



Jerusalem 6:51
Toronto 8:14

ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

the conversation. Silence creates a vacuum, and extremists are always eager to fill it.

Boy George has reminded us that courage can be contagious. His example should inspire thousands of others, not

only celebrities, but also business leaders, professors, athletes, clergy, elected officials and ordinary citizens who still know the difference between right and wrong.

Most importantly, his courage should inspire Jews and their supporters. For generations, we have taught our children not to hide who they are, not to apologize for their existence and not to wait for someone else to defend them. Now is the moment to live up to those values.

We should publicly thank those who stand with us. We should buy their books, stream their music, attend their concerts, share their messages and ensure that courage is rewarded rather than punished. At the same time, we must demand more from the leaders and institutions that claim to represent us.

History rarely remembers those who remained safely silent. It remembers those who stood up when standing came at a cost. Boy George has chosen his place in history. The question is whether the rest of us will choose ours. (JNS Aug 6)

Commentary...

Boy George has More Courage than Many Jewish Leaders

By Rachel Sapoznik

History has an uncomfortable way of revealing who is willing to stand up when doing so comes at a cost.

Recently, it wasn't a rabbi, the head of a major Jewish organization, a billionaire donor, a university president or a Hollywood executive who stood up for the Jews. It was Boy George. Yes, that Boy George.

The British pop icon, who is not Jewish, looked at the explosion of antisemitism since Oct. 7 and refused to remain silent. He watched Jewish students face harassment on college campuses, synagogues become targets and protesters rationalize or even celebrate the massacre of innocent civilians. In response, he wrote a new song, "Od Nirkod" ("We Will Dance Again"), honoring the victims of the Hamas-led terrorist attacks in southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, and expressing solidarity with the Jewish people.

Boy George undoubtedly knew what would follow. He knew activists would attack him, social-media mobs would target him, and that there could be professional consequences for publicly standing with Israel and the Jewish community. And there have been, though he did it anyway.

That is what courage looks like. And it forces us to confront a difficult question: Where are the people whose full-time job is to defend the Jewish people?

He has reminded us that courage can be contagious.

For nearly three years, Jewish communities around the world have endured an extraordinary wave of antisemitism. Jewish-owned businesses have been vandalized. Students have been threatened and intimidated. Protesters have glorified terrorism and openly praised those responsible for murdering Jews. Families have hidden their mezuzahs, removed Stars of David and wondered whether it is safe to wear a kippah in public.

Yet too many Jewish institutions have responded with carefully worded statements designed to offend no one, press releases read by almost no one, private meetings and appeals for quiet diplomacy.

There is certainly a place for diplomacy, strategic advocacy and serious work behind the scenes. There is, however, no place for silence masquerading as strategy.

The Jewish people do not need more committees or another round of empty declarations. We need conviction. We need leaders who understand that moral clarity matters more than political convenience and that defending the Jewish people sometimes requires making others uncomfortable.

Boy George understood something many Jewish leaders appear to have forgotten: Neutrality in the face of hatred is not neutrality. It benefits the hater.

He did not ask whether standing with Jews would damage his brand. He did not hire consultants to test the political winds or wait for permission from the cultural gatekeepers. He simply made it clear that he stands with the Jewish people.

That should not require bravery in a democratic society. The tragedy is that today, it often does.

This is not an indictment of every Jewish organization. Many are doing extraordinary and necessary work: providing security, pursuing legal action, educating the public and supporting communities under threat. Their efforts deserve recognition and support.

We must demand more from the leaders and institutions that claim to represent us.

But behind-the-scenes work cannot replace visible leadership. The battle against antisemitism is being fought in the public square: in classrooms, on social media, throughout the entertainment industry, inside government and on college campuses. If those defending the Jewish people remain invisible, those spreading hatred will dominate

El-Sayed, the Democrats, AIPAC and the War on American Jews

By Jonathan S. Tobin

It would be difficult to underestimate the impact of Dr. Abdul El-Sayed on American politics. His victory in the Michigan Senate Democratic primary over Rep. Haley Stevens (D-Mich.) has inspired endless commentary and analysis about the sources of his personal appeal, the shortcomings of his opponent, the state of the electorate and the failures of pollsters to come even close to predicting the results. And it won't be until we see how he fares against his Republican opponent, former Rep. Mike Rogers, in the general election, that we will have a better idea of how most Americans—and not just Democratic primary voters—feel about his beliefs.

