every call, every email, every letter, every op-ed, every letter to the editor, every time a college student stands up for Israel on campus, every time we defend Israel against the constant effort to delegitimize the Jewish state—makes a difference. Only because of the consistency of our efforts, is that relationship and support as strong as it is.

And only because we commit ourselves each year to keep working, and maybe this year do a little bit more, will the Jewish state and the Jewish people grow even stronger in the year to come.

# Quotable Quotes

“It’s up to you to hold the system accountable and sometimes upend it entirely. It’s up to you to stand up and to be heard, to write and to lobby, to march, to organize, to vote. Don’t be content to just sit back and watch.”

[– President Barack Obama,](#)  
[May 14, 2012](#)

“The truth is that the ultimate guarantor of the U.S.-Israel relationship is each of you. It is you, the American people who from every corner of our country and every possible demographic definer take the time to call on your elected leaders to stand with Israel.”

[– Sen. Joseph Lieberman \(I-CT\),](#)  
[March 4, 2012](#)

“...I look forward to spending time with many of you personally. I want to hear what’s on your mind, hear about your concerns...”

[– Republican Presidential Nominee Mitt Romney,](#)  
[April 24, 2012](#)

“In Washington, lobbying has a bad connotation. You’re getting ready to go do some of it, but it’s really not lobbying. You’re telling your story. You’re telling the story of your heritage and the future of your children and your grandchildren. You’re telling the story that’s the great miracle of Israel and what it takes with our two countries to commit to a future for Israel that is safe and secure and peace with its neighbors.”

[– Sen. Johnny Isakson \(R-GA\),](#)  
[March 5, 2012](#)

“All countries come in for knocks every now and then at the United Nations, including our own. Nobody is above fair criticism. But what Israel faces is something very different. It’s relentless. It’s obsessive. It’s ugly. It’s bad for the United Nations. It’s bad for peace.”

– United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ambassador Susan Rice, March 5, 2012

“I fear not the different opinions about Israel, but apathy.”

– Consul General of Israel to the Mid-Atlantic Region of the United States Daniel Kutner, April 26, 2012

“At one point [in America] there was only one abolitionist who said slavery was wrong. There was only one suffragette who said women need the right to vote. There was only one civil rights worker who said we have to perfect the American promise for African-Americans. And there was only one environmentalist who said we’ve got to clean up our air and water. And then there were two and then there were four and then there were five...And if we lose sight of that and we think that all this has got to come from the - from the brains of elected representatives, we don’t see the strength of America.”

– Former Sen. Bill Bradley (D-NJ), May 8, 2012

“The United States continues to be deeply troubled by this Council’s biased and disproportionate focus on Israel, as exemplified by this standing agenda item...”

– United States Ambassador to the United Nations Human Rights Council Eileen Chamberlain Donahoe, March 19, 2012

# Select Articles

## [New Congress to be Very Inexperienced](#)

*Daily Political – Michael Burg*  
*June 11, 2012*

When January roll call is made on Capitol Hill, it will be full of newly enrolled senators and representatives making it one of the least experienced groups in many years. Congress will have a number of sophomore and rookies who are not bound by the traditions of the institution, but have virtually none of the experience of prior Congresses.

The freshman class of 2010 was historically large and in 2012, 36 lawmakers retired adding to the turnover expected in the November election, the January Congress could consist of more than 155 members with fewer than four years of Capitol Hill experience.

The implications that a youthful Congress brings are significant. On the positive side, the American public will get new blood infused into what is considered the least popular Congress for decades. New ideas and new vigor will come to stodgy and stoic Capitol Hill.

The downside could be equally as bad. The new lawmakers for both parties could be even more partisan and less willing to make compromises and not be beholden to any specific leader or customs and that could create a problem for what has been considered the traditional form of legislating.

The new youthful Congress could cause more polarization and gridlock than the current standing Congress even though voters have rebuked Congress for taking that stance. Jim Copper a House member from Tennessee said there are subcommittee chairmen who do not know the correct end of the gavel to use when bringing a meeting to order, much less how to get a bill passed. In 2010, 96 freshmen were brought into Congress, including 9 Democrats and 87 Republicans. Special elections brought in another five freshmen. This year 11 senators and 24 House members have decided to retire or have already retired.

Another 12 or more current lawmakers have decided to run for a different office, potentially making their seats available. The redistricting that took place left another 19 seats open. Election losses are not even amongst those numbers and that could generate even more freshman members of Congress.

## [South and West See Large Gains in Latest Census](#)

*The New York Times – Sabrina Tavernise and Jeff Zeleny*  
*December 21, 2010*

WASHINGTON — The Census Bureau rearranged the country's political map on Tuesday, giving more Congressional seats to the South and the West at the expense of the Northeast and the Midwest — changes that will have far-reaching implications for elections over the next decade.

The reallocation of seats was based on a new decennial population count of 308,745,538 Americans. The total was up by just 9.7 percent over the last decade, the slowest rate of growth since the 1930s. Demographers

attribute the decline in part to falling birth rates among whites and the slowdown in immigration because of the recession.

These are the first results from the census conducted this year, and they will be used to reapportion seats in Congress, and, in turn, the Electoral College, based on new state population counts. The figures will influence the landscape for the 2012 presidential race and the makeup of the Electoral College, with Republican-leaning states from the Sun Belt gaining more political influence at the expense of Democratic-leaning Rust Belt states.

According to the new counts, Texas will gain four seats, Florida will gain two, while New York and Ohio each lose two. Fourteen other states gained or lost one seat. The gainers included Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, South Carolina and Utah; the losers included Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts and New Jersey.

If President Obama were to win in the next election the same states he carried in 2008, he would receive six fewer electoral votes under the new map. Yet that shift would be significant only if the race were very close.

It is also unclear if the gains will go mostly to Republicans, since more than three-quarters of the population gains in the last decade were members of minorities, populations that tend to vote for Democrats.

The changes followed a long-running trend of population growth in the South and the West, and loss in the Northeast and the Midwest. In 1910, the West made up just 7 percent of the American population, compared with nearly 25 percent today, said Robert M. Groves, the director of the Census Bureau. About 40 percent of the decade's growth was driven by immigration, he added.

The release rang the opening bell for the inevitable battles over redrawing Congressional districts. With a presidential election just two years away, and Republicans enjoying momentum after their sweep of state legislatures in November, the stakes are high.

On the surface, Republicans would seem to have an overwhelming advantage. Most of the states gaining seats trend Republican, and most of those losing them tend to elect Democrats. What is more, Republicans will be well-placed to steer the process, with Republican governors outnumbering Democratic ones 29 to 20, with one independent, come January.

"Republicans are in the best position since modern redistricting began," said Tim Storey, an expert on redistricting at the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Of the 336 districts whose borders are drawn by state legislatures, Republicans have full control of 196, Mr. Storey said. Democrats control legislatures for 49; a further 91 are split. The rest would be drawn by divided legislatures or appointed commissions.

But population gains in the South and West were driven overwhelmingly by members of minorities, particularly Hispanics. The new districts will need to be drawn to reflect their numbers, opening potential advantages for Democrats.

"Just because Texas is getting four new seats does not mean Republicans will get four new Republicans to Congress," Mr. Storey said. "You don't have unfettered ability to redraw new boundaries."

It is a complex landscape of shifting advantages, and lawyers for both parties are already designing legal strategies in the event of stalemates in state legislatures, where redistricting battles play out. The last census, in

2000, set off litigation in about 40 states. The real work of redrawing begins in February, when the Census Bureau releases detailed geographic counts for each state.

“You either have a deadlock or a compromise plan, and I don’t see a lot of compromise going on these days,” said Gerald Hebert, a lawyer who represents Congressional Democrats. “Parties really prepare for war on this thing.”

The census results provided the starkest warning yet that the survival of both political parties could turn on how their candidates appeal to greater numbers of Hispanics, particularly in Arizona, Florida and Texas. Still, the Hispanic population includes people who cannot vote because they are not American citizens.

In Texas, for example, more than 85 percent of the population growth has been minority, according to Kenneth Johnson, a demographer at the University of New Hampshire. And even though Republicans control every statewide elected office and both chambers of the legislature, state Republican officials concede that the district lines will most likely be drawn so Democrats are in position to win as many as two of the new seats.

Legislatures are required to follow the Voting Rights Act, which outlawed discriminatory voting practices, and Matt Angle, the director of the Lone Star Project, a Democratic policy group, warned that Republicans would face court challenges under the act if they “got too greedy.”

Even so, Democrats have struggled to make significant inroads in Texas in recent elections, with Mr. Obama losing by 12 percentage points in 2008.

Ohio, which has long been among the most influential presidential battleground states, is losing two House seats, bringing its total to 16, the fewest since 1820. The state has lost seats every decade going back to 1970, reflecting its painful economic decline as its industry contracted.

“It’s distressing to all of us, to anyone from Ohio,” said Senator Sherrod Brown, Democrat of Ohio. “It’s a difficult thing because we lose a lot of influence that way.”

Arizona, with the second-highest population rise after Nevada, is the state most likely to become a new presidential battleground. Mr. Obama considered competing there two years ago, but decided against spending money in the home state of his Republican opponent, Senator John McCain.

White House advisers said the new census map still left plenty of paths to reach 270 electoral votes needed to win the election in 2012. The losses in eight Democratic-leaning states were expected, aides said, and were slightly offset by gains in Nevada and Washington.

