

The Jewish Future, Part 1

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By Symposium

Elliott Abrams

Dark clouds always seem to hang over the Jewish people, and today's include old problems like anti-Semitism in Europe and new ones like Iran's nuclear-weapons program. But to me the future seems bright.

I do not believe the Islamic Republic will exist in 2065. Even the superpower Soviet Union fell after three-quarters of a century, and the ayatollahs are now in year 36 of their revolution. They are loathed by the people of Iran, and I believe popular resistance and contradictions among the clerics will eventually spell doom. Of course we can make that more likely to happen, and sooner, by our own conduct toward Iran—reversing recent policy. But they will not last 50 more years anyway, and a normal Iran will not be an enemy to Israel and the Jewish people.

Second, both the Arab world's chaos and its battles with Iran and jihadism point to improved relations with Israel. We see this happening already, and over time it can expand. The Palestinian issue is now page-10 news, not a headline and not something that much moves Arab governments. And I believe that the status of the Palestinian West Bank population will have changed in 50 years, from subjects of Israel to those of Jordan. Israelis want to separate from the Palestinians but need security, and the long-term solution is the Jordanian army and police. Perhaps the structure 50 years from now will look like something that disappeared 100 years ago, the Austro-Hungarian empire—with one king (by 2065, Abdullah's son Hussein) and two prime ministers—one for Jordanians and one for Palestinians. Once the Palestinian issue has a different diplomatic face, other Arab governments will be freer to do what Jordan and Egypt have done: make peace with Israel. Relations with Gulf oil producers, who are also potential investors, will be helpful to Israel's economy. And that will be a richer economy in 2065, benefitting from Israel's huge gas discoveries.

Just which Arab states will exist in 2065 is harder to predict, but Israel will probably have decent relations with Jordan, Lebanon, Kurdistan, and the independent Druze areas of what used to be Syria.

Israel will find American interest in the Middle East diminished due to North American energy independence, and interest from Asia increased—especially from China and India. While threats to the Persian Gulf and its oil will have lessened with the demise of the Islamic

Republic, Israel will still find that the Chinese and Indian navies are patrolling those waters and occasionally visiting the Mediterranean. But its own relations with the world's two most populous nations will be, as they are now, friendly and economically beneficial.

So 2065 will bring all sweetness and light? No. The American Jewish community will have declined as a percentage of the U.S. population, reducing its clout. And the American left, in whatever party represents it, will be as anti-Israel as the parties of the European left. Support for Israel will remain a divisive issue between left and right. Hatred of Jews in the Muslim world will remain a dangerous virus. Europe will be an increasingly hostile place for Jews, for political and demographic reasons. European Jewish populations will be small, especially after the French Jewish community begins to leave in large numbers. Israel and the United States will form the two poles of the world's Jewish population, with everyone else playing a very minor role.

With the Holocaust an event more than 100 years in the past in 2065, its role as a cement of the American Jewish community will have dried up as well. Nor will Israel, per se, play that role as it did in the half century after 1948. The cement will be Judaism. Those Jews practicing it, in whatever form, will naturally be attached to one another and to Israel; those Jews not practicing it will drift away from the community and the Jewish state. Even more in 2065 than in 2015, Jews will be thankful for the support of American Christians in sustaining the ranks of the pro-Israel community.

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WHAT WILL BE THE CONDITION OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY 50 YEARS FROM NOW?

Peter Berkowitz

Of the multitude of factors that shape the Jewish people and that will determine their condition 50 years from now, few are more significant—and more in their hands—than education. Precautions can be implemented to protect against natural disasters, fanatical and ruthless adversaries, and massive disruptions to world markets, while preparations can be undertaken to exploit unexpected windfalls and favorable headwinds. Yet prudent precautions and sensible preparations will be for naught unless Jews understand their tradition and the moral and political conditions that in the 21st century will enable them to preserve it.