But there should be no mistaking one thing: Democrats have given a person whose most important issue was demonizing Jewish participation in American politics a narrow plurality. By rallying around him and unifying behind his candidacy, as the defeated party establishment has already done, they are normalizing a hateful position against a segment of citizenry. They are declaring that politics driven by traditional tropes of antisemitism and money is not merely debatable, but a stand they can all get behind if it means winning a majority in the U.S. Senate.

Like other public antisemites on the left and right, the 41-year-old El-Sayed has declared his love of the Jewish people and his "commitment to Jewish safety" after winning the primary by less than one percentage point—about 15,000 votes out of more than 1.5 million. Similar sentiments have been heard before by Democrats associated with the progressive "Squad" in the U.S. House of Representatives, like fellow Michigander Rashida Tlaib and Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.). New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani has also attempted to deflect justified charges of antisemitism. All of them, like El-Sayed's pledges, are equally insincere.

He and other left-wing opponents of Israel claim that they are merely "criticizing" Israel's current government and expressing sympathy for Palestinian Arabs in the Gaza Strip. They also say that by attacking the pro-Israel lobby AIPAC, they are merely decrying the influence of money in American politics and seeking to prevent special interests or a foreign country from attempting to "buy" Congress.

But these excuses aren't merely deceptive. They are a flimsy cover for stands that seek not so much to put AIPAC in its place as to remove Jews from the American public square—other than those who join with Jew-haters to try to demonize a key aspect of Jewish identity and faith.

They do not "criticize" Israel as much as they wish to delegitimize the existence of the one Jewish state on the planet. They want to strip it of its rights and ability to defend itself against an

international movement that seeks its destruction.

Their opposition to an “ethno-state” is limited only to the Jewish one and indifferent to the dozens that are Muslim. Their desire to rid the electoral system of the influence of campaign spending is limited to those individuals and entities that organize support for Israel. They have no problem with the people, organizations or interests supporting those who back Islamists. They claim that American citizens who back their country’s Israeli ally are malign actors working on behalf of foreign influence. Yet they see nothing wrong with the infinitely greater resources being spent in the United States by Islamist nations like Qatar to spread and normalize Jew-hatred.

They aim to drive AIPAC out of American politics, and yet, they take money, as El-Sayed did, from those affiliated with the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a group not merely openly antisemitic but founded as a front for Hamas. And they seek to isolate and silence those who point to the growing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is linked to CAIR.

All of this illustrates that the anti-Zionism that drives the efforts of a growing cadre of Muslim politicians such as El-Sayed is indistinguishable from a hatred of Jews. El-Sayed explicitly seeks to redefine Judaism and eliminate one of its key elements—love of the land of Israel and its centrality in Jewish life—to clear himself of justified charges of antisemitism.

In the last decade since progressives began an effort to wrest control of the Democrats from its establishment after their presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton, was defeated by President Donald Trump, a wave of left-wing candidates have sought to transform the party.

It began not just with the election of the four charter members of the left-wing congressional “Squad” in 2018, but with the refusal of the party establishment to isolate or condemn Tlaib and Omar when they initially engaged in open antisemitism. Then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi didn’t just prevent the censure of Omar for her now-infamous antisemitic tweet stating, “It’s all about the Benjamins, baby,” referencing money and the lobbying group AIPAC, and analogizing Israel to the Taliban.

In fact, Pelosi went on to pose with them for the cover of Rolling Stone magazine to show that she and Democrats embraced what they rightly saw as politicians who spoke for their party’s base, which were not merely open to socialism but also hated Israel and were hostile to Jews. They were also afraid of being accused of Islamophobia, which in practice in the 21st century isn’t hatred for Islam but a willingness to notice Muslim Jew-hatred.

