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Zionism: Still helping Jews to save themselves



CENTER FIELD
• By GIL TROY

During that annus horribilis, 2023, many things precious to Jews failed. Israel's government failed systemically, flamboyantly, from the coalition's inception. The IDF's border defense failed operationally and strategically. The Ivy League that Jews worshiped failed morally. Many young people that American Jews have so invested in failed politically and ideologically.

Yet, Zionism did not fail on October 7. Chaim Weizmann warned in 1947, that "a people does not get a state on a silver platter." Actually, Zionism – especially its self-defense ethos – keeps saving Israel, and the Jewish people – physically and spiritually.

"There is, of course, a thing called history," the historian Arnold Toynbee taught, "but history is something unpleasant that happens to other people." Indeed, October 7 ended many Jews' 50-year holiday from history.

Since defeating the Egyptian and Syrian armies' 1973 Yom Kippur surprise attack, Israelis had been running away from history – quite successfully. Despite occasional terrorist bumps, Israel prospered. A primitive, beleaguered country blossomed into a regional powerhouse militarily, and a hi-tech superpower financially, and intellectually.

As most Israelis hope that the Supreme Court's ill-timed decision to reawaken judicial reform passions won't polarize us again, both factions in this year's fight were fleeing history. The Left's extremists

were protecting their Israeli dream, fearing Netanyahu's government would ruin their hi-tech, relatively low-maintenance, Israel. Meanwhile, the Right's extremists, chomping into their piece of the Israeli pie, reduced politics to a fight for spoils and revenge against old rivals domestically – while ignoring our enemies externally.

Bibi Zionism bewitched everyone. Netanyahu helped Israel modernize, prosper, and become spoiled. Ignoring his father's darker historical teachings, Bibi became the avatar of "Ikea Zionism," promising a chicken in every pot and an Apple laptop in every over-decorated bedroom.

Ironically, Bibi Zionism's greatest creation – the Start-Up Tel Avivis – fought him to save his Easy Livin' Zionism from his own government. And, Bibi held onto power by ignoring those accomplishments and returning his Bibistas to the grievances Bibi Zionism helped them escape.

Increasingly, Bibi Zionism spurned good governance, national unity, and problem-solving. It preferred winning the daily news cycle to addressing long-term issues, having addicted Israelis to cushy lifestyles, and my-way-or-the-highway politics.

American Jews were also on the run historically – and loving it. In 1973, the community was still insecure, moving on up, guilt-ridden about its Holocaust-era silence. By 2023, Jews had so "made it" that many young Jews felt guilty about their "privi-



PRIME MINISTER Benjamin Netanyahu leads a cabinet meeting in Tel Aviv, last week. 'Israel's government failed systemically, flamboyantly, from the coalition's inception. Yet, Zionism did not fail on October 7,' says the writer. (Miriam Alster/Flash90)

lege," negating their parents' and grandparents' Herculean efforts to succeed. They also deemed themselves "white," which to the Left became a curse, and to the far Right – a blessed designation Jews didn't deserve.

Still, last New Year's, Israelis and American Jews could see two of the happiest, richest, most comfortable communities in Jewish history. Most Canadian, Australian, and British Jews felt good too.

TODAY, WE'RE devastated, bleeding, worrying, fighting multi-front wars. We under-

estimated our Middle Eastern enemies – and overestimated our Western friends.

True, Zionists who thought Zionism would end Jew-hatred miscalculated – but blame the Jew-haters not the Jews. Zionism finally gave Jews tools for confronting Jew-hatred. Promising Jews we would never be powerless again, Zionism returned us to history. Jewish history pulses with tragedies, enemies, failures – but with values, visions, and victories too. If the October 7 sadistic slaughter made us all Jews again, Israel's successful counterat-

tack made us all 100% Zionist.

An extraordinary 1942 Hebrew short-story, translated magnificently by Hillel Halkin, explains this tension. Haim Hazaz wrote "The Sermon" midway through the Holocaust, six years before Israel's creation. He addresses Jewish history's challenges and the resulting Zionist opportunities amid enduring Jew-hatred.

Yudka – "Little Judah" or "Jew" – commandeers a kibbutz meeting, proclaiming, "I object to Jewish history." After all, "we never made

our own history, the gentiles always made it for us." Forever victims not players, we spawned a history with "no adventures, no conquering heroes, no great rulers... All it has is a mob of beaten, groaning, weeping, begging Jews."

In an aside, anticipating today's un-Jews, Yudka blasts "all those absent-minded Arab-loving professors," who "wallow" in Jewish "suffering." They believe suffering "enables us to be Jews," that it "maintains us and makes us appear strong and heroic" and moral. Tired of surrendering, Yudka sighs: "The

more enslaved we are, the more superior we feel."

Yudka overreacts, deciding that Zionism must crush Judaism rather than redefine and revitalize it. But I agree that "Zionism's inner essence, its hidden power" is radical, pro-active, and cleansing. Miraculously, Zionism created "A different people, one above all that makes its own history by and for itself, rather than having it made for it by others... Because a people that do not live in its own land and control its own fate has no history."

Jewish history's ongoing tragedy is that too many hate us; Zionism's enduring success is that we have a citizens' army to protect us and a new mentality that will never, ever surrender again.

Since Jews returned to power in Israel, some Arabs have always tried killing us. On October 7, 2023, too many succeeded. But even on that bloody day, we mobilized, immediately, globally. Every day we fight, we mobilize, we volunteer, we support, we push back, we write brave new chapters in Jewish history – etched in Zionist ink, sweat, and blood.

And every day that we sing, we dance, we marry, give birth, or just live our lives, we deprive our enemies of the victory they seek – which we, as Zionists, will never, ever grant them again.

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