Grouches fail to foil Israel Independence Day

written by David M. Weinberg | 19.05.2024

The hard left in Israel tried, but failed, to foil *Yom Haatzmaut* (Israel Independence Day) this week. It held "torch dousing" instead of "torch lighting" ceremonies, and slammed Israel radio and tv for broadcasting the traditional memorial and celebratory Independence Day events.

Radical left spokespeople especially savaged the prime minister's speeches at national events, calling him a "dictator who refuses to act according to the voice of reason and morality" and a man who operates "from a desire for revenge, oppression and power."

Haaretz ran a sourpuss op-ed article demanding "No Celebrations!" "This year, the holiday's very existence has become intolerable. How is it possible to cope with independence celebrations in a state that turns its back on what makes it a state and defines it as independent?… As long as Israel has not brought back the hostages, any engagement with 'independence' is self-deception…"

"(We must) resist celebrating a holiday that has been emptied of meaning, that makes one's eyes sting from so much falsehood and one's throat burn from so much insult. We are left with depression felt by every decent Israeli who doesn't belong to the right, the Netanyahu cult, or the settler/ultra-Orthodox/religious Zionist community."

Just to be clear who and what it was opposing, the same newspaper ran a screed from a fellow at the Harvard Divinity School which offered a near-theological justification for extinguishing Yom Haatzmaut. "In Israel, Jewish extremists worshipping a god of holy war are getting stronger," the writer expectorated.

"Since October 7, the flagrantly anti-democratic, morally bankrupt political theology of Israel's right-wing Jewish radicals, a worldview that justifies the death, starvation, and hunger of Palestinians, is becoming more dominant. Jews in Israel and around the world must confront this desecration of our tradition," and certainly not celebrate Israel Independence Day.

One of the gods of the atheist, doubtful-Zionist hard left, Prof. Yuval Noah Harari, wrote in *Yediot Ahronot* that the dark forces of Jewish supremacy and Zionist oppression were on the ascendancy in Israel, posing a threat to Israel's future and legitimacy. He held out hope that "classic, sane Zionism" could yet win back the country, but in the meantime found little to celebrate on Independence Day.

FORTUNATELY, most Israelis clearly rejected this rejectionist, dangerously debilitating narrative, and set out into Israel's streets and parks to mark *Yom Haatzmaut*.

It was marked not as usual, not in wild fanfare or inappropriate rejoicing, not in complacency. Rather, it was marked in subdued appreciation and prayer. In appreciation of Israel's survival and achievements, and with a prayer that brotherhood, resoluteness, and better leadership will see the country through to great victories.

Of course, Israel never has had the luxury of taking its survival for granted, and this is ever truer this year when Iran and its terrorist proxies are closing in from all directions, and the Ayatollahs in Teheran are close to producing a nuclear bomb. Woke forces are tightening a global diplomatic noose around Israel's neck.

Also, much of Israel's northern and southern reaches remain devastated ghost regions from which tens of thousands of Israeli residents remain internally exiled. Men, women, and child hostages are still held by Hamas in Gaza, and precious soldiers are falling in the hell holes of Jabalya. So yes, there is little immediate comfort for Israel on this birthday week.

"Beleaguered" is an appropriate adjective for the current Israeli psyche.

Nevertheless, I sense that 99.9% of Israelis upheld celebration of *Yom Haatzmaut* this week as a statement of hope. *Hatikvah*, the hope, has not extinguished. Israel can and should be able to drive beyond the current straits, repairing its internal ills and strengthening its strategic posture.

Rabbi Tamir Granot, head of Yeshivat Orot Shaul in Tel Aviv (who lost a son in the current war), said at a prayer rally this week that "When everything is good, when there is no anger or pain, one doesn't need hope; it's possible just to live well. It is precisely when it hurts, when we are angry, when the heart burns, when there is tension, when our children are held captive by cruel enemies, that we need and

find that material called hope."

Naturally and so very correctly, Granot pointed to the extraordinary resilience displayed by Israeli civilians and soldiers in repulsing the Hamas invasion last Simchat Torah, and to the stamina of Israeli society ever since. So very correctly, he warned against the defeatist messaging and internally vicious campaigning that is once again seeping to the fore of Israeli politics today.

