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# Pro-Herzog compromise campaign



**CENTER FIELD**  
• By GIL TROY

**L**isten! Can you hear it? Beyond the snarling of this Rottweiler government, which only hears the opposition's insults; beyond the dooming-and-glooming of the uncompromising opposition, which only hears the government's snarls, I detect other, more familiar, seasonal sounds. It's the growing chorus of backs creaking, steel-wool-pads scratching, elbows greasing, shoppers shopping and wallets thinning.

Yes, Israel's annual Passover clean-a-thon has begun. It will culminate with 85% of Israeli Jews attending a seder – followed by mass matzah-eating, intense Remembrance Day mourning, and giddy barbecuing on Israel's 75th birthday, 42 days from now.

Israelis' many shared rituals, songs and food during Passover, Hanukkah, Purim, and so many holidays prove Troy's "coercion aversion theorem." The more religiously bullied Israelis feel, they less they do; our most popular Jewish activities are voluntary, not imposed. That's why so many Israelis who happily eat hamantashen and rest on Shabbat, avoid getting married by the officially mandated rabbinate.

I cannot predict our short-term political future, but I am confident that nothing will stop our exhausting, exhilarating, holiday barrage. Let's hope a compromise comes yesterday. All we need is a "gang of four" from the Likud – or four Likudnik children shaming their parents into saving us – to slow the government's mad, self-destructive rush.

The coalition has to realize that a lasting partial victory is better than a traumatizing triumph that fades with the next government transition. And the opposition must beware of mission creep: they mobilized against a too-sweeping reform that risks concentrating too much power in the prime minister. Declare victory if you

wrest some concessions – and don't try canceling the election results.

Meanwhile, this crisis has produced at least one hero. Once again, our president, Isaac Herzog, stood tall. This time, he challenged those most guilty, the politicians in power, to "take responsibility immediately," warning: "history will judge you."

More and more centrists, rejecting both sides' vitriol, keep asking "what can we do?" The answer is clear – we must start rallying around our president, celebrating the value of compromise, and toasting Israel, this extraordinary Jewish democracy.

Every gazillionaire justifiably worried about the instability the government has unnecessarily unleashed should not divest from Israel – but invest in Israeli centrism. Bankroll a massive advertising campaign, run by sharp political consultants and savvy social media influencers, boosting Herzog, thinking about how we unite the day after – and celebrating us. Build from holiday-to-holiday, romanticize Herzog's Zionist biography, and remind us that we are one.

Think Ronald Reagan's "Morning in America" campaign – or Barack Obama's "Yes We Can" ads. In Israeli terms, remember how an unknown Naftali Bennett debuted impressively with his 2013 Jewish Home Party campaign. Interviewers asked Israelis-on-the-street "what is the 'Jewish home' for you?"

The charming, inspiring, incredibly effective ads offered the standard answers found in Hadag Nahash's "Yom Shishi" ("Friday) song, and Hatikva 6's "HaChee Yisraeli" ("The Israeli-est") song. That song's rousing melody could rouse the masses.

Some efforts have begun. The Jewish People's Policy Institute (JPPI) launched a campaign for compromise, but



THIS CRISIS has produced at least one hero. Once again, our president, Isaac Herzog, stood tall, says the writer. (Avshalom Sassoni/Flash90)

it must be scaled up dramatically. Most movingly, dozens of major generals, from Left to Right, published a "Unity Letter"; although in English, their initiative is not about – as their front-page ads proclaim – "Singing the partition to leave the IDF out of politics." The UN had no 1947 theme song; it's about signing their petition!

Both extremes keep shouting us centrists. But we, the silenced majority, are not outnumbered. The screeching encourages simplistic stereotypes of a divided Israel: apparently, it's the Jews vs the Israelis, or the Priestly Kingdom of Judea vs the Republic of Tel Aviv, or the "elites" vs the "people."

Each either-or misses Israel's muddying marvelous middle. There's nothing Jewish in Ben-Gvirites belching anti-Arab bigotry, or Smotrichistas dreaming of destroying villages, or 400 goonatics stopping to pray while trashing Huwara. Such desecrations of God's name violate core Jewish values.

MEANWHILE, CONSIDER last week's split-screen Israel – protesting and Purim-partying, with costume stores adorning

Tel Aviv's streets and many adults, not just kids, masquerading. These protesting "Israelis" are pretty darned Jewish.

Similarly, believing that our wrecking-ball conservatives want a Judean theocracy misses how non-religious Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and most Likudniks are, while overlooking their allies from haredi-stan, Mizrachi-town, and neo-conservativia. And while the government amplifies the most north Tel Aviv protest voices, many kippah-wearing or elbow-covering recovering-Bibists reject the reforms too.

Finally, super-connected, hyper-intellectual, lawyer-ideologues – like Justice Minister Yariv Levin, and Constitution, Law and Justice Committee chairman Simcha Rothman – are such elitist insiders, they make me look like a man of the people. Meanwhile, polls show that more and more salt-of-the-earth Israelis fear this take-no-prisoners government.

These dueling binaries mislead. Most Israelis, from Left to Right, happily live in Theodor Herzl's Altneuland. Our old-new land is impressively modern yet delightfully traditional, respectful, grounded,

anchored. We Altneulanders deserve the old Benjamin Netanyahu – the Zionist who in his memoirs hails Herzl as a modern Moses. The patriot who always prioritized Israel's self-defense over any partisan's obsession. The statesman who could cooperate when necessary with an opposition leader and fellow Zionist, Isaac Herzog – even supporting his presidency – and just a few years ago, united Israel against real enemies: the nuclear-hungry mullahs, not his fellow citizens.

And we Altneuland Zionists will happily respond to a foundation-driven or crowd-sourced, upbeat blue-and-white campaign, emphasizing how lucky we are to be living in this land, right now, and how lucky we are to be led by this president – and other forces for good binding us together, not ripping us apart.

*The writer is a distinguished scholar of North American history at McGill University, and the author of nine books on American history and four books on Zionism. He is the editor of the new three-volume set, Theodor Herzl: Zionist Writings, the inaugural publication of The Library of the Jewish People (www.theljp.org).*