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בנימין זאב הרצל - בהקשר לציונו - 80790						

: Whither the enlightened world

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HERE AND THERE
BRENDA KATTEN

February 14 marks 130 years since the publication of Theodor Herzl's *Der Judenstaat* (*The Jewish State*). Published in 1896, it stunned the Jewish world.

It is generally recognized that the catalyst for Herzl writing this pamphlet – or skinny booklet, as it is described – was his experience as the Paris correspondent for the Viennese newspaper *Neue Freie Presse*. Herzl witnessed the degrading of Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish French artillery captain falsely convicted of selling military secrets to Germany. Herzl saw this as an example of the blatant antisemitism pervading Europe. His answer was the creation of a Jewish state where Jews could live without fear of antisemitism. His vision encapsulated that while non-Jews would be welcome, the vast majority would be Jews.

Herzl, an assimilated member of Vienna's middle class, was not a practicing Jew nor did he speak Hebrew. His ignorance of the Jewish religion saw a future Jewish state as having little to do with Judaism, leading him, at one point, to being prepared to accept Uganda as the home of the Jewish people.

What would Herzl think if he were to return to today's world? For sure, he would be shocked to find the level at which antisemitism has pervaded the free and so-called enlightened world.

There are those who compare today's Jew-hatred with the hatred of Jews during the 1930s and 1940s that led to Hitler and the Germans' annihilation of two-thirds of European Jewry. However, today's antisemitism is particularly disturbing, as it is not limited to a single country but is practiced in far too many sovereign states throughout the world.

The current Jew-hatred is the result of an Iran whose supporters and proxies have ensured that the free world is educated to despise Jews. Qatar, with strong ties to Iran, has financed major universities worldwide, guiding students toward the abhorrence of Jews.

Iran's proxies, Hamas and Hezbollah, while unsuccessful in physically eliminating the one Jewish state, have managed to persuade the "enlightened world" that Israel – the victim of Hamas's attempt to wipe us off the map on October 7, 2023, – is the aggressor.

What the free world is not yet prepared to accept is that Iran is not only an enemy of the Jews; it is an enemy of the entire non-Muslim world.

The clearest evidence of how blind the West is in recognizing this reality is its failure to assist the brave Iranians who came out in their millions on the



streets of Tehran (not for the first time), protesting against their leadership and paying the ultimate price.

Due to Iran's complete blackout of communication, it is difficult to verify the exact number of Iranians who have been brutally murdered, but figures vary, with some quoted as high as 30,000 and beyond.

What would Herzl think if he were to return to today's world?

Where in the free, "enlightened" world are the demonstrators against the murderous Iranian leadership? There are those who find the time and energy to consistently demonstrate against the Jews and Israel but appear to show no sympathy for the countless men, women, and children barbarically murdered by their Iranian leaders.

What we witnessed recently in the center of London were thousands marching in support of Palestine and against Israel while brandishing placards bearing the image of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, with words underneath reading "The right side of history." Chants of "Long live the ayatollah" could be heard, and Nazi salutes were visible as demonstrators marched on their way to Downing Street, home of the UK's prime minister.

Without doubt, what the world desperately requires today is a Churchill, who alone was prepared to confront Hitler in the 1930s. The West is in dire need of such a leader. There is a time to appease and a time to confront, and – without doubt – the time to confront a second Hitler is now.

AT THE same time, we in Israel need to confront the ever-increasing divisions within our own society, as we are facing one of the most challenging periods in our history. The time is long overdue for self-reflection. We are a split nation, which made us vulnerable to attack on Oct. 7.

Then the country was divided over Justice Minister Yariv Levin's proposal to weaken the judiciary – a proposal that Levin continues to promote. He also holds the position of deputy prime minister.

Israel, a country without a constitution and devoid of a second house, requires the legal input on proposed law changes. Since 1995, the Supreme Court has the authority to strike down laws passed by the Knesset if they contradict Basic Laws. In January 2024, the Supreme Court determined it has the power to review and possibly strike down even Basic Laws if they violate the "core of Israel's identity as a Jewish and democratic state." The court can strike down government decisions or ministerial actions based on the "reasonableness" doctrine.

What Levin aims to achieve would enable the government to do as it pleases, regardless of what is legally or morally correct.

Right now we are witnessing the government's attempt to remove the attorney-general, its questioning of the validity of the High Court of Justice, and its refusal to recognize Supreme Court President Isaac Amit as its legally elected head.

For more than a year, Levin has failed to convene the Judicial Selection Committee, thereby preventing the appointment of judges to the magistrate and district courts, heavily increasing the burden on the judicial system.

SUPPORTING A 'Free Palestine' as part of a 'Stop Bombing Iran' protest following the US attack on Iranian nuclear sites, near the US Embassy in London, June 23, 2025. (Jaimi Joy/Reuters)

Simultaneously, we face a government bent on passing a budget giving financial support to the ultra-Orthodox sector that continues to refuse to play its part in the defense of this country.

How dangerous is this, at a time when the IDF is short of approximately 10,000 soldiers, including an urgent need for some 7,000 additional combat personnel due to the prolonged conflict in Gaza and other fronts!

The citizens of Israel – relying heavily on those who serve in the IDF – deserve a budget that reflects the contribution made by those who give to the country, rather than those who take and give naught.

One such individual who gave of himself to save others was St.-Sgt.-Maj. Ran Gvili. The entire country, and especially his family, were relieved when his body was returned to his home for burial. Gvili was the last hostage to be released. Extraordinarily brave on Oct. 7, he was among the first to arrive to defend Kibbutz Alumim's men, women, and children. In spite of being shot twice, Gvili succeeded in killing 14 terrorists before succumbing to his wounds.

ON THIS 130th anniversary of Herzl's *Der Judenstadt*, we appreciate how right Herzl was in recognizing the need for a state where Jews would be masters of their own destiny.

The journey to retain the one Jewish state has been fraught with challenges, of which the most testing has been to fight those bent on our destruction time and again. This we have done thanks to the sacrifice of too many – may their memory be as a blessing.

Israel, in spite of those determined to annihilate us, has succeeded in becoming a country achieving way beyond Herzl's wildest dreams – from the days of the earliest pioneers, who turned a swampland into a country whose desert has produced untold vegetation, to the start-up phenomenon and technological world leader Israel is today, embracing manifold health-promoting discoveries utilized throughout the world.

Herzl would be proud of what the Jewish state has accomplished, and he would be even prouder if we could find a way of coming together.

Am Yisrael chai.

The writer is president of the Israel, Britain and the Commonwealth Association and has chaired public affairs organizations in Israel and the UK.