What matters about those events is that set of choices has informed and explained Democratic Party politics in the years since then.

That’s why in the aftermath of the Hamas-led Palestinian-Arab assault in southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, the reaction from so many Democrats has been to turn on the Jewish state. Many Democrats believe that former Vice President Kamala Harris was defeated by Trump in 2024 because she and former President Joe Biden were insufficiently hostile to Israel, despite their hamstringing of the Jewish state’s post-Oct. 7 war effort and slow-walking of arms deliveries.

And it is why the Democratic caucuses in both the House of Representatives and the Senate are now on record as supporting an embargo on aid to Israel, including defensive weapons like the Iron Dome anti-missile system.

They defend this as a reaction to what they claim is the brutality of Israel, but what they are really telling us is something else. They are making clear that the majority of their officeholders, party cadres, liberal mainstream media allies, and academic and cultural thought leaders have accepted the toxic left-wing ideologies that define Jews and Israel as “white” oppressors. This belief that they are always in the wrong, no matter what they do, and that those who wish to destroy the Jewish state are oppressed minorities always in the right is at the heart of the surge of antisemitism since Oct. 7.

That is how blood libels and other fabricated propaganda about Israel committing “genocide” in Gaza, deliberately starving Palestinians or dragging (and even blackmailing) the Trump administration to go to war against Iran have become not so much widely believed on the political left but viewed as unquestionably true.

That is the political eco-system that made possible the rise of someone like El-Sayed. Without it, it would have been unthinkable for a candidate to win a major party nomination for the U.S. Senate via a campaign that was largely based on the idea that the most important challenge facing the American people is the existence of a lobbying

group that seeks to promote support for Israel. The fact that AIPAC’s reach and resources are dwarfed by other lobbying groups that represent major industries and that it spends less than leftist mega-donors, like the family of George Soros, on candidates who, among other causes, oppose Israel is dismissed. El-Sayed’s campaign is driven by anti-Jewish bigotry, not concern about campaign finance laws.

Yet beyond the specifics of the efforts to maliciously and falsely portray AIPAC as a sinister group manipulating the system against U.S. interests, there is something more at stake in this debate. Those who single out AIPAC and have shockingly buffaloe most Democrats into saying they won’t take contributions from it or its members are seeking to drive Jews out of the American public square.

Just as bad, Democrats who still claim to support Israel and who don’t condemn AIPAC, like Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), endorsed El-Sayed after the primary. For them, partisanship is more important than opposing antisemitism. That same mindset caused Senate Democrats to boycott a hearing chaired by Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) on the growing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in the United States and elsewhere.

It is entirely true that part of El-Sayed’s appeal is linked to a hunger for populism and a rejection of failed political establishments across the political spectrum. He is also profiting from the lack of historical memory among so many Americans who are willing to fall for the siren call of far-left economics that he promotes (despite the wealthy health professional’s declaration that he is not a socialist).

His charisma and political skills, and, by contrast, Stevens’s dull political persona, also played a role in the outcome. Though she was a genuine moderate, her ability to marginalize him and fend off his claims that she was the candidate of a “foreign” lobby was also undermined by her fear of alienating anti-Israel and antisemitic sentiment in a party where both were already normalized. Her reflexive criticism of Israel and willingness to acquiesce to the demonization of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu—a now-standard trope of pro-Israel Democrats—also made it difficult to point out that El-Sayed’s positions were as immoral and prejudicial as they were wrongheaded.

Yet even supporters of El-Sayed, like Michelle Goldberg, The New York Times’ anti-Zionist columnist, noted his megalomaniacal tendencies, so typical of hate-mongers, which cause him to believe that those who oppose him can’t be sincere.

The existence of a large Arab and Muslim-American population in Michigan—and the ubiquity of anti-Jewish prejudice in that particular community—was another factor, though one that hasn’t been replicated in U.S. politics, except in certain circumstances, as Mamdani’s victory in New York City showed.