Current trends in Jewish education—or, more precisely, in how Jews are educated—are troubling. If these trends persist, the condition of the Jews in 50 years could well be dire.

Educational priorities in Israel and in the Diaspora may differ somewhat, but the education of Jews in both is crucial. A flourishing Israel and a flourishing Diaspora—which increasingly means a flourishing American Jewry, as approximately two-thirds of Jews who live outside of Israel live in America—are inextricably intertwined. While Israel has become the capital of Jewish life to which American Jewry turns for inspiration, Israel depends on Jews in America not only for economic aid and political support in a dangerous world, but also for models of the varieties of Judaism.

Neither the education of Israeli Jews nor that of American Jews, however, is adequate to sustain their flourishing and maintain their alliance.

Israeli Jews grow up informally educated by speaking their native tongue, Hebrew, the language of the Bible and of Jewish liturgy; by a calendar whose rhythms reflect the Jewish year; by living the clash between secularism and Jewish Orthodoxy; and by bearing arms to protect their lives and the Jewish state. At the same time, secular Israelis are deprived by their formal education of access to the riches of the Jewish tradition. Many will graduate from college knowing little of the Bible and the Talmud; the philosophical achievements of Maimonides and Spinoza as well as those of Herman Cohen, Martin Buber, and Franz Rosenzweig; the classics of Hebrew literature; and, not least, the roots and major strands of Zionism.

In addition, Israel does a poor job of providing students—secular as well as religious—with a solid grounding in the tradition of freedom. Few college graduates in Israel are conversant with the intertwined moral, economic, and political principles that put into practice the belief—inscribed in the Declaration of the State of Israel as well as in America's Declaration of Independence—in the equality in freedom of all human beings.

The education of American Jews is in still worse condition. As a consequence of the decline of liberal education in the United States, most American Jews will also graduate college without a basic knowledge of the virtues that underlie free societies; the institutional arrangements through which constitutional government secures liberty and equality under law; and the assumptions, operations, and achievements of free markets. Most American Jews, moreover, will graduate from college, like their Israeli counterparts, unaware of the beauty and wisdom of the Jewish tradition. But unlike young Israeli men and women, most American Jews will, in addition to their other educational disadvantages, lack even minimum competence in Hebrew, which furnishes a gateway both to the study of the Jewish tradition and to the experience of the many dimensions of Israel's marvelous vitality.

It would be foolhardy to count on reform of public schools in Israel or America. The damage wrought in both countries by the progressive aversion to disciplined transmission of knowledge and the politically correct war on liberty of thought and discussion will take a generation or more to repair.

To protect their long-term interests and to heighten the prospects that in 2065 the condition of their people will be good, Jews in America and in Israel must do what Jews have done throughout their history: reinforce, expand, and, where necessary, build from scratch educational institutions independent of government, in some cases as a supplement to public education and in others as an alternative.

But now Jews—in America and Israel—must go beyond what they have done in the past. It will not be enough for Jews to make sure that their children receive a Jewish education. Because of the sad state of liberal education, Jews must also construct private educational institutions that teach students the principles that support free and democratic government.

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Paul Berman

In epilogue to his wonderful novel from 1930, *Jews Without Money* (how's that for a literary reference!), the proletarian writer Michael Gold pictured his poor and oppressed father on the Lower East Side in 1899 looking up from a Yiddish newspaper and saying to his mother: "Great news, Katie! The 20th century is coming next Thursday night!" And Gold remembered his mother's reply: "Whatever it is, it probably means more trouble for the Jews." Such is my prediction for 2065.