“I don’t think it will have a huge practical impact,” Robert Gibbs, the White House press secretary, said Tuesday.

*Robert Gebeloff contributed reporting.*

### **[What Happened to Israel’s Reputation?](#)**

***Wall Street Journal – Ambassador Michael Oren  
May 14, 2012***

*This year Israel is celebrating . . . a series of accomplishments that have surely exceeded the expectations of its most visionary founders. It is one of the most powerful small nations in history. . . . [It] has tamed an arid*

*wilderness [and] welcomed 1.25 million immigrants. . . . The Israelis themselves did the fighting, the struggling, the sacrificing in order to perform the greatest feat of all—forging a new society . . . in which pride and confidence have replaced the despair engendered by age-long suffering and persecution.*

So Life magazine described Israel on the occasion of its 25th birthday in May 1973. In a 92-page special issue, “The Spirit of Israel,” the magazine extolled the Jewish state as enlightened, robustly democratic and hip, a land of “astonishing achievement” that dared “to dream the dream and make that dream come alive.”

Life told the story of Israel’s birth from the Bible through the Holocaust and the battle for independence. “The Arabs’ bloodthirsty threats,” the editors wrote, “lend a deadly seriousness to the vow: Never Again.” Four pages documented “Arab terrorist attacks” and the three paragraphs on the West Bank commended Israeli administrators for respecting “Arab community leaders” and hiring “tens of thousands of Arabs.” The word “Palestinian” scarcely appeared.

There was a panoramic portrayal of Jerusalem, described as “the focus of Jewish prayers for 2,000 years” and the nucleus of new Jewish neighborhoods. Life emphasized that in its pre-1967 borders, Israel was “a tiny, parched, scarcely defensible toe-hold.” The edition’s opening photo shows a father embracing his Israeli-born daughter on an early “settlement,” a testament to Israel’s birthright to the land.

Would a mainstream magazine depict the Jewish state like this today, during the week of its 64th birthday?

Unlikely. Rather, readers would learn about Israel’s overwhelming military might, brutal conduct in warfare and eroding democratic values—plus the Palestinians’ plight and Israeli intransigence. The photographs would show not cool students and cutting-edge artists but soldiers at checkpoints and religious radicals.

**Why has Israel’s image deteriorated? After all, Israel today is more democratic and—despite all the threats it faces—even more committed to peace.**

Some claim that Israel today is a Middle Eastern power that threatens its neighbors, and that conservative immigrants and extremists have pushed Israel rightward. Most damaging, they contend, are Israel’s policies toward the territories it captured in the 1967 Six-Day War, toward the peace process and the Palestinians, and toward the construction of settlements.

Israel may seem like Goliath vis-à-vis the Palestinians, but in a regional context it is David. Gaza is host to 10,000 rockets, many of which can hit Tel Aviv, and Hezbollah in Lebanon has 50,000 missiles that place all of Israel within range. Throughout the Middle East, countries with massive arsenals are in upheaval. And Iran, which regularly pledges to wipe Israel off the map, is developing nuclear weapons. Israel remains the world’s only state that is threatened with annihilation.

Whether in Lebanon, the West Bank or Gaza, Israel has acted in self-defense after suffering thousands of rocket and suicide attacks against our civilians. Few countries have fought with clearer justification, fewer still with greater restraint, and none with a lower civilian-to-militant casualty ratio. Israel withdrew from Lebanon and Gaza to advance peace only to receive war in return.

**Whereas Israelis in 1973 viewed the creation of a Palestinian state as a mortal threat, it is now the official policy of the Israeli government. Jewish men of European backgrounds once dominated Israel, but today Sephardic Jews, Arabs and women are prominent in every facet of society. This is a country where a Supreme Court panel of two women and an Arab convicted a former president of sexual offenses. It is the sole Middle**

Eastern country with a growing Christian population. Even in the face of immense security pressures, Israel has never known a second of nondemocratic rule.

In 1967, Israel offered to exchange newly captured territories for peace treaties with Egypt and Syria. The Arab states refused. Israel later evacuated the Sinai, an area 3.5 times its size, for peace with Egypt, and it conceded land and water resources for peace with Jordan.

In 1993, Israel recognized the Palestinian people ignored by Life magazine, along with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the perpetrator of those “Arab terrorist attacks.” Israel facilitated the creation of a Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Gaza and armed its security forces. Twice, in 2000 and 2008, Israel offered the Palestinians a state in Gaza, virtually all of the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. In both cases, the Palestinians refused. Astonishingly, in spite of the Palestinian Authority’s praise for terror, a solid majority of Israelis still support the two-state solution.

Israel has built settlements (some before 1973), and it has removed some to promote peace, including 7,000 settlers to fulfill the treaty with Egypt. Palestinians have rebuffed Israel’s peace offers not because of the settlements—most of which would have remained in Israel anyway, and which account for less than 2% of the West Bank—but because they reject the Jewish state. When Israel removed all settlements from Gaza, including their 9,000 residents, the result was a terrorist ministate run by Hamas, an organization dedicated to killing Jews world-wide.

Nevertheless, Israeli governments have transferred large areas to the Palestinian Authority and much security responsibility to Palestinian police. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has removed hundreds of checkpoints, eased the Gaza land blockade and joined President Obama in calling for the resumption of direct peace talks without preconditions. Addressing Congress, Mr. Netanyahu declared that the emergence of a Palestinian state would leave some settlements beyond Israel’s borders and that “with creativity and with good will a solution can be found” for Jerusalem.

Given all this, why have anti-Israel libels once consigned to hate groups become media mainstays? How can we explain the assertion that an insidious “Israel Lobby” purchases votes in Congress, or that Israel oppresses Christians? Why is Israel’s record on gay rights dismissed as camouflage for discrimination against others?

The answer lies in the systematic delegitimization of the Jewish state. Having failed to destroy Israel by conventional arms and terrorism, Israel’s enemies alit on a subtler and more sinister tactic that hampers Israel’s ability to defend itself, even to justify its existence.

It began with PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat’s 1974 speech to the U.N., when he received a standing ovation for equating Zionism with racism—a view the U.N. General Assembly endorsed the following year. It gained credibility on college campuses through anti-Israel courses and “Israel Apartheid Weeks.” It burgeoned through the boycott of Israeli scholars, artists and athletes, and the embargo of Israeli products. It was perpetuated by journalists who published doctored photos and false Palestinian accounts of Israeli massacres.

Israel must confront the acute dangers of delegitimization as it did armies and bombers in the past. Along with celebrating our technology, pioneering science and medicine, we need to stand by the facts of our past. “The Spirit of Israel” has not diminished since 1973—on the contrary, it has flourished. The state that Life once lionized lives even more vibrantly today.

*Mr. Oren is Israel’s ambassador to the United States.*

## **Shared Values and Mutual Interests**

# Background

**Israel is a vibrant democracy that, like the United States, stands out as a leading force for good in the world. Women are at the forefront of many aspects of an Israeli society that shares its experience, technologies and know-how with others in order to improve the lives of millions of people worldwide. Israel, with America, is pioneering developments in the energy sector to create a greener planet. The values and goals that the United States and Israel share have led to unprecedented economic partnership and are the root of the strategic alliance between the two countries.**

## Shared Values

**T**he unique relationship between the United States and Israel is rooted in shared values, interwoven cultures and mutual interests. Israel is a reliable democratic ally that shares America's worldview, in a region dominated by radical forces, dictatorial regimes and extremist non-state actors.

Many of the same democratic principles that the United States adheres to are also proclaimed in [Israel's Declaration of Independence](#), including "complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex...[and] freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture..."

Both nations were founded by refugees seeking political and religious freedom. Both were forced to fight for independence against foreign powers. Both have absorbed waves of immigrants seeking political freedom and economic well-being. And, both have evolved into democracies that respect the

rule of law, the will of voters and the rights of minorities.

Like the United States, Israel has an independent judicial system, which protects the rights of individuals and operates under the principle of "innocent until proven guilty." Israel also features regularly scheduled elections that are free, fair and open to all its citizens, regardless of religion, race or sex.

As a result, Israelis and Americans find a natural ability to work together on various projects and innovations that enrich both nations and the world at large. No matter what challenges these countries face, this bond will endure.

## Commitment to Democracy

**W**hile democracy is common in the West, Israel is a unique sanctuary of democracy, freedom and pluralism in the Middle East, protecting its citizens' rights while upholding the progressive values it shares with America. Freedom House, a group that conducts research on democracy, political freedom and human rights, has consistently classified Israel and America as "free" in its [rankings of world nations](#).

Israel's Declaration of Independence explicitly guarantees the rights of religious minorities, and Israel's Knesset has reaffirmed these rights by statute. In most Middle East countries, minority religious groups suffer from persecution and discrimination. In Israel, each faith has its own religious council and courts, recognized by law, with jurisdiction over all religious affairs and matters of personal status.

Moreover, Israel is renowned for its boisterous press. A wide variety of daily and weekly newspapers, TV shows and internet news sites freely criticize government policy and actively

investigate high-level corruption. The Jewish state ranked higher than any other Mideast country in the [Press Freedom Index for 2011-2012](#).

Freedom of the press is protected by an active civil society and a strong, independent judicial system. Israel's Supreme Court is particularly important in this regard, serving as a check on the actions of the legislative and executive branches. "One of the most unusual aspects of Israeli law is the rapid access that petitioners, including Palestinians, can gain to Israel's highest court," writes [The New York Times](#).