Still, El-Sayed’s support was largely limited to white privileged voters, along with his Arab and Muslim base. The credentialed elites are the base of the Democratic Party these days, not the working-class voters it once represented and now largely scorns. He did poorly among African-Americans, who are a vital constituency for Democrats. As much as Jews and blacks have split on many issues, convincing African-Americans to buy into the idea that a pro-Israel lobby was the country’s greatest problem was a tough sell.

Nevertheless, the consequences of a campaign that normalizes El-Sayed’s vile tactics will be felt throughout the political system and American discourse.

It remains to be seen whether Rogers will be more effective in pointing out El-Sayed’s extremism. It will also be interesting to see if African-Americans turn out for a candidate with little to say to them in the numbers Democrats need to prevail.

Much attention will also focus on Michigan’s Jewish community, mainly in and around Detroit, which makes up only 1.4% of the state’s electorate. It is still overwhelmingly politically liberal and loyally votes the Democratic ticket. If a significant minority reflexively votes for the Democratic candidate, as was the case with Mamdani in the 2025 New York City mayoral election, regardless of El-Sayed’s contempt for Jewish interests and rights, it will be a sign of the moral collapse of liberal Jewry.

It should be remembered that in March, a domestic terrorist, Ayman Mohamed Ghazali, crashed his pickup truck—loaded with gasoline and commercial fireworks—into Temple Israel, a large

Reform synagogue in West Bloomfield Township, Mich. Fortunately, no one was hurt except for the attacker himself, who was shot and killed by law enforcement. El-Sayed rationalized that crime by saying it was understandable since the terrorist was upset about the death of his brother, a Hezbollah commander in Lebanon, who was killed as a result of Israel's efforts to prevent the Iranian proxy group from attacking their country.

If, rather than a test of the appeal of El-Sayed's antisemitism, the election hinges on a verdict about the Trump administration, the Democrats may be able to carry their candidate over the finish line. If so, then the problem won't be just the addition of an antisemite to the Senate. It will be a signal sent to his party as well as the still relatively small minority of Republicans that share his prejudices, that targeting Jews will be both acceptable and good politics in 2028.

(JNS Aug 6)

The Tragic Israel Wedge By Melanie Phillips

Israel has not just become a pathologically unhinged obsession in the Western world. It's also turning into a wedge issue that's splitting Diaspora Jews from each other.

Last week, New York City's Islamist mayor Zohran Mamdani broadcast a video packed with eye-watering lies painting Israelis as cruel and bloodthirsty genocidal monsters determined to kill and starve innocents in Gaza.

The purpose of this two-minute hate was to signal that it was now open season against Zionism and the Jews of the city, for whom the price of acceptance is to be the institutionalized demonization of Israel to further Mamdani's driving aim of the destruction of the Jewish state.

The full implications of this strategy were well understood by Angela Buchdahl, the Reform rabbi of Manhattan's Central synagogue. In a strong open letter to the mayor, she wrote that he had used "rhetoric that demonizes Jews and the Jewish state" and had therefore put "a bullseye on our backs."

But Mamdani is also taking more direct aim at his city's Jewish community.

Earlier this week, he appointed an 18-member advisory committee on the judiciary without a single Jewish attorney, former judge, or legal professional—this in a city where Jews make up approximately half of all its lawyers.

The message was unmistakable. The mayor is simply trying to erase civic involvement by the city's Jews.

Mamdani's broader aim is to transform America's most important city into an Islam-compliant welfare dependency with no potential challenge to his power base.

Islamists believe that Jewish power is their principal obstacle to conquering the West. With New York containing the largest Jewish population in the world outside Israel, Mamdani is setting out to neutralize the Jews through discrimination and an atmosphere that incites harassment, intimidation and violence against them.

Appallingly, more than 30% of the city's Jews voted Mamdani into office. Other Jewish New Yorkers understood from the get-go that he was hostile to Israel, although even then many of them didn't fully appreciate just how monomaniacal he is in his hatred of Israel and the Jewish people.

