

As we reflect back on the year that was, the months of July and August, when Jews and fellow supporters of Israel followed the print and broadcast media with great anxiety and concern, loom large in our consciousness. Beginning with the kidnapping and murder of three teen-age yeshiva students by a Hamas cell in the West Bank, hostilities between Israel and the Hamas regime in Gaza escalated into full-scale warfare with rocket attacks by Hamas on Israeli cities, air strikes by Israeli planes to destroy rocket launchers and storage sites and to wipe out the Hamas military command, and a limited ground incursion into Gaza to demolish an intricate network of underground tunnels through which Hamas could infiltrate into Israel and abduct and murder Israeli citizens. The fighting was punctuated by a series of temporary cease fires; only in late August was a more enduring truce arranged. We read and watched the news, pored over analyses of the political and diplomatic situation, advocated for Israel in the forum of public opinion, and responded generously to the Federation's Stop the Sirens campaign.

Israelis from both the political right and left supported Operation Protective Edge. No country in the world would tolerate rocket attacks on its civilian population without retaliating and without striving to deter future aggression. The fact that there were so few Israeli civilians killed or injured was not for a lack of murderous intentions on the part of Hamas but rather attributable to the superb success of the Iron Dome anti-missile defense. It was understood by Israelis and their supporters that there is no moral equivalence between a regime that purposely targets civilians and one that seeks to minimize the civilian casualties that are inevitable in the waging of anti-insurgent warfare and that attempts to give timely warning to non-combatants to remove themselves from areas that will be bombed. When the tunnels were discovered and their potential for use in a deadly surprise attack on Israel was realized, it was understood that they needed to be destroyed. Hamas had squandered the opportunity handed them by the withdrawal of Israeli troops and settlers in 2005; rather than develop the area economically, they diverted building materials and other resources to aggressive purposes, leading to Israel's restrictions on movement and importation of goods and deepening the misery of Gaza's people. Hamas's ideology and its hatred of Israel have always trumped its concern for its people's welfare; otherwise, it would not have placed rocket launching sites in residential areas or adjacent to schools and places of worship; and otherwise it would have at a minimum provided bomb shelters for the civilian population. .

Although Hamas, by placing its people in harm's way and callously seeing civilian casualties as so many propaganda points to be scored, bears a large measure of responsibility, still the devastation, the displacement, the loss of life among civilians in Gaza grieve me. We are

heirs to a tradition that spills a drop of wine from our cups at the mention of the plagues of Egypt. We don't gloat over an enemy's suffering. To censor or attempt to silence expressions of sympathy for the non-combatant population in Gaza (as was done by both the Israel Broadcasting Authority and by the administration of Bar Ilan University) is deeply misguided and runs counter to all that I cherish in the humanistic traditions of Judaism. Thankfully, there are many Israelis who honor those traditions, and approximately half of the donations to non-sectarian and Christian charities assisting Gazans were by Israeli Jews

Prime Minister Netanyahu, whatever the fluctuations in his popularity with the Israeli electorate, deserves a lot of credit for the restraint he displayed by refraining from a ground incursion until after the discovery of the tunnels and by resisting the more strident voices in his security cabinet who were calling for the total obliteration of Hamas and for the re-occupation of Gaza, an objective that could possibly take not weeks but years. I believe that the Prime Minister understood that Operation Protective Edge could succeed in weakening Hamas, but that destroying that regime would incur a level of casualties that would be unacceptable both to Israelis and to world opinion. Destroying Hamas, moreover, would leave Israel with the responsibility for administering Gaza and would create a political vacuum that would eagerly be filled by even more virulent and fanatical Islamists (and yes, it is easy to imagine such forces).

This is the fourth such conflict between Israel and Hamas in eight years. Were lives lost, property destroyed, and economies disrupted just to get back to square one and have a replay of hostilities several years hence? My own feeling is that the destruction of the tunnels was a plus for Israel; I shudder to think what might have happened had they been left in place undiscovered. It should not surprise us that Israeli public opinion is divided as to who was the victor, with the majority believing that neither side came out ahead. This, of course, did not stop Hamas from staging a victory celebration. They were in a desperate situation, blockaded by Egypt as well as Israel, largely isolated in the Arab world, and without the funds to pay the salaries of officials; now they have attracted notice and attention, Israel is negotiating with them, albeit indirectly, and their demands are on the table for discussion.