Members of Israel's Muslim, Christian and Druze communities sit in the Knesset and on the courts, serve as ambassadors overseas, and hold top positions in business and academia. Each religious community maintains its own institutions—schools, councils, and courts—and controls its holy sites.

### Commitment to Women's Rights

In Israel, women are at the forefront of society. Women have led the way as members of the Knesset, heads of political parties, and ministers in the government. The name Golda Meir, Israel's fourth prime minister and the third female head of government in modern history, is still revered throughout the world.

In addition, Israel has always had at least one woman on its Supreme Court. In fact, women are a central part of the Israeli judicial system, comprising 51 percent of all judges and 44 percent of all lawyers. But Israeli women fill positions of authority long before they enter politics or choose to pursue law. At the age of 18 they are already required to enter military service, where their [equal status](#) was enshrined in law in 2000.

Many of the traits needed for successful leadership in the military transfer to management positions in the business sector. It is thus no surprise that women have made a great deal of progress in the Israeli corporate world. Ofra Strauss serves as Chair of the Board of the Strauss Group, an international food and beverage company based in Israel. Bank Leumi, Israel's largest and most profitable bank, is led by Rakefet Russak-Aminoach, who succeeded another woman, Galia Maor. Maor was named one of Forbes Magazine's "[100 Most Powerful Women](#)" in 2007.

The accomplishments of Israeli women in science and research have garnered global recognition as well. Perhaps the most extraordinary achievement is that of [Ada Yonath](#), winner of the 2009 Nobel Prize in Chemistry. Yonath is the first Israeli woman to win the prize, the first woman from the Middle East to win a Nobel Prize in the sciences, and the first woman in 45 years to win the Nobel Prize for Chemistry.

## KEY POINTS

Members of Israel's Muslim, Christian and Druze communities sit in the Knesset and on the courts, serve as ambassadors overseas, and hold top positions in business and academia.

The United States and Israel are working together to help reduce our dependence on petroleum and pursue sustainable technologies to reduce our environmental impact.

## Commitment to Helping Others

Israel's democratic character and commitment to women's rights contribute to the state's efforts to improve the lives of millions of people worldwide. From the natural disasters that struck Japan and Haiti, to drought stricken nations in Africa, Israel works with the United States to provide other countries with the assistance they need to develop and grow. In fact, Israel has contributed to more than two dozen recent relief efforts after earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and other natural disasters.

And, while the U.S. and Israel have both long provided development assistance in Africa, the international development agencies in Israel and America recently [signed a memorandum of understanding](#) (MOU) to further increase cooperation on food aid to Africa. The MOU between USAID (the U.S. Agency for International Development) and MASHAV (the Israel Agency for International Development Cooperation) allows for closer cooperation on the issue of food security in four countries: Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Rwanda.

The signing of the MOU was not an aberration. According to the most recent MASHAV [annual report](#), "In 2011 MASHAV's activities included a wide spectrum of international partnerships and programs for development. A total of 2,638 professionals from 109 countries participated in 120 activities offered in Israel, while 2,913 took part in 72 on-the-spot courses (in host countries) offered in a total of 31 countries. MASHAV experts were dispatched throughout the world on 110 short-term consultancies and humanitarian medical missions to 46 countries, and eight long-term experts served in MASHAV's demonstration projects around the world in six countries. MASHAV hosted 13 professional delegations, and organized and participated in many international conventions around the world."

## Commitment to a Cleaner World

It is not just shared democratic values, and commitments to women's rights and helping those in need that unites the United States and Israel. Today, the two nations are working together like never before in the arenas of energy security and clean technology. The American and Israeli governments, as well as private business ventures in both countries, are partnering to promote new energy solutions and ensure our long-term energy security. This important work is helping to reduce our dangerous dependence on petroleum and pursue sustainable technologies to reduce our environmental impact.

Starting with a 1984 memorandum of understanding, a number of agreements have helped drive innovation and cooperation between the U.S. and Israel in the energy arena. In 2008, the countries signed a new MOU for sustainable energy cooperation, which served as the basis for [the U.S.-Israel Energy Cooperation Program](#) that is funded annually by Congress.

In addition, the [Binational Industrial Research and Development Foundation](#) (BIRD) facilitates U.S.-Israel cooperation in an array of fields, including agriculture, healthcare and homeland security. U.S. and Israeli companies are connected in joint research and development, and provided with low-dollar grants to jumpstart collaboration and innovation, with the explicit goal of bringing new technologies to the commercial market.

BIRD launched a dedicated energy arm in 2008 to bring together the United States and Israel in the joint development of new technologies that will strengthen our shared energy security. The United States and Israel are collaborating on multiple projects, leveraging public funds provided by the Department of Energy and Israel's Ministry of National Infrastructure to incentivize private sector investment and innovation.

## KEY POINTS

🧠 Israeli companies are among the top 20 suppliers of direct investment into the U.S.

🧠 The historic alliance between the United States and Israel is the most stabilizing feature in an otherwise unstable region of the world.

Through cooperation with the United States and its dedication to continued innovation, Israel is pursuing policies, undertaking national initiatives and developing technologies to fundamentally change the world.

### Economic Partnership

The values that the United States and Israel share have made the two countries natural economic partners, and joint research and trade has helped strengthen the economies of both nations. In 1985, the United States and Israel signed America's first [Free Trade Agreement](#). Trade between the two allies has since grown by 500 percent, and more than \$78 million worth of goods and services are exchanged each day. U.S. and Israeli businesses, researchers and academics are finding new opportunities for investment and collaboration with many top American tech firms.

American heavyweights such as Intel, Motorola and Google have capitalized on Israel's entrepreneurial spirit and world-class talent pool, establishing major R&D centers throughout the country. With the most Ph.D.s and published scientific papers per capita in the world, Israel has become the preeminent foreign outpost for computer technology, telecommunications and software industries, with roughly 100 U.S. companies active in Israel. More Israeli companies are traded on the NASDAQ than any country outside the United States and China.

Israeli companies have increasingly looked to opportunities in the United States, investing more than \$50 billion between 2000 and 2009. Israel is

among the top 20 suppliers of direct investment into the United States. In 2009 alone Israelis invested more than \$7 billion. This sum marked an increase in U.S.-directed investment immediately following the global financial crisis, when many throughout the world were looking inward.

### Strategic Allies

The strong shared values and economic ties between the U.S. and Israel set the framework for a unique strategic alliance. Long-standing U.S.-Israel strategic cooperation allows the two allies to face common threats, including terrorism and weapons proliferation. Israeli innovation in the defense and homeland security areas has helped protect American soldiers abroad and civilians at home.

With no other country in the region—and few in the entire world—does the United States share the same high level of strategic cooperation. American-Israeli cooperation begins with frequent high-level strategic dialogues among senior political and military leaders and extends to combined military planning and exercises, intelligence-sharing and technological development.

The expanding network of American and Israeli military and intelligence coordination has provided a powerful deterrent to those in the Middle East who seek to harm either country. The historic alliance between the United States and Israel is the most stabilizing feature in an otherwise unstable region of the world.

President Obama has voiced a similar view on the importance of this relationship: “Many of the same forces that threaten Israel also threaten the United States and our efforts to secure peace and stability in the Middle East. Our alliance with Israel serves our national security interests.”

As such, America is committed to providing Israel the means to defend itself, by itself, and close strategic cooperation between the two allies has provided the U.S. with key benefits. Israel regularly shares its cutting edge technology and lessons learned with America’s military to help our soldiers accomplish their missions and remain protected.

That is why the [memorandum of understanding](#) implemented beginning in 2009, which pledged \$30 billion in U.S. security assistance to Israel over

a 10-year period, [is so important](#). President Obama’s request of \$3.1 billion for Israel in fiscal year 2013 fulfills the fifth year of that pledge. This 10-year agreement embodies America’s commitment to maintain Israel’s qualitative military edge over its adversaries on the battlefield.

Though America clearly faces a tough budgetary environment, American security assistance is vital in helping Israel meet [the growing challenges](#) of a region in turmoil, a potential nuclear Iran, Hamas rocket attacks from Gaza, and a resurgent Hizballah in Lebanon armed with more than 55,000 rockets and missiles.

*For more on the values that the United States and Israel share, and how the two countries work together, visit [www.aipac.org/SharedValues](http://www.aipac.org/SharedValues).*

# Judaic Texts and Teachings

## The Value of Friendship

During the High Holidays, we gather together as a community for many reasons. The symphony of communal prayer soars to the heights of heaven—something we cannot say about our individual prayers. We gather of course to see each other and renew friendships. But there is also another, more subtle motivation to get together. When we congregate, we grow from each other. We strengthen each other, and the connection that we have makes each of us better Jews and better people.

Maimonides, commenting on the subtle pressures, both positive and negative, to which our community subjects us, writes:

דרך ברייתו של אדם-להיות נמשך בדעותיו ובמעשיו אחר ריעיו וחבריו, ונוהג במנהג אנשי מדינתו. לפיכך צריך אדם להתחבר לצדיקים ולישב אצל החכמים תמיד, כדי שילמוד ממעשיהם; ויתרחק מן הרשעים ההולכים בחושך, כדי שלא ילמוד ממעשיהם. הוא ששלמה אומר, "הולך את חכמים, יחכם; ורועה כסילים, ירוע" (משלי יג:כ). ואומר, "אשרי האיש אשר לא הלך בעצת רשעים ובדרך חטאים לא עמד" (תהלים א:א).