Some liberal Jews still refuse to acknowledge this. The rise in Jew-hatred, they say, has been caused by the policies of Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and the extremist members of his coalition.

Many British Jews, under siege from the largest rise in Jew-hatred in the world last year, similarly blame Israel for their plight.

Seeking scapegoats to avoid the reality that's staring them in the face, such myopic Jews ignore the steady rise in Jew-hatred that's occurred over the past several decades in lockstep with the radicalization of the left and the increasing dominance of "Palestinian" propaganda.

The most agonized Jews, however, are those liberal progressives who had the ground on which they stand knocked away from underneath them by the atrocities of the Hamas-led onslaught against Israel on Oct. 7, 2023.

Unable to deny that their own side had sanitized and supported the Palestinian Arabs, who revealed themselves on that terrible day to be depraved and psychopathic savages, they still cling to many of the

delusional lies and distortions of the progressive mindset that cast Israel as the villain of the region.

Now, however, they are being presented with a choice they can't ignore. To be accepted as New Yorkers, Jews are being expected to denounce Israel and renounce Zionism.

Buchdahl got the point. She told Mamdani: "You continue to divide Jews into those whose politics you deem acceptable and Zionists whom you cast beyond the pale."

America is now following down a very hard road trodden by British Jews for more than two decades.

Even while Israelis were being blown to kingdom come in the Second Intifada, the Israel Defense Forces were being called "Nazis" in Britain for trying to destroy the terrorist infrastructure in the "West Bank." And British Jews were accordingly presented with an ultimatum: If you don't denounce Israel, then you aren't to be considered fully British.

Today, the Israel wedge is also being used to marginalize Jews in New York by splitting them off from mainstream society. But it's also splitting progressive Jews down the middle. An anguished debate is now taking place among them about the relationship between Zionism and Judaism.

Tragically, many of them see no innate connection between the two. Jonathan Jacoby, the national director of the Nexus Project, a left-wing antisemitism watchdog, said the conflation of Jews and Israel was "one of the most serious challenges that we face."

The ignorance makes one want to weep. Judaism holds that the Jewish people were given a Divine command to establish a righteous society in the land of Israel. Jewish religious laws are rooted in the land. Jewish liturgy is studded with references to Zion.

While, of course, Jews remain Jews even if they are neither observant nor Zionists, anti-Zionism, which would destroy the religion by detaching it from the land, is therefore inescapably anti-Judaism.

Progressives don't get this because they've bought into the worldview that liberal universalist or Marxist ideologies, along with the "intersectionality" they have spawned, are authentic Jewish values. They think that anyone telling them that these are all, in fact, anti-Jewish ideologies is a bad person and therefore "right-wing"—for them, the ultimate evil.

As a result, they believe many of the lies about Israel. They can't grasp that the demonization of the Jewish state is precisely what's been done to destroy Jews down through the centuries.

So they end up in the same place as the Jew-haters, claiming that the Jews are using the charge of antisemitism to cover up the crimes of Israel. Believing that "the right" is monstrous, they have ended up supporting monsters themselves.

This is hardly being helped by the behavior of certain Israelis. A public letter was sent this week to U.S. President Donald Trump by Matan Vilnai, an Israeli politician and a former deputy chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces, on behalf of Commanders for Israel's Security, an organization representing hundreds of retired senior Israeli officers.

The letter claimed that "escalating violence in the West Bank" by "Jewish terrorists" was poised to "ignite the region" and that much of it was being orchestrated by members of the Israeli government.

This deeply impressed New York Times columnist Bret Stephens, who laid into "anti-Palestinian settler terrorism" and dismissed Netanyahu's claim that only about 150 youths were involved.

Even if 1,000 individuals were involved, that would still only represent 0.2% of the total Jewish population of around 500,000 in Judea and Samaria.

And these unprovoked attacks, while undeniably a problem that needs to be far better dealt with, are vastly exceeded by the many thousands of murderous Arab attacks against Jews living in these areas.