But will the Jews of 2065 bear up under their difficulties? I remind them (I am assuming that readers in 2065 will be paying attention to our long-ago symposium) that Jewish well-being ought to mean something more than success in the oddly linked fields of demography and military affairs. And it ought to mean more than religious survival, though you would never know this from looking at the question that *Commentary's* editors have posed. Jewish civilization is larger, after all, than Judaism the religion. There used to be something called liberal civilization, and, during the century-and-a-half between, say, the 1840s and these latter months of 2015, the civilization of the Jews contributed massively to it. Dear Jews of 2065, there used to be a natural and civilized dedication to universal human rights. Also a commitment to economic progress and equality, not just for Jews. Those are political themes. Something deeper: There used to be a certain Jewish feeling of being at home in the world of philosophy and the arts.

Will a proper and Jewish recollection of those sundry commitments and appreciations and ways of being survive and thrive, amid the glooms of 2065? Dear Jews of the future, some of you, the contented Americans, will disappear into the semiliterate and all-accepting maw of American mediocrity, where your Jewish memory will lose its textures and grandeurs, even if you continue to observe a few rituals. Some of you will disappear into rabbinical fantasies of ancient times, where you will steep in memory unto madness, you and your Islamic counterparts together, alas. But will there be somebody, anybody at all in America or Israel or France or someplace else, who will continue to uphold the broad and generous Jewish-inflected liberalism, cultural and political, of the past? There will be somebody. I squeeze that person's hand. To that very old-fashioned person I say, "Chin up! Mother Gold's worries apply to you especially! You had better work up a positive program to guarantee the hardiness and prosperity of your own principles!"

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David Brog

The Jewish people and the West are at a crossroads. We are at the same crossroads. We've arrived here at the same time.

The timing is not coincidental. The interdependence is not new. The future of both civilizations depends upon the choice each makes today.

One road leads to assimilation. Diaspora Jews who forsake their faith will become Westerners—Americans, Europeans, Argentinians—with little to distinguish them from their neighbors. Israeli Jews who abandon their ancient traditions will become the Hebrew-speaking gentiles of which so many early Zionists warned (and some dreamed).

But the Jews no longer face this dilemma alone. The entire West now confronts the same stark choice. Western man is once again slipping the bonds of the Judeo-Christian culture that undergirds his civilization. Yes, pleasure and ego have always beckoned. But only now do we find increasing numbers of our greatest minds telling us that resistance isn't merely futile, it's evil.

As the Jews and the West contemplate the way forward, they confront steadily rising stakes. At one time, a bad decision would have merely jeopardized our culture. Today, the wrong choice will endanger our lives.

This physical threat comes from an ascendant radical Islam. We mustn't be fooled. Those chanting death to the Jews on Europe's streets are not the descendants of Christian supremacists. They are almost always the cousins of those currently killing Christians in the

Middle East in the name of Islam. We mustn't be naive. The only reason such slaughter remains largely confined to the Middle East is that radical Islam lacks resources, not will.

The answer to these joint threats—cultural and physical—is the same. It is to turn our backs on the road to assimilation and embark down that other road, the one that leads us home. The answer is for Jews to engage with Judaism. The answer is for the West to embrace its Judeo-Christian roots.

Such return to tradition need not be reactionary. As radical Islam demonstrates daily, faith unchecked by respect for human dignity and reason quickly turns toxic. Happily, respect for both human dignity and reason is a core Judeo-Christian value. And besides, the root of the West's current crisis is not hubris but low self-esteem.

A West reconnected to its Judeo-Christian roots will overcome its sophomoric spasm of multiculturalism. A West so educated will both acknowledge the reality of evil and recognize the evil of our time. A West so schooled will rediscover the will to fight this evil.

The Jews and the West stand together at the same crossroads. The road toward assimilation looms before us both. It's a road we have taken before. And we've forgotten that it's a dead end.

Without Judaism, Jews disappear. Those who abandoned their dusty desert rituals for Greek or Roman ways certainly had physical progeny. But these children ceased being Jewish centuries ago.

Fortunately, not all Jews chose to trade the Bible's blazing moral code for nude olympics and vomitoria. Some clung to their ancient ways. Thanks to them, there are both Jews and a West today.