*The nature of man is to be pulled by his temperaments and actions after his friends, and to accustom himself to the customs of the people of his country. Therefore, one has to associate with righteous people and to sit always amongst learned people, so that one will learn from their actions. One should distance oneself from wicked people, who go in darkness, so that one will not learn from their actions. Solomon said, "He who walks with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall suffer harm" (Proverbs 13:20). It is also written, "Happy is the man who does not follow the counsel of the wicked, nor adopts the way of sinners, nor sits amongst scorners" (Psalms 1:1).*

More simply, we are social creatures who affect and are affected by the people around us. Therefore, Maimonides tells us, we must seek out groups of people who affect us for the good; who share our desire to make the right choices, and who want to raise their children with the same values that we do. This is the power of the congregation. A synagogue in Hebrew is a "*beit kneset*," a house of gathering. We gather together with a common goal to enhance ourselves, our families and each other religiously and spiritually. This gathering, in and of itself, strengthens us all and creates a self-supporting community dedicated to a common goal.

In the Mishnah Avot (1:6) we find a similar idea:

יהושוע בן פרחיה אומר, עשה לך רב, וקנה לך חבר; והוי דן את כל האדם לכף זכות.

*Yehoshua ben Prachya said, Make for yourself a rabbi; acquire for yourself a friend, and judge each person favorably.*

Why, in the eyes of the Sages, was a friend so critical? Maimonides, categorizing the different friendships that one should seek to acquire, provides some insight, explaining that the highest level of friendship is the "exalted beloved" (which he means in the platonic sense):

ואוהב המעלה, הוא שתהיה תאות שניהם וכוונתם למטרה אחת, והיא: הטוב, וירצה כל אחד להעזר בחברו בהגיע הטוב ההוא לשניהם יחד. וזה הוא החבר אשר ציוה לקנותו...

*This beloved exalted friend is such that the desires of both [friends] and their intentions are for a single goal, and that is for the good. And each wishes to assist his friend in that they both achieve this goodness together. This is the friend that one is commanded to acquire...*

There is almost nothing as important as a good friend of this type. Through mutual ambitions, collaboration, support and comfort, this person's very presence makes his friend better, more effective and more capable.

Many of us are blessed to have such friendships. And, as Americans who strongly support Israel, we are proud that this description also depicts the relationship between the United States and Israel. The U.S.-Israel relationship is rooted in shared goals and values and has proven beneficial to both countries.

Describing the ideal friendship, Maimonides wrote:

וכאשר יסמוך כל אחד משני החברים על זה הציווי, תהיה כוונת כל אחד מהם להשלים רצון חברו, ותהיה כוונת שניהם דבר אחד בלא ספק. ומה טוב מאמר אריסטו: "החבר-אחר שהוא אתה."

*When each of these two friends rely on this command [to seek friendship], the intention of each will be to fulfill the desires of his friend, and the intentions of both will be for the same single [goal] without a doubt. How good is that which Aristotle said: "The [true] friend—another who is you."*

This is why we gather together in this *beit kneset*. And, it is also why both as individuals and as a community, we work to ensure that the friendship between the United States and Israel remains as strong as it is today, so that both countries continue to work hand-in-hand to promote the values of freedom and democracy around the world.

### Valuing the Contributions of Women

The High Holiday liturgy offers several striking examples of women's leadership and the desire of Jewish authorities to incorporate the contributions of women into normative Jewish practice. In fact, we must credit a woman for both the form and content of our daily prayers—a woman who we read about on the first day of Rosh Hashanah.

The *haftarah* on Rosh Hashanah relates not only the birth of the prophet Samuel, but the pain that Hannah, Samuel's mother, endured as she remained, for years, unable to bear children. The text tells of her yearly trips to the Temple for the holiday harvests, as she watched her husband celebrate the festival with his other wife and her many sons. In desperation, Hannah turned to God in silent prayer, pleading for a child and pledging to give that child back to serve in the Temple should she be so blessed.

Today, silent prayer seems normal. Yet, during Hannah's era no one prayed silently, instead they offered sacrifices and libations and made public declarations to God. Why would anyone mumble quietly to himself? This behavior was so strange that the high priest, Eli, watching her pray, castigated her for her behavior:

חנה היא מדברת על לבה רק שפתייה נעות וקולה לא ישמע ויחשבה עלי לשכרה. ויאמר אליה עלי "עד מתי תשתכרין הסירי את יינך מעליך." (שמואל א א: יג-יד)

*Now Hannah, she spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard; therefore, Eli thought she was drunk. And Eli said unto her: "How long will you be drunk? Put away your wine from yourself." (Samuel I 1:13-14)*

Eli was a wise and thoughtful person; he wasn't cruel. And yet, he assumed that she was drunk because she was behaving in a manner no one had ever seen before. Ever. When Hannah explained that she had merely been pouring her heart out to God, Eli blessed her. But even more importantly, her actions became a model for Jewish prayer in the future. The Talmud (Jerusalem Talmud Brachot 9:1) teaches us:

הקב"ה נראה רחוק, ואין קרוב ממנו, דאמר רב לוי...ראה כמה הוא גבוה מעולמו, ואדם נכנס לבית הכנסת ועומד אחורי העמוד ומתפלל בלחישתו, והקב"ה מאזין את תפלתו, שנאמר, "והנה היא מדברת על לבה," והאזין הקב"ה את תפילתה.

*God seems distant, but there is none closer, as Rabbi Levi said...see how high God dwells above*

*the world. And yet, a man enters the synagogue, and stands behind a pillar in silent prayer, and God listens to his prayer, as it is written, “And Hannah spoke in her heart,”—and God heard her prayer.*

It might be obvious to us, but it wasn't obvious then. Hannah paved the way for the millennia of Jewish prayers that have followed her lead.

We find a second example of women's leadership also during the traditional reading on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, in the story of the banishment of Ishmael from Abraham's home. Sarah, seeing the negative influence of Ishmael on her household, demanded that Abraham send the boy and his mother away. Abraham was understandably distraught, and seemed reluctant to heed her demands. Yet, God sided with Sarah, telling Abraham (Genesis 21:12):

אל ירע בעיניך על הנער ועל אמתך כל אשר תאמר אליך שרה שמע בקלה.

*Let it not be grievous in your sight because of the lad, and because of your bondwoman; in all that Sarah says to you, listen to her voice.*

Rashi notes that God didn't just tell Abraham to listen to his wife in this instance. Rather, God told him to listen to “all that Sarah says to you.” Rashi explains that “This teaches us that Abraham was secondary to Sarah in prophecy.” Abraham usually took the lead standing outside the tent, welcoming the guests. But in prophecy; in closeness to God, Sarah's greatness outshone that of her husband. Therefore, when she saw the need to insist on a matter that she felt could affect the future of her children, and our nation, she did. And God sided with her.

Jewish tradition, instead of rejecting the contributions of Hannah and Sarah because of their gender—which sadly is often the case even today with many religions, and even more so thousands of years ago—accepted these women as leaders

and visionaries not only in their time, but for all time.

This spirit of egalitarianism—valuing the contributions of all people based on merit—has always been a critical element of Jewish tradition, down to the essence of the way that we all pray. It is a value that has shaped the United States and it is a value that continues to be an essential aspect of the modern Jewish state as well.

In modern Israel women occupy leadership positions in every element throughout society, from the highest levels of government, to the judiciary to the military. Women serve in combat positions on the ground and in the air, each according to her abilities.

Today, every girl growing up in Israel has an array of opportunities open to her. And, like the influences of Sarah and Hannah, their contributions will not only be welcomed, they will be valued and cherished as well.

### **Bread in the Basket**

In ancient times, the service in the Temple in Jerusalem precisely followed the procedure proscribed in Leviticus chapter 16, which we traditionally read on the morning of Yom Kippur. According to the Torah, the high priest would confess the sins of the entire nation of Israel while leaning upon the head of a goat:

ונתן אתם על-ראש השעיר, ושלח ביד-איש עתי המדברה. ונשא השעיר עליו את-כל-עונותם, אל-ארץ גזרה; ושלח את-השעיר, במדבר.

*And he shall put [his hands] upon the head of the goat, and shall send it away by the hand of an appointed man into the wilderness. And the goat shall bear upon it all their iniquities to a land which is cut off; and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.*

This is the description of the שעיר לעזעזל—the “goat sent away to Azazel”—that comprised a central

element of the Yom Kippur service in the Temple era, and is also a central element of the traditional Mussaf recited during the Yom Kippur prayer service.

Yet, this goat was not simply let go into the wilderness, it was literally thrown off a cliff to represent the casting off of the communal sins on the holiest day of the year. The Mishnah (Yoma 3:2-6) explains that the high priest himself would not accompany the goat on its final, fateful journey, but that another person had the responsibility to fulfill this task, which it turns out was not that easy.

According to Dr. Avi Sasson of Bar Ilan University, the closest cliff to Jerusalem was about a 10 mile walk from the Temple. And the man appointed to walk the goat all that way was fasting, along with the rest of the nation, throughout the day. According to the Mishnah (Yoma 6:4):

מיקירי ירושלים היו מלוין אותו עד סוכה הראשונה. עשר סוכות מירושלים ועד צוק... על כל סוכה וסוכה אומרין לו, "הרי מזון והרי מים," ומלוין אותו מסוכה לסוכה.

