

Netanyahu Is Destroying Both Israel and the Palestinians

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Much of what Israel and the Palestinians are experiencing today has befallen them under Netanyahu's leadership. He believes that the Palestinians will always pose an existential threat to Israel, which led him to pursue domestic policies that dangerously undermined the country's founding principles of freedom and equality. Concurrently, he has taken extreme measures to suppress the Palestinians and maintain the occupation to keep them at bay. This has resulted in the disintegration of the social fabric of both societies, and prevented the rise of new political leadership to change course.

Notwithstanding Israel's remarkable military, economic, and technological achievements and the dramatic expansion of its trade and diplomatic relations since its creation in 1948, Israel failed to live up to its promise. Under Netanyahu's watch, Israel's democracy is tearing apart at the seams, the unity of purpose between Israeli and diaspora Jewry is crumbling, the social and political divide among Israelis is dangerously widening, and the prospect of living in peace and security is becoming increasingly untenable.

During the same period, the Palestinians' situation has become ominously worse. They remain dependent on handouts, millions of refugees still languish in camps, and they are socially and politically disintegrating, insecure, and despairing. The hopelessness of young Palestinians and the self-resignation of old, with diminishing prospects of escaping the harsh reality of the occupation, further intensified their hatred and resentment toward Israel. And the Palestinians' distant dream of establishing their own state is rapidly fading away.

Netanyahu seems to forget that the historic survival of the Jews and the secret behind it did not rest on military prowess or financial dexterity or the most advanced technology, but on an unwavering moral commitment to human and civil rights and the brotherhood of man. They stood steadfastly behind the poor and the despairing, and championed the causes of freedom, liberalism, and equality. These attributes were engrained in the minds and souls of the Jews, due, in the main, to their horrifying experiences throughout the millennia of dispersement, persecution, expulsion, discrimination, and death.



One might think that these terrifying historical experiences would influence Netanyahu and his followers to fully adhere to human rights, and exhaust every conceivable way not to betray these principles in dealing with the Palestinians. But sadly, Netanyahu has capitalized on a certain segment of Palestinians that still resist Israel’s existence to legitimize Israel’s actions against the Palestinians.

Netanyahu pushed for the passing of the Nation State Law, which degrades non-Jews to second-class citizens. The law affirms that

“The state of Israel is the national home of the Jewish people, in which it fulfills its natural, cultural, religious and historic right to self-determination.”

The law discriminates against Israeli Arab citizens, intensifies their resentment toward and hatred of the state, and widens the gap between the two sides, which dangerously increases Israel’s vulnerability from within.

Netanyahu supported Trump’s cuts of US funding to organizations that promote dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, and barred scores of other Israeli organizations dedicated to peace from raising money in foreign countries. Netanyahu is denying the necessary process of reconciliation between the two sides, which is central to peaceful coexistence and the only way to resolve the conflict. To be sure, Netanyahu is tearing down instead of building bridges to promote peace.

Additionally, Netanyahu is destroying Israel’s democracy brick by brick, starting with the judiciary, which is the most revered and independent institution in Israel. He is supporting an amendment that transfers jurisdiction of certain cases regarding the West Bank away from the Supreme Court, which will complicate its decrees to remove illegal outposts and settlements, and another law that would allow Members of the Knesset to reinstate laws struck down by the Supreme Court.

In the words of the Court’s **President Esther Hayut**, the proposed legislation “would bypass the human rights of every individual in Israeli society”, adding that “[i]t [the

amendment] voids the Basic Law. The cynical use made of the problem of infiltrators as an excuse to legislate such a bill cannot hide its destructive significance.”

Under Netanyahu, the growing power of the Orthodox religious institution and the steady shift of the country to the extreme right are effectively blurring the lines of separation of power between ‘church and state.’ He supported the Religious Services Ministry’s threats to bar the “Women of the Wall” from praying at the Western Wall, warning that if they do not obey, they will not be allowed to worship at all. Sadly and tellingly, the police did nothing to stop verbal and physical attacks against women praying at the Kotel in July.

He further alienated diaspora Jewry, especially in the US, by caving in to the rabbinical institutions. He reneged on his decision to allow men and women to pray together at the Western Wall, what would have been a historic agreement with liberal Jewish denominations. This was not only a slap in their face, but defiance of one of the most critical aspects of Jewish survival, which is maintaining their powerful and uncompromising affinity despite being dispersed in over 100 countries.

Finally, Netanyahu is gradually chipping away at one of the central pillars of democracy—freedom of the press. He has become increasingly critical of the free press and has meddled with no less than 13 media outlets. As being investigated in corruption Cases 2000 and 4000, he constantly attempts to manipulate the media to receive favorable coverage, increases political interference, and actively uses the courts to propagate libel and defamation lawsuits, while further extending the military censure into social media.

Every measure Netanyahu has taken is acutely undermining Israel’s very existence. But the biggest threat as we know it is its leaders, especially Netanyahu’s unwillingness to realistically face the conflict with the Palestinians while acting to destroy the Palestinians’ aspiration for statehood. Instead of remaining relentless in the search for a solution dictated by the unimpeachable reality of coexistence, he chose to suppress the Palestinian national movement by whatever means necessary, including force.

Every punitive measure that has been taken against the Palestinians, be that administrative detentions, demolishing Palestinian villages such as Khan al Ahmer in favor of new Israeli settlements, expropriating private land to build Israeli outposts, night raids, limiting mobility, denying building permits, uprooting olive trees, and arbitrary incarcerations, have led to the gradual destruction of the Palestinians’ social fabric and cohesiveness, prolonging the occupation and displacement for decades. The humiliation of the Palestinians for three generations has rendered their present leadership helpless, with little or nothing to offer to change their plight.

To be sure, Netanyahu betrayed the very reason behind Israel’s creation—to live in peace, provide a safe refuge for the Jews, and foster strong and unwavering ties with diaspora Jewry, while feeding into one another to maintain their strength, harmony, and purpose.

Netanyahu could have been the prime minister to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians, but did not because he was and still is determined not to allow the establishment of a Palestinian state as long as he is in power.

He will leave behind a garrison pariah state and shattered Palestinian community, while setting back the prospect of peace for another generation.

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