More important than who won is the question of where Israel goes from here. In any conflict, there are lessons to be learned, and the IDF doubtlessly will, as it has done in the past, learn from its strategic mistakes and avoid such errors in the next round of fighting (which regrettably can not be ruled out).

If we date the conflict between Jews and the Arab population in Israel/ Palestine to the period of World War I, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and the emergence of Palestinian nationalism, hostilities have been going on for one hundred years. Neither side is going to go away, and, ultimately, there is no military solution to the conflict. Israel has shown that it can strike out at the extremist regime in Gaza, but the path ahead will require reaching out to and strengthening the more moderate forces. That Egypt and Saudi Arabia at least tacitly supported Israel's operation and certainly did not vehemently protest indicates an opportunity. The moderates in the Arab world fear and loathe jihadism more than they oppose Israel.

A two state solution, an independent state of Palestine living peacefully side by side with a safe and secure Israel, remains the best hope for the survival of Israel as both a Jewish state and a democracy. Two nations, roughly equal in size, vying for supremacy within the framework of a single state is a recipe for unending and brutal civil conflict. One way of countering the appeal of extremists is to keep alive among the Palestinians the hope not only of bettering their economic situation but also of realizing their aspirations for political independence.

Admittedly, a two state solution at the present moment seems a far distant hope. For all his efforts, Secretary Kerry's efforts to negotiate a peace settlement came to naught. The Middle East region is in turmoil. Ancient hatreds, a reversion to tribalism, the breakdown of nation states established by the colonial powers, a civil war in Syria that has taken 200,000 lives and displaced millions of people, and the rise of a brutal and ruthless jihadism that aspires to return to the seventh century all make Israel wary regarding territorial concessions. Ehud Olmert, when he was Prime Minister in 2009, offered terms for a peace settlement to Mahmoud Abbas that are far more generous than any that are likely to be offered at present, but no agreement was reached. Abbas may be too weak politically and Netanyahu too beholden to a governing coalition, many of whose members oppose the two state solution, for any progress in that direction to occur. The gaps between the two sides may just be too wide now to bridge.

But the status quo is untenable. It carries not only the risk of intensified violence between Israelis and Palestinians but also of diplomatic isolation and alienation from Israel's allies and economic partners. And before we start complaining about this administration's policies, we might consider that it is in Israel's interests to have support from a bipartisan consensus, that there have been tensions and crises in Israel's relations with America under previous administrations of both parties as well as threats by the U.S. to "re-assess" the relationship, and that advocacy of the two state solution and opposition to settlements have been the policies of

every American administration that I can recall. Israel needs a plan B, whether working through the Arab League Peace Initiative proposed in 2002 or, as former Ambassador Michael Oren suggested, unilaterally withdrawing from much of the West Bank in coordination with the Palestinian Authority. Building or expanding settlements, particularly in areas that will not be part of Israel's future borders, does nothing to advance peace or the security of Israel and causes Israel to lose the moral high ground that it needs to stand on in order to maintain support from the western democratic world.

If Israel and Gaza have been chapter one in the annals of the past year, the disturbing rise in anti-Semitism in Europe has been a troubling second chapter. The sources of European anti-Semitism are varied. On the political right there are nativist movements that are anti-Muslim and anti-Roma but also anti-Jewish. Greece and Hungary are the two examples that come to mind. Rightists have frequently been involved in Holocaust denial and in attempting to rehabilitate the reputation of Nazi collaborators who are celebrated as heroes of the struggle against Communism and for national independence. A more significant element consists of disaffected Muslim youth, whose communities have never been successfully integrated into the fabric of the European countries where they reside and who have been attracted by the ideology of jihadism. Finally, there is a left-wing anti-Semitism that sees the Palestinians as underdogs resisting the Israeli Goliath and instinctively sympathizes with them. Opposition to Israel becomes the criterion, the badge of one's self-identification as a progressive and perhaps a way of expiating Europe's own guilt for its colonialist past. The conflict in Gaza has certainly added fuel to the flames, but it is more of a pretext than a cause. Far more Muslims have been killed by other Muslims than by Israelis, and many more civilian casualties have been inflicted by American and British forces in Iraq and Afghanistan than by the IDF.