*The eminent people of Jerusalem used to accompany him [the one who was to lead the goat] to the first booth. There were 10 booths from Jerusalem to the ravine...At each booth they would say to him, "Here is food, and here is water." And they would accompany him from one booth to the next...*

Although he was fasting, they offered him food and drink because his mission was more critical than his fast. Should he grow weak and need to eat or drink, they would be there, ready to give him whatever he needed to ensure his success and atonement for the nation.

The Talmud (Yoma 67a) makes a fascinating observation, noting that never—not once—did the messenger charged with accompanying the goat ever partake of the food or drink. If so, why would they continue to set up refreshment stations along the way year after year? The Talmud answers:

אלא שאינו דומה מי שיש לו פת בסלו למי שאין לו פת בסלו.

*Because one cannot compare one who has bread in his basket to one who has no bread in his basket.*

In other words, the booths were there not to provide food and water; they knew that the man would never eat or drink, no matter how hot it became walking under the desert sun. But the people sitting under those booths offering refreshments provided a different, crucial gift: psychological support. They said to him, "We know that you won't need us. We know that you won't eat or drink. But just remember: If you ever do need us, we're right here for you. So don't worry."

This is the support that friends offer one-another. We don't usually rely on our friends for constant support. We don't turn to them to provide our daily needs. We might not ever actually turn to them for help. But friends stand ready to help. True friends are there in case we fall, ready to offer assistance and support until we can get back on our feet. And, most crucially, just knowing that they're there often gives us the strength and fortitude to get by without their help.

Each of us strives to become this kind of friend; the kind of person that our loved ones, be they friends or family, count on to be there when they need us.

This description also typifies the relationship between the United States and Israel. While the United States clearly offers critical, tangible support to the state of Israel through military, economic and security assistance, perhaps just as important is the friendship that the two countries enjoy, and the implicit support that this friendship implies.

Knowing that America will always stand at the side of Israel, its friend and ally, just knowing that the bread is in the basket, makes navigating the desert of life in the Middle East that much easier for the people of the Jewish state.

### Three Types of Freedom

Freedom is a foundation of the season of repentance. Without it, *teshuvah* is not possible. After all, how can we change without the freedom to choose—to reassess, reflect and improve? Maimonides writes (Laws of Repentance 5:1):

רשות כל אדם נתונה לו: אם רצה להטות עצמו לדרך טובה ולהיות צדיק, הרשות בידו.

*Freedom of choice to follow the laws of God or not to follow them is granted to all men. If a person wants to follow the path of virtue, becoming a tzaddik, that is his choice.*

Maimonides clarifies this point further (5:3 and 5:5) by stating:

ואין לו מי שיכפהו ולא גוזר עליו, ולא מי שמושכו לאחד משני הדרכים, אלא הוא מעצמו ומדעתו נוטה לאיזה דרך שירצה... ועיקר זה עיקר גדול הוא, והוא עמוד התורה והמצוה--שנאמר "ראה נתתי לפניך היום, את החיים ואת הטוב, ואת המוות, ואת הרע." (דברים ל:טו)

*There is no higher power that compels, persuades or decrees which path one must choose. He is on his own accord, he freely chooses the road he wants to follow....The principle of freedom of choice is a basic concept and a pillar on which the entire Torah and mitzvot rest, as it is written, "See, I have set before you today to choose between life and good, and death and evil." (Deuteronomy 30:15)*

This notion of liberty was so evident to the founders of the United States that they didn't feel the need to elaborate or explain it in the Declaration of Independence. And yet, the basis for that great document and the values that informed it can be found in the roots of Jewish thought codified thousands of years ago.

There is another type of freedom—a more mystical aspect of liberty—that is also related to the High Holidays. Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, in his work S'fas Emes, explains that Rosh Hashanah is

intimately associated with the theme of freedom. Invoking the image of a prisoner confined against his will, Rabbi Alter writes that during this holy time of the year we free ourselves from the shackles of the sins that we committed during the past year. We free ourselves from the daily grind and the burden of our worldly pursuits in order to soar to spiritual heights that we cannot attain during the year.

Explaining the meaning of the name of the month of Tishrei, which begins on Rosh Hashanah, he writes (See Days of Awe: Ideas and Insights of the S'fas Emes on the High Holy Days, pp. 78-82):

מאמרם ז"ל תשרי ותשבוק, כי בראש השנה נעשו בני ישראל בני חורין וכל מה שנתלכלכו כל השנה ונקשרו הנפשות בהבלי עולם נעשו בני חורין בראש השנה.

*[Tishrei] according to the words of our Sages of blessed memory [means]: You shall release and untie, for on Rosh Hashanah the Children of Israel became free people. For all that which they had sullied themselves and that their souls were bound to the emptiness of the world—from this they became free on Rosh Hashanah.*

S'fas Emes notes that just as we sound the *shofar* today on Rosh Hashanah, we also sound the *shofar* at the conclusion of the Jubilee year to proclaim the freedom of all slaves from their masters (see Leviticus 25:9-10). Thus, the *shofar* that we sound on Rosh Hashanah acquires this element of freedom as well. We blow the ram's horn to proclaim ourselves free: free from the foolishness that prevents us from doing the really important things. Today we are free to focus on who and what we really can and should be.

Yet, just by sitting here today, we celebrate a third, simpler form of freedom that we perhaps have grown to take for granted. For many hundreds of years, Jews could not assume that we would have the right to gather and pray unmolested. Whether it was the local or national government in which we found ourselves, the Church, the Caliphate or simply a hostile local population, we know all too

well how our ancestors struggled and yearned for the freedom to worship in peace.

Today, we have that freedom to come and pray as we wish; to study, to discuss and to grow in the open, without fear or concern. Like the founders of our country, we take that liberty for granted, which we should, while taking note of it all the same. And, as proud Jews and supporters of the Jewish state, we take a great deal of pride in knowing that the state of Israel, since its birth, has stood for these same values of freedom and liberty for all of its citizens—Jew, Christian or Arab. Israel protects the

rights and liberties of all religions, and does so proudly.

As citizens of the United States, we value our freedom by exercising it; by speaking out when needed, and voting for the candidate that articulates our views; and by ensuring that the state of Israel, which shares this essential value with the United States, has the ability to continue to serve as a beacon of freedom for people across the Middle East, who yearn for the right so fundamental to us all: the right to be free.

# Quotable Quotes

“Sixty-four years ago, the United States became the first country in the world to recognize the state of Israel...Since that momentous day, the special bond of friendship between the United States and Israel has grown stronger. Ours is a unique relationship founded on an unbreakable commitment to Israel’s security, and anchored by our common interests and deeply held values.”

[– President Barack Obama, April 26, 2012](#)

“I share your commitment to a strong and secure Israel...Israel’s continued existence as a Jewish state is a vital national interest of the United States...the bond between Israel and America is unbreakable...Our enemies should never doubt our resolve, and our allies should never doubt our commitment.”

[– Republican Presidential Nominee Mitt Romney, March 6, 2012](#)

“Israel is an example of a country that succeeds because they emphasize science and engineering...Many countries leaders want to replicate the phenomenal success of Silicon Valley. Israel is one example of what it takes, emphasizing technology and science education, a governmental role in supporting research and development...and a culture that encourages risk taking and allows for rapid failure. For a small country, Israel will have an oversized impact on the evolution of the next stage of the technology we all use.”

[– Eric Schmidt, Executive Chairman of Google, June 25, 2012](#)

“Israel remains a beacon of hope and an inspiring example. [The United States and Israel] are united by a deep and unbreakable bond based on mutual interests and respect... We are steadfast in our commitment to Israel’s security, which is a cornerstone of our foreign policy in the Middle East.”

[– Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, April 26, 2012](#)

“[The U.S.-Israel Enhanced Security Cooperation Act] reflects the immutable and enduring bond between our two nations. It is a bond that reflects the shared values of our people and our shared interests in preserving stability in the Middle East.”

[– House Minority Whip Rep. Steny Hoyer \(D-MD\), March 5, 2012](#)

“The ties that bind the United States and Israel are cemented by our mutual dedication to freedom, opportunity and democracy. We must support our ally and send a message that the United States and Israel will always stand together.”

[– House Majority Leader Rep. Eric Cantor \(R-VA\), March 5, 2012](#)

“...the deep partnership between the United States and Israel is rooted in people-to-people ties based on shared values and common ideals. And these common ideals also explain our dedication to Israel, the democratic example for this part of the world, and our commitment to Israel’s security.”

[– U.S. Ambassador to Israel Daniel Shapiro, May 30, 2012](#)

# Select Articles

## [UpWest Labs Closes The Missing Link Between New Israeli Startups And Silicon Valley](#)

*Techcrunch.com - Eric Eldon*

*February 7, 2012*

Silicon Valley investors have been going to Israel for decades to take advantage of its pool of hardcore tech entrepreneurs. But a new generation of consumer-focused companies has been emerging in the country over the last few years — and they're facing a few challenges. One is that the local market is relatively small, which means that it can be harder for them to design and iterate products for mainstream users in large markets elsewhere. Another is that local venture funding has been skewing towards later-stage investments. Finally given the distance, access to potential partners and the Silicon Valley knowledge network can be difficult to reach.