These have hugely increased since Oct. 7 and now threaten a third intifada. To which neither the Israelis nor Stephens made any reference at all.

"Settler violence" has been grossly exaggerated and decontextualized as another libel with which to demonize Israel. Vilnai and his colleagues belong to a cadre of Oslo "two-state solution" diehards for whom, along with most of the Israeli media and a large section of the intelligentsia, Netanyahu and the "settlers"

are the enemy who are always guilty as charged.

Israelis like Vilnai and his ilk have disproportionate influence in the West. They not only provide priceless ammunition for the enemies of the Jewish people, but also play into the ignorance and prejudice of many diaspora Jews—a rising number of whom are turning against Israel.

The increasing gap between Judaism and Israel needs to be closed very fast. That means teaching the Jewish community, particularly the young, essential truths about Judaism and Jewish history in the land of Israel. It means teaching them how Israel always upholds international laws. It means teaching them that real Jewish values are, in fact, the things they most deeply believe in and in which they can take pride.

Jews of all denominations need to raise their game to do this. But progressive rabbis, who will need all their courage to confront deeply rooted, damaging assumptions, have the most crucial and challenging role of all. (JNS July 30)

A Few Concrete Blocks will Shape the Fate of the Entire Middle East By Amit Segal

A few hundred concrete blocks painted yellow now sit at the center of a debate that will shape—no exaggeration—the entire Middle East. On the day the hostages came home 10 months ago, the IDF held 52% of the Gaza Strip. Since then, it has expanded to 70%. Gazans wake up to find the “yellow line” buffer zone closer than it was, sometimes forcing them to evacuate again to stay out of the line of fire.

Israel touts its expanding control of the Strip, though, in reality, there’s no advance of forces or new positions, only the widening of our troops’ firing line against approaching threats. The gap between the original lines and the current ones is what the fight over Gaza’s future now turns on. In principle, Israel doesn’t believe Hamas will disarm (or surrender its weapons to be melted down—a new American idea). It has no interest in a photo-op with U.S. President Donald Trump as long as it isn’t asked to withdraw.

The Americans tell Israel: 400 feet between you and them—what’s that? Move the concrete blocks back a little, and we’ll use it to force Hamas into the next stage. Worst case, a few hours of crane work and you’re back where you started. In Jerusalem, they resist, fearing a return to the withdrawals-first pattern that paved the whole road to Oct. 7. And in the background, there’s another political worry: With less than three months to the election, any withdrawal or agreement hurts Likud and the coalition. Itamar Ben-Gvir will bite from the right; Avigdor Lieberman, Naftali Bennett and Gadi Eisenkot from the left.

The Americans were caught off guard when Israel dug in against a withdrawal they considered purely tactical. Israel reminded them of the electoral calendar and of the fact that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has no great desire to concede now and collect the reward, if ever, only when it’s already too late. So, the thinking goes, let’s turn to the opposition leaders and have them publicly back the deal struck at the White House. For some reason, Lieberman, Bennett, Eisenkot and Yair Golan have yet to step in front of the cameras to call for an Israeli withdrawal and embrace Netanyahu. Surprising.

A round of primaries was held in the United States this week, and in a striking number of them, Gaza was front and center. Israel has a supreme interest in putting the issue to rest and beginning to recover in global public opinion; not, heaven forbid, by leaving Hamas in place, but through temporary tactical maneuvering that lets the Americans and their regional allies keep isolating the terrorists that still, barely, control the ruins of the city.

“I will fight tooth and nail, if necessary,” Netanyahu said when former President Joe Biden moved towards a weapons embargo on him. But what, exactly, will the United States fight with? Even without an embargo, its own arsenals are approaching the red line fast. The commander of United States European Command warned the Pentagon that there aren’t enough resources to defend against the coming confrontation with Iran while protecting both Israel and American forces—they will have to choose.