Criticizing Israeli policies is legitimate and the charge of anti-Semitism should never be made lightly, but the outrageousness of the statements emanating from European literary and academic figures has crossed a line. Violence against Jews in Europe is a matter of grave concern. Jews are fearful of wearing a yarmulke or speaking Hebrew in public; and the murder of four Jews by a French Islamist at the Jewish Museum in Brussels testifies to the horrific dangers that European Jewry may potentially confront.

I am concerned for Jews in Europe and around the world. I am concerned for the safety of Israelis who fight a war they are capable of winning militarily but all too easily losing on the battlefield of public relations. I am concerned too about us in our American Jewish communities

and our ability to maintain civil discourse and to disagree without casting aspersions on the other party's loyalty.

And I am concerned, finally, about what the character of Israel will become. As many Israeli political leaders have said over the years, we did not engage in activity in behalf of the Zionist movement and return to our homeland in order to rule over another people. Security concerns have necessitated the construction of a barrier between Israel and the Palestinian territories, which has reduced terrorism emanating from the West Bank to virtually zero. Similar concerns have led to the hiring of foreign workers (Thais and Filipinos) to replace Palestinians who used to do landscaping and construction and like types of work in Israel. The result has been that other than in the course of military service Israelis do not encounter Palestinians and vice versa; and, if you don't know someone and do not see him as a human being with a family and with aspirations and concerns similar to your own, it becomes easy to dehumanize him. I don't have at my fingertips survey data on Israeli attitudes toward Arabs and Palestinians, so I don't know how widespread racist feelings are among Israelis. I would like to think it's confined to the margins. But the price tag attacks on churches and mosques, the scrawling of hateful graffiti, the uprooting of Palestinian olive trees are all to be deplored. The burning of a Palestinian teenager in retaliation for the kidnap-murder of the Israeli yeshiva students, which repulsed and horrified Israelis, was apparently perpetrated by dropouts from the ultra-Orthodox world, who become vulnerable to recruitment by racist fringe movements. And there are to my eternal shame ultra-nationalist rabbis in Israel who preach a Torah of racism and hatred, urging the IDF to adopt a policy of total ruthlessness. Add to this anti-democratic legislation in the Knesset which aims to stifle voices of criticism and dissent, and you understand my concern.

Israelis have fought Arabs from 1948 and before. In light of that, in light of ongoing terrorism and a Hamas movement whose charter invokes the most blatant and vile tropes of fascist and Nazi anti-Semitism, harsh feelings towards "the enemy", viewed as an undifferentiated monolith, are understandable, but hatred is a poison that eats away at the hater and damages him or her as much as it wounds the intended target.

At Chautauqua this past summer, Nancy and I had the pleasure of hearing a lecture by Fareed Zakaria, the CNN commentator on world affairs, who ably provided the background both of the Gaza conflict, which was raging at the time, and of the emergence of ISIS, which was then carving out a broad swath of Syria and Iraq as its enclave. We were especially pleased that Fareed was supportive of Israel in its Gaza operation and cognizant as well of the totalitarian nature of

Hamas and its unsuitability as a partner for peace. At the end of his talk, he referred to Israel as a miracle of modern times and expressed admiration for the dynamism and vibrancy of its economy, its society and its culture. He worried, however, that given the persistence of the conflict with the Palestinians and of the occupation, that the Israel of the future might bear only scant resemblance to the Israel we've come to admire and cherish.

Such then has been the year that was and such are my concerns as we enter the New Year. May 5775 bring *shalom* closer. May the voices of hate be stilled and the forces of love, of *chesed v'rachamim*, of grace, of kindness and of compassion prevail. May we never lose hope, for that is the quality that has kept alive as a people through the centuries and millennia.

*Shanah tovah.*