UpWest Labs has a solution, which is bringing new Israeli entrepreneurs to live in Silicon Valley. The setup in some ways looks like the many other incubator/accelerator programs that have sprouted up here and everywhere in the world. Founding teams live together in a house in Menlo Park for three months, work together out of an office in Palo Alto, and meet a set of mentors from around the area. In exchange for up to 8% equity, they receive a small amount of seed funding, usually in the \$15,000 to \$20,000 range.

But look under the surface and UpWest has some things going for it that suggests it could start producing especially strong batches of companies. The focus is on bringing in founders who already have some sort of product going, who can use their time in the Valley to build on what they have, establish new relationships and learn best practices that they can bring back to Israel.

This is distinct from many seed-stage programs, which more typically look for smart and ambitious people with lots of ideas. The difference in approaches has to do with Israel itself.

“Israel has a long history of producing more entrepreneurs per capita than almost any other eco-system. They have a strong technical education system which when coupled with the universal military service provides unique pool of talent.” explains program advisor Robert Goldberg, a long-time executive and investor in Silicon Valley who has been active with Israeli companies for years. “While there have been a number of successful Israeli startups the proportion of homerun exits has been low. UpWest Labs aims to change this by leveling up and arming entrepreneurs with access to knowledge, people and capital. “

To date, most of these people have been building companies in tech-heavy areas like security and databases, that could then be sold to multinationals, as this recent Economist article explores. While the overall venture industry in Israel has had its ups and downs, the data suggests early internet companies are being ignored. One recent study, by the Israel Venture Capital Research Center, indicated that angel funding has dropped as a share of total venture investments to under 2009 levels; while internet investing has gone up, it hasn't been at the early stage, and it's still not in proportion to the pool of quality companies.

UpWest Labs' founders decided to start the program after watching the Israeli startup scene change over the last decade. Gil Ben-Artzy spent the last six years doing corporate development and operations management at Yahoo, responsibilities that involved regularly going to Israel, working with Yahoo's local team there, as well

as local entrepreneurs and investors. Shuly Galili, meanwhile, is the cofounder and executive director of the California Israel Chamber of Commerce. The organization that has spent more than a decade helping Israeli companies with marketing, fundraising and general business development here.

The program pairs companies with some 30 mentors, ex-patriots and others with some connection to Israel and the program founders, who are also Silicon Valley-based experts on particular areas. After startups finish their three months, the goal will be for them to have the connections that will keep them coming back to Silicon Valley and other parts of the tech world.

While some programs have been expanding their class sizes over the years, Ben-Artzy says that's not the plan at this point. Instead, he's aiming to keep a small class feel so each of the companies can get maximum attention. This might seem a little risky considering that breadth of investment is often the best way for early-stage investors to actually make money. But it makes sense, considering that UpWest is bringing in companies that already have something to show for themselves.

For now, UpWest is just getting started. The first class arrived in Menlo Park last month. The six companies in it are working on consumer mobile, social, gaming, SaaS and enterprise software (so, it's not entirely consumer, but still heavier in that direction). We'll be looking at the more closely later on. In the meantime, the program has started recruiting its next class of start-ups.

### [Israel: A True Ally in the Middle East](#)

*Los Angeles Times - Robert D. Blackwill and Walter B. Slocombe  
October 31, 2011*

American leaders have traditionally explained the foundations of the U.S.-Israel relationship by citing shared democratic values and the moral responsibility America bears to protect the small nation-state of the Jewish people. Although accurate and essential, this characterization is incomplete because it fails to capture a third, crucial aspect: the many ways in which Israel advances U.S. national interests.

Today, Israeli contributions to U.S. national interests cover a broad spectrum. Through joint training, exercises and exchanges on military doctrine, the United States has benefited in the areas of counter-terrorism, intelligence and experience in urban warfare. Increasingly, U.S. homeland security and military agencies are turning to Israeli technology to solve some of their most vexing technical and strategic problems.

This support includes advice and expertise on behavioral screening techniques for airport security and acquisition of an Israeli-produced tactical radar system to enhance force protection. Israel has been a world leader in the development of unmanned aerial systems, both for intelligence collection and combat, and it has shared with the U.S. military the technology, the doctrine and its experience regarding these systems. Israel is also a global pacesetter in armored vehicle protection, defense against short-range rockets, and the techniques and procedures of robotics, all of which it has shared with the United States.

In missile defense, the United States has a broad and multifaceted partnership with Israel. Israel's national missile defenses -- which include the U.S. deployment in Israel of an advanced X-band radar system and the more than 100 American military personnel who man it -- will be an integral part of a larger missile defense spanning Europe, the eastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf to help protect U.S. forces and allies.

Israeli-developed defense equipment, some of which benefited from generous U.S. aid, now used by the U.S. military include short-range unmanned aircraft systems that have seen service in Iraq and Afghanistan;

targeting pods on hundreds of Air Force, Navy and Marine strike aircraft; a revolutionary helmet-mounted sight that is standard in nearly all frontline Air Force and Navy fighter aircraft; lifesaving armor installed in thousands of MRAP armored vehicles used in Iraq and Afghanistan; and a gun system for close-in defense of naval vessels against terrorist dinghies and small-boat swarms. Moreover, U.S. and Israeli companies are working together to produce Israel's Iron Dome -- the world's first combat-proven counter-rocket system.

Counter-terrorism and intelligence cooperation is deep and extensive, with the United States and Israel working to advance their common interest in defeating the terrorism of Hamas, Hezbollah and Al Qaeda and its affiliate groups, and preventing nuclear proliferation in the region. There are joint Special Forces training and exercises and collaboration on shared targets.

This intimate relationship reinforces overall U.S. intelligence efforts by providing Washington with access to Israel's unique set of capabilities for information collection and assessments on key countries and issues in the region. Such was the case, for example, when Israel passed to the United States conclusive photographic evidence in 2007 that Syria, with North Korean assistance, had made enormous strides toward "going hot" with a plutonium-producing reactor.

On important issues, the two nations do sometimes differ, a phenomenon not unique to the U.S.-Israel relationship. Over the decades, there have been periodic policy flare-ups, some even bitter, on topics ranging from Israel's preventive action against Iraq's nuclear reactor to Israeli sales of weaponry and military technology to China. Some of the most contentious disputes have been about actions affecting the Middle East peace process. But more often have been instances of U.S.-Israel collaboration -- most important, the Arab-Israel peace treaties that are the anchor of American national interests in the Middle East.

We do not deny that there are costs to the United States, in the Arab world and elsewhere, for its support of Israel, as there are costs to U.S. support of other beleaguered -- and sometime imperfect -- friends, including West Berlin in the Cold War, Kuwait in 1990-91 and Taiwan today.

But the long-standing U.S. commitment to Israel has not prevented development of close ties with Arab nations, which understand -- however much they disagree with U.S. support for Israel -- that they benefit from a good relationship with the United States on other issues. Nor has it made the Arab oil-exporting states any less conscious of their own economic and strategic interest in a reasonably stable flow of oil to world markets, or their eagerness to buy first-class military equipment from the United States or to enjoy the benefits of U.S. protection against Iranian or other aggression.

Would Saudi Arabia's policies toward the United States, for example, be markedly different if Washington entered into a sustained crisis with Israel over the Palestine issue? Would Riyadh lower the price of oil? Would it stop hedging its regional bets concerning U.S. attempts to coerce Iran into freezing its nuclear weapons programs? Would it regard current U.S. policy toward Afghanistan more positively? Would it view American democracy promotion in the Middle East more favorably? Would it be more inclined to reform its internal governmental processes to be more in line with U.S. preferences? No.

In sum, we believe that Israel's substantial contributions to U.S. interests are an underappreciated aspect of this relationship and deserve equal billing to shared values and historical responsibility as rationales for American support of Israel.

*Robert D. Blackwill, deputy national security advisor for strategic planning in the George W. Bush administration, and Walter B. Slocombe, undersecretary of defense for policy in the Clinton administration, are authors of the new Washington Institute report Israel: A Strategic Asset for the United States.*

## **Israel's Resilient Democracy**

***Foreign Policy – Ambassador Michael Oren***

***April 5, 2012***

At 64, Israel is older than more than half of the democracies in the world. The Jewish state, moreover, belongs to a tiny group of countries -- the United States, Britain, and Canada among them -- never to have suffered intervals of non-democratic governance. Since its inception, Israel has been threatened ceaselessly with destruction. Yet it never once succumbed to the wartime pressures that often crush democracies.

On the contrary, conflict has only tempered an Israeli democracy that affords equal rights even to those Arabs and Jews who deny the state's legitimacy. Is there another democracy that would uphold the immunity of legislators who praise the terrorists sworn to destroy it? Where else could more than 5 percent of the population -- the equivalent of 15 million Americans -- rally in protest without incident and be protected by the police. And which country could rival the commitment to the rule of law displayed by the Jewish state, whose former president was convicted and jailed for sexual offenses by three Supreme Court justices -- two women and an Arab? Israeli democracy, according to pollster Khalil Shikaki, topped the United States as the most admired government in the world -- by the Palestinians.

These facts are incontestable, and yet recent media reports suggest that democracy in Israel is endangered. The Washington Post was "shock[ed] to see Israel's democratic government propose measures that could silence its own critics" after several Israeli ministers proposed limiting contributions to political NGOs by foreign governments. Citing "sickening reports of ultra-Orthodox men spitting on school girls whose attire they consider insufficiently demure, and demanding that women sit at the back of public buses," New Yorker editor David Remnick warned that the dream of a democratic, Jewish state "may be painfully, even fatally, deferred." In response to legislation sanctioning civil suits against those who boycott Israelis living in the West Bank, the New York Times concluded that "Israel's reputation as a vibrant democracy has been seriously tarnished."