Reuters reported that the U.S. Army has nearly exhausted its entire stock of precision missiles. In Israel, it was reported that the bunker-buster bombs of the kind dropped on Fordow last year are also nearly gone after a single night of strikes, making an attack on Pickaxe Mountain difficult.

The whole world is now watching Trump.

And all this after just a few weeks of fighting a failing Middle Eastern dictatorship, torn from within and teetering on economic collapse. What happens if Russia stages a provocation somewhere else in Europe? Or if China decides to push forces toward Taiwan? The state of the U.S. military brings to mind the IDF on the eve of Oct. 7: An imposing image that, in practice, delivered failure after failure, draw after draw. Its only clear victory since the end of the Cold War was over Saddam Hussein, a quarter of a century ago.

The whole world is now watching Trump. Will he end the war with Iran still controlling the Strait of Hormuz, the regime still standing and its army merely licking its wounds?

Two absurdities.

The first: The American, and especially Republican, trauma of a ground operation and a bloody quagmire is the very thing that has kept the Iranians alive. Almost any ground operation—to seize uranium, take Kharg Island or capture senior officials—would likely have triggered a dramatic upheaval of the regime.

The second: It is precisely the fear of a dramatic collapse in American standing that stops Trump from ending this conflict the way Washington ended Afghanistan, Iraq and Vietnam. Walter Russell Mead proposed years ago that the United States finish off Iran—the small, weak, estranged son of the Sino-Russian-Korean axis, and the only one that doesn’t yet have nuclear weapons. The message, he wrote shortly after Oct. 7, would land well in every capital that loves evil, even if the message is that the United States can no longer win.

Like divided border cities during the Cold War, the twilight zone in Israeli politics known as the “Unity Bloc,” the “Third Bloc,” the “National Right” or whatever else you want to call it, is where the foreign powers are scheming.

Because, with all due respect to the campaign so far, the election will be decided by one question: Who, if anyone, can squeeze four or five seats out of this rather unpromising lemon. Take this week’s Channel 12 poll: If Hili Tropper and Yoaz Hendel clear the electoral threshold, they carry the Eisenkot bloc to 60 seats—within reach of a stable, four-year government. But if those four seats instead go to Gilad Erdan and Yuli Edelstein, or to Eyal Winter—none of whom rule out Netanyahu—then Eisenkot has no majority to govern, even with Arab abstention. Ten thousand votes shifting one way or the other, and the outcome is entirely different.

To general surprise, Eisenkot is looking more competent these days. The ideal scenario, from his point of view, is one in which right-wing voters move directly to a party that will recommend him to form the government and effectively join it—all to keep another election off the table. Tropper, alert to the danger of being lumped in with the Yair Golan-Yair Lapid camp, has lately been explaining that, while his final stop is Eisenkot, he won’t rule out pairing with another party just before the lists close and riding it to the unity government terminal.

Netanyahu, for his part, rules out only two things: He doesn’t trust Winter, and he won’t talk to Erdan. Channel 14 credits the former Likud minister with a soft spot for Yair Lapid and Yair Golan.

This isn’t some elaborate plot to peel him away from Netanyahu; it’s the reason that Erdan never went looking for a future inside Likud to begin with. In Likud, they’d be delighted to see Benny Gantz clear the threshold, rightly suspecting he’d sooner hand the premiership to Tali Gottliv than to Eisenkot, who abandoned him and left him to drown.

If the Bennett-Eisenkot fight was the semifinal, what’s happening now is the Oceania qualifiers on the road to the World Cup: a crowd of small teams chasing half a ticket to the tournament. The Erdan-Edelstein party launch was designed to drag everyone underwater by force. Once they’re all swallowing water and thrashing, just before the last of them blacks out, the strongest will break to the surface. Gantz is betting his money will pull the others toward him; Tropper, that the polls will. Erdan’s weapon is having no way out; he’s burned his bridges in Likud. Tropper has a safe harbor to return to; Gantz has a pension after long years in the game, but Erdan will tell everyone: I’m here to the end, and whoever wants to survive is welcome to join me. (Israel Hayom Aug 6)