He, and others, noted that cancellation of *Yom Haatzmaut* would have been a moral victory for Israel's enemies, and also would have been cynical exploitation of the hostage plight to bring down the government. Indeed, the demands for cancelation of Independence Day celebrations were (unsurprisingly) like the demand that Israel unconditionally swallow the outrageous dictates of Hamas for an immediate cease-fire, complete IDF withdrawal from Gaza, and the release of all the terrorists including the Nukhba murderers and rapists.

INSTEAD of such enervating poison, the motivating music that must continue to echo in our ears can come from the inspiring speeches given by bereaved mothers and fathers at Remembrance Day and Independence Day speeches this year.

Some these speeches were based on parting letters left behind by fallen soldiers, expressing absolute faith in the wellsprings of age-old Jewish identity and the future of the State of Israel; letters that exhorted their families to stay the course and celebrate life.

Others, like the stunning speech delivered by Rabbi Menahem Kalmanson at the Israel Prize award ceremony, were based on a deep dive into "brotherhood;" a renewed commitment to national solidarity and love of peoplehood.

Kalmanson was a member of "Team Elhanan," a family unit which bravely entered Kibbutz Beeri on Oct. 7, fought terrorists, and rescued over 100 members of the kibbutz. The eldest brother, Elhanan, was killed by terrorists after 16 hours of fighting.

Menachem: "This ceremony answers the question 'Why are we here?' — a question that echoed throughout the past year as dissension and dispute raged in the country and threatened to tear us apart from within. The question 'Are we still brothers?' continued to echo until the sirens of Simchat Torah echoed and our enemies awaiting our demise came out of their trenches and attacked."

“We did not ask ourselves why we are doing this, settlers going out to save secular kibbutzniks. As my brother Itiel said, “When you know your brother is in danger you don’t really have a choice. ‘I seek my brothers’.”

“At the home of the Meir family in Beeri, Michal Meir refused/feared to open the door for us when we came to rescue her. She did not open the door until I yelled *Shma Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad* (Hear oh Israel the Lord our God is One). This was not a prayer, it was a shout: I’m a Jew, I’m here for you, please open the door.” This call, this cry for unity, echoed around the region that day as thousands of soldiers went forward out of a sense of deep responsibility and endangered their lives for their brothers.”

Kalmanson concluded by declaring: “We cannot continue to fight without seeing the good in this nation, as the blood of our brothers cries out from the ground, and we are our brother’s keeper.”

ANOTHER theme that dominated *Yom Haatzmaut* discourse (about which I have written frequently) was defiance; defiance of the pro-Hamas messaging and anti-Zionist approaches that have taken root in capitals and campuses around the world.

As Prof. Gil Troy has written: “On Israel Independence Day we must negate the misleading, Palestinian-centered tale of woe, and return to the magnificent Jewish story and the Zionist tale of redemption… Our enemies want to make us miserable, to make Israel unlivable, to make Independence Day uncelebrate-able. We cannot allow that to happen…”

“We cannot afford to mourn or mope. We must live the miracle of Israel: freedom, prosperity, dignity, and power… while rejecting the poisoned ivy of the Ivy Leagues…. and we must broadcast our narrative and affirm our rights loudly and proudly, effectively, and creatively.”

To this I add: Let us count our personal and national blessings. Life in Israel is full of meaning, marked by sacrifice, commitment, achievement, and joy; the crucial ingredients that make life satisfying and exciting, and uniquely so for Jews who have long awaited a national return to Zion.

Let us remind ourselves that, until 76 years ago and for the last 2,000 years, the Jewish People had no national home. Instead, it suffered Diaspora, dispersion,

degradation, and disaffiliation, even near-extermination. Attempts to annihilate the Jewish People in Israel and to persecute them abroad continue apace, but the People of Israel are no longer defenseless.

So, despite apocalyptic agonizers, demoralized doubters, devious detractors, and fair-weather friends – let us recommit to hope, brotherhood, and aptly deft defiance.

Published in The Jerusalem Post, 17.05.2024 and Israel Hayom 19.05.2024