The most scathing criticism of Israeli democracy derives from the situation in the West Bank, captured by Israel in a defensive war with Jordan in 1967. The fact that the Israelis and Palestinians living in those territories exercise different rights is certainly anomalous -- some would say anti-democratic. "There are today two Israels," author Peter Beinart wrote recently in the New York Times, "a flawed but genuine democracy within the green line and an ethnically-based nondemocracy beyond it." The latter, Beinart concluded, should actually be called "nondemocratic Israel."

Together, these critiques create the impression of an erosion of democratic values in Israel. Threats to freedom of speech and equal rights for women are cited as harbingers of this breakdown. Several observers have wondered whether the state that has long distinguished itself as the Middle East's only genuine democracy is deteriorating into one of the region's many autocracies and theocracies.

But are the allegations justified? Is Israeli democracy truly in jeopardy? Are basic liberties and gender equality -- the cornerstones of an open society -- imperiled? Will Israel retain its character as both a Jewish and a democratic state -- a redoubt of stability in the Middle East and of shared values with the United States?

These questions will be examined in depth, citing comparative, historical, and contemporary examples. The answers will show that, in the face of innumerable obstacles, Israeli democracy remains remarkable, resilient, and stable.

## Creation Ex Nihilo

In the United States, as in most Western countries, democracy evolved over the course of centuries. First nobles and then commoners wrested rights from monarchs, established representative institutions, and expanded the parameters of freedom. Democracy in Israel, however, emerged without the benefits of this gradual process. Taking root in hostile conditions, nurtured by a citizenry largely unfamiliar with Western liberal thought, democratic Israel appeared to sprout from nothing.

When Zionism emerged at the end of the 19th century, the Jews of Palestine and the thousands who joined them from tsarist Russia and around the Middle East had no exposure to democracy. Ottoman rule offered few models for democratic development and, in its final stages, brutally suppressed human rights. In fact, communism -- imported from Eastern Europe in the form of collective farms and labor unions -- influenced the political culture of the pre-state Jewish community, or Yishuv, far more than republican or free-market ideas.

Yet nearly from its inception, the Yishuv gravitated toward democracy. Intensely ideological and diverse, the Zionist parties -- socialist, religious, nationalist -- were forced to work together in the quest for Jewish statehood. The British Mandate, implemented in 1923, further fostered self-governing institutions such as the Jewish Agency. Still, in the words of Britain's first High Commissioner Lord Herbert Samuel, the Zionists remained "entwined in an inimical embrace like fighting serpents."

Ultimately, democracy in the Yishuv emerged not only from the requisites of state-building, but also from the legacy of tradition. The Hebrew Bible questions absolutism and the divine right of kings, and endows each individual with civic rights and responsibilities. For centuries, Jewish communities had organized themselves along democratic lines, with elected officials and public administrations. "We did not adopt the approach of the German Social Democrats ... the British Labor Party ... [or] Soviet communism," Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion averred. "We paved our own path." Innately, the Zionists understood that their future state would be both Jewish and democratic, regarding the two as synonymous.

The Yishuv accordingly developed embryonic democratic institutions such as the Elected Assembly and the Zionist Executive. It mustered a citizens' army -- the Haganah -- a free press, and unprecedented opportunities for women. In spite of repeated attempts by the Palestinian Arabs to combat the Yishuv, Zionist parties and labor unions sought common ground with the Arabs. The elements of a democracy, in other words, were in place well before Israel's establishment on May 14, 1948.

Under its declaration of independence, Israel ensured all of its citizens "complete equality of social and political rights ... irrespective of religion, race, or sex." It guaranteed "freedom of religion, conscience, language, education, and culture." In addition to a popularly elected government, Israelis would be represented by the 120-seat Knesset and protected by an independent judiciary. Suffrage was universal and assembly safeguarded.

Israel had forged the Middle East's first genuinely functional democracy. But the obstacles confronting that system -- domestic and external -- remained immense. A nation founded by pioneers from autocratic societies would have to wrestle with identity and security issues that would daunt even the most deeply rooted

democracies, especially as it subsequently absorbed nearly two million immigrants from the Middle East and the former Soviet bloc. Indeed, in the annals of modern democracy, Israel is entirely unique.

### Sui Generis

While Israeli democracy is grounded in the institutions and principles intrinsic to democratic systems, the Jewish state is nevertheless exceptional. It is a nation-state much like Bulgaria, Greece, and Ireland, but it also includes a large minority -- the Arabs -- whose distinct national and linguistic character is officially recognized. Though Judaism has a prominent place in both public and political life, Israel -- unlike Denmark, Great Britain, and Cambodia -- does not have a national religion. And in contrast to any of the world's democracies, Israel has never known a moment of peace, and must struggle to reconcile the often-clashing duties of preserving liberty and ensuring national survival.

Israel is not in any way a theocracy. It is, rather, the nation-state of the Jewish people. Indeed, Israel defines membership in that people broadly, integrating many who would not be considered Jewish by rabbinic authorities. Though religious parties participate in elections and the Chief Rabbinate exerts extensive influence over lifecycle events (marriage, burial), ultimate authority resides in the state's secular legislative, judicial, and security branches. The Jewish holidays -- Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Passover -- are national holidays, not unlike Christmas in the United States and Good Friday and Easter in many European countries.

All countries establish criteria for citizenship, and Israel is no exception. Nation-states such as Finland, Germany, and Hungary guarantee citizenship to their repatriating nationals. Israel, too, has a Law of Return, assuring citizenship to Jewish immigrants. The law is a form of affirmative action, righting the historic wrong of statelessness that cost the Jewish people immeasurable suffering and loss.

But Israel isn't just home to Jews. Muslims, Christians, Druze, and other minorities account for more than 20 percent of the population. Each enjoys autonomy in religious affairs and supervises its own sacred places. Indeed, the holiest site in Judaism, the Temple Mount, which is also revered by Muslims, has remained under the auspices of the Islamic waqf.

Discrimination, unfortunately, is common to virtually all countries, and Israel also grapples with it. Still, Arabs serve in the Knesset and on the Supreme Court, and they represent Israel diplomatically as well as athletically on its national teams. Though Arabs are exempted from national service, thousands volunteer to serve in the Israel Defense Forces alongside conscripted Circassians and Druze.

Arab Christians are especially successful in Israel, on average surpassing Jews academically and financially. At a time when Christians are fleeing the Middle East, Israel has the region's only expanding Christian population.

The flight of Christians is not the only historic event unfolding in the Middle East, a region convulsed by popular uprisings and demands for freedom. Israel has not been immune to these upheavals and has experienced its own social protests, with hundreds of thousands of Israelis taking to the streets. But unlike the violence of the Arab or Iranian revolts, the demonstrations in Israel were unexceptionally peaceful. Their demands, moreover, were immediately addressed by the government, including the provision of affordable housing for young people and free education for children starting at age three. When the people speak and the government earnestly responds, that is democracy in action.

Israeli democracy is distinguished not only by its receptiveness to public opinion but, perhaps most singularly, by its ability to thrive during conflict. Whether by suspending habeas corpus or imprisoning a suspected ethnic

community, as the United States did in its Civil War and World War II, embattled democracies frequently take measures that depart from peacetime norms. “Congress should have spent more time learning from the Israeli experience,” wrote Harvard Law School dean Martha Minow and professor Gabriella Blum in 2006, noting that Israel provides broader rights to security detainees than the United States. In spite of the unrelenting and often existential nature of the threats confronting Israel, it has stuck with the standards established on the day of its independence. As Arab armies joined with local Arab forces in an attempt to destroy the nascent state, Ben-Gurion determined that Israel “must not begin with national discrimination.” Israeli Arabs received the right to vote and run for political office.

In fact, Israel has tolerated acts that would be deemed treasonous in virtually any other democracy. Ahmed Tibi, who once advised PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat and recently praised Palestinian “martyrs” -- a well-known euphemism for suicide bombers -- serves as a member and deputy speaker of the Knesset. Another Arab Knesset member, Hanin Zoabi, was censured for her participation in the 2010 flotilla in support of the terrorist organization Hamas, but retained her seat and parliamentary immunity. Israeli Arab parties routinely call for dismantling the Jewish state, yet only one party was ever barred from Israeli elections: Kach, a Jewish party that preached hatred of Arabs.

In 1988, U.S. Supreme Court Justice William Brennan found that “Israel ... provides the best hope for building a jurisprudence that can protect civil liberties against the demands of national security.” Confronted with a phalanx of dangers -- suicide bombers, tens of thousands of enemy missiles, unconventional weapons -- Israel strives to maintain what its own Supreme Court calls “a delicate and sensitive balance” between meeting the country’s defense needs and preserving human rights. Though terrorists have used ambulances to ferry ammunition and carry out attacks, the court in 2002 instructed Israeli forces to refrain from impeding medical care even at the cost of compromising security. And when, in 1999, Israel’s defense services argued that physical duress was necessary to extract life-saving information from terrorist suspects, the court banned the use of all moderate, non-lethal pressure. In fact, Israel became the first democracy to tackle this controversial issue. In 2011, the court upheld the right of Mustafa Dirani, a Lebanese terrorist captured by Israel and later released in a prisoner exchange, to sue the state for alleged abuse during his imprisonment. “This is the price of democracy,” the Supreme Court has concluded, “It is expensive, but worthwhile. It strengthens the State. It provides a reason for its struggle.”

### Democracy’s Litmus

Clearly, Israeli democracy is distinctive, capable of bearing unparalleled burdens and coping with dizzying complexities. And yet, with increasing frequency, Israel’s commitment to democratic principles has been challenged.

Take, for example, the Washington Post’s claim that the Israeli cabinet had stifled free speech by proposing to tax and cap foreign government donations to NGOs operating in Israel. European governments contribute more to NGOs in Israel than to similar groups in all other Middle Eastern states combined. Eighty percent of those funds are directed toward political organizations that often oppose the government’s policies or, as in the case of Adalah and Badil, deny Israel’s legitimacy as a Jewish state. The United States also places restrictions on foreign funding for NGOs, which can forfeit their tax-exempt status by engaging in political advocacy.

Many Israelis saw the bill not as a threat to free speech, but rather as a means of defending their state from international isolation. The proposed bill did not, in fact, restrict the right of NGOs to speak freely -- only their ability to receive unlimited foreign funding. Even so, the bill was keenly debated within the government and ultimately not approved.

To call Israeli democracy into question because of one suggested bill that never made it into law is unjust. Democracies consider many laws, some of them imperfect, without compromising their democratic character. In Israel, as in America, legislation is tabled, deliberated, and often rejected without impugning the democratic process. In fact, that is the democratic process.

The issue of sexual equality, by contrast, poses a graver challenge to Israeli democracy. Whether by spitting on women or compelling them to sit separately on buses, gender discrimination indeed erodes democratic foundations. But concerns that the dream of Israeli democracy “may be painfully, even fatally, deferred” are off base, as discrimination against women is illegal in Israel. Criminal charges were quickly brought against those few ultra-Orthodox men who degraded or forcefully segregated women, and police were swiftly dispatched to the isolated neighborhoods where these outrages occurred to ensure continued compliance with the law. Hate crimes, though peripheral, persist in the United States as well as in Israel, but do not augur an end to democracy in either.

On the contrary, gender equality, not prejudice, remains an Israeli hallmark. Twenty-four members of the Knesset and both leaders of the social protest movement are women, as are the head of a major opposition party, a general on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and a recent chief justice of the Supreme Court. “If Israeli women can sit in the cockpit of an F-16,” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the 2011 graduating class of air force pilots that included five women, “they can sit any place.”

The press has also assailed the legislation permitting Israelis to sue other Israelis who boycott goods produced in West Bank settlements. The law might seem to violate the right of political expression. After all, not all Israelis support the government’s policies in Judea and Samaria -- the Hebrew names for the territory. Nevertheless, the Knesset, after a lengthy three-stage deliberation, approved the bill. Such boycotts, it reasoned, discriminated against a specific segment of Israeli society. Whether based on ethnicity or race, the boycott of individuals merely because of their place of residence was nothing less than prejudice. That principle notwithstanding, under Israel’s system of checks and balances, the Supreme Court may yet pass judgment on the bill.

#### Anomaly or Non-Democracy?

Still, there have been calls to boycott the settlements. “Israel,” argues Peter Beinart, “is forging ... an entity of dubious democratic legitimacy” that bars “West Bank Palestinians ... from citizenship and the right to vote in the state that controls their lives.” Beinart’s reasoning is based on the assumption that the West Bank Palestinians are denied democratic rights, legal recourse, or any say in their future, and that Israel has taken no serious measures to facilitate Palestinian statehood.

In reality, the majority of the Palestinians in the West Bank reside in areas administered by the Palestinian Authority. Together with the Palestinians living under direct Israeli control, they vote in the Palestinian elections. These were scheduled for January 2010, but have been delayed by the Palestinian leadership -- not by Israel. The Palestinian inhabitants of East Jerusalem, for their part, have also voted in the Palestinian elections.

Similarly, the legal situation in the West Bank cannot simply be reduced to democracy or non-democracy. Palestinian law applies to those Palestinians living under Palestinian Authority auspices. In Israeli-controlled areas and for Palestinians arrested for security offenses, Israeli military law, based on British and Jordanian precedents, is enforced. Such a patchwork might confound any democracy, but Israel has endowed all

Palestinians with the right to appeal directly to its Supreme Court. Palestinian villagers in the past have contested the location of Israel's security barrier, claiming it infringed on their land. Though the barrier has proven vital in protecting Israelis from terrorist attacks, the justices often found in the Palestinians' favor and ordered the fence moved. "One of the most unusual aspects of Israeli law is the rapid access that petitioners, including Palestinians, can gain to Israel's highest court," the New York Times observed in 2003, noting that even during periods of fierce fighting, "the high court was receiving and ruling on petitions almost daily."

The existence of partially democratic enclaves within a democratic system does not necessarily discredit it. Residents of Washington, D.C., are taxed without representation, while those in the U.S. territories -- Guam, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands -- cannot vote in presidential elections. Anomalies exist in every democracy, and Israel's is not voided by the situation in the West Bank. But because of its commitment to remaining a Jewish and democratic state, Israel is striving to end that aberration and resolve the century-long conflict with the Palestinians.

The solution is two states -- the Jewish state of Israel and the Palestinian state of Palestine -- living side by side in mutual recognition, security, and peace. Israel proffered offers for such an arrangement in 2000 and 2008, and withdrew both its military and civilian citizens from Gaza to enable the Palestinians to create a peaceful prototype state. Prime Minister Netanyahu has made the two-state solution the cornerstone of his diplomatic platform. Addressing a joint session of the U.S. Congress in 2011, he stressed Israel's willingness to take significant risks for peace and concede land sacred to Jews for millennia. For the first time, an Israeli prime minister publicly stated that "some [Israeli] settlements will end up beyond Israel's borders," and that "with creativity and with goodwill, a solution [for Jerusalem] can be found."

Of course, the Palestinians are not passive observers of this process. They have exercised their agency by rejecting Israel's multiple offers of independence. During their last elections, the majority of the Palestinian people voted for Hamas, a terrorist organization that is dedicated to Israel's destruction and has transformed Gaza into a terrorist mini-state. In recent years, Palestinian Authority leaders have balked at direct negotiations with Israel, preferring instead to seek independence unilaterally without making peace and pursue reconciliation with Hamas.

As impediments to peace, settlements pale beside those posed by Palestinian support for terror and the rejection of Israel's right to exist as a secure and legitimate Jewish state. Yet, in spite of all the disappointment and loss, Israelis still hope that the Palestinians will achieve sovereignty -- that they, too, will face the myriad challenges of maintaining a Middle Eastern democracy. And next door they will have a seasoned, dynamic model.

#### A Work in Progress

The fulfillment of the two-state solution might ease Israel's difficulties balancing defense needs and civil rights. But regional instability, combined with a highly pluralistic and value-diverse society, will continue to test Israel's democratic resolve.

One such crucible is the issue of gay rights in Israel. A nation at arms, Israel never had a "don't ask, don't tell" rule for its military as in the United States. The government assures same-sex couples the same rights as heterosexual couples, and provides shelter to Palestinian homosexuals seeking safety from Islamists in the West Bank. And in a recent survey conducted by GayCities.com and American Airlines, Tel Aviv was ranked as the world's most gay-friendly city. Israel, of course, has traditional populations that repudiate gay rights. Nevertheless, when religious leaders -- Jewish, Christian, and Muslim -- together demand the suspension of Jerusalem's annual Gay Pride Parade, the state makes sure it proceeds.

The litmus test for any democracy is its ability to protect the rights of its minorities. Along with its need to reconcile civil liberties with security needs, Israel must also strike a balance between democracy and pluralism. The task can become onerous, especially when the interests of large minorities conflict with democratic norms. Many ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods, for example, object to billboards depicting women. They, too, have a right to express their beliefs, however inconsistent with democracy, and Israel has a duty to hear them.

Israel is hardly alone in confronting such paradoxes. Much of the American public supports the application of obscenity laws on network television though they do not necessarily accord with the First Amendment. Israel does not subject its networks to obscenity laws but, like the United States, it has a growing religious constituency whose sensibilities must be considered. Being democratic means walking innumerable lines between parochial preferences and public freedom -- between showing respect and upholding the law.

Israeli culture allows for a broad spectrum of political beliefs, all of them fervently held and expounded. The heckling of the president by congressmen makes headlines in America, but the jeering of Israeli prime ministers by Knesset members is too commonplace to report. The peace process, religion, and social and economic justice are just some of the contentious issues that Israelis debate constantly.

For all this, Israeli democracy remains a work in progress. Like all democracies, even those in less turbulent parts of the globe, Israel's has its flaws. We have to work harder to safeguard minority rights and gender equality, harder to achieve a just balance between defense and civil liberties and between democracy and pluralism. And we must never abandon the vision of peace.

But we must also acknowledge that Israel is a work of progress. Founded by individuals from dissimilar, often illiberal cultures, pressed with the absorption of millions of immigrants and saddled with the West Bank situation which it has repeatedly offered to resolve, confronted with the relentless threat of war, democracy in Israel is today more robust and effervescent than ever. Against incalculable odds, Israel remains unflaggingly -- even flagrantly -- democratic.

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