We mustn't forget that the West we inhabit is far more than classical civilization electrified. Athens may have been a democracy, but almost every Athenian owned slaves taken from neighboring tribes. Romans may have developed advanced technology, but they also unceremoniously drowned their baby girls in rivers.

The ancients were nice Nazis who elevated their own race—and only the supposedly productive within their race—above the rest of humanity. Modern Nazis, Fascists, and Communists did the same thing with their own race, nation, and class, respectively. And when the West abandons its Judeo-Christian values, the Jews are almost always the ones who perish first.

Where will Jews be in 50 years? The answer depends on the path both the West and the Jews choose today. If the West chooses poorly, Israel and the Jewish people will face an increasingly hostile world with fewer and fewer friends. We've already seen enough early signs of this possible future to understand how badly it will end.

If the Jews choose poorly, they will disappear even more quickly. But the West will certainly pay a price for Jewish folly. It will lose its stubborn conscience, its living connection to its most nourishing roots. A West without Jews will more readily revert to the ways of its classical predecessors and become societies less human and less humane. It's happened before, and not as long ago as we'd like to think.

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THE JEWISH FUTURE

/ A SYMPOSIUM /

Angela Buchdahl

In our collective Jewish memory, we came out of Egypt an *erev rav*, a mixed multitude. As we fled, we accepted like-minded people of all kinds who wanted to join us in this journey to freedom. They were not all Hebrews, but this scrappy, diverse group that stumbled through the wilderness was brought together by the shared and sacred purpose of redemption. And for the first time we were called *Am Yisrael*: the nation of Israel.

The Torah reminds us that when we came out of Egypt, we were scared, afraid of our own freedom. So many choices. We began to romanticize what it was like to be enslaved: "Do you remember all the leeks and fish we used to eat when we were slaves?"

It's the most human of impulses. Even today, in an era of unprecedented Jewish freedom, we Jews look back at times of more limited choice with nostalgia: "Do you remember when Jews all lived in the same neighborhood, ate the same foods, joined the same law firms and country clubs, and followed the same rules in the same way?"

But none of us wants to go back to Egypt. Or the ghetto. Or the shtetl. If Judaism can endure only under the physical danger and emotional pressure of enslavement and anti-Semitism, we are not yet redeemed.

It took 40 years for the generation that was enslaved to be replaced by a generation that no longer yearned for Egypt. Fifty years from now, the Jewish people will only know complete freedom: freedom to choose how we want to observe the mitzvot. Freedom to choose whom to love and marry. Even the freedom to choose whether we will be Jewish at all. So many choices. It is both frightening and a tremendous opportunity.

In 50 years, Jews will be Jewish because they choose Judaism—for its profound meaning and purpose. We will have multitudes of others, like-minded people of all kinds, who will choose to join us as *gerei tzedek*, righteous converts to Judaism, or as *gerei toshav*, non-Jews who become part of our community and raise Jewish families. *Am Yisrael* will still be a nation set apart, but it will be forged together in our freedom, not thrust apart by our enemies.

In 50 years, we will have eradicated Jewish diseases. Not only Tay-Sachs and Gauchers. But our racism. And narrow tribalism. And other diseases resulting from generations of insularity and inbreeding. No longer will you be able to identify the Jews in a room by their “Jewish” last names or “Jewish” appearance.

But you will remain able to recognize your fellow Jews—because you will recognize them from Sinai, when we all stood together, all men, women, children, and converts, woodchopper and water-drawer alike, and accepted Torah and our covenantal relationship with God. Our kinship will run deeper than ethnic identification, and we will have a broader understanding of Chosenness—because in significant part, the choice will have been our own.

In 50 years, we still will be the Chosen People. Chosen to pull ourselves and others out of *mitzrayim*, the narrow places. Chosen to share our particular light with all people. Chosen to help shape a redeemed world. But in 50 years, when we truly know what it is to be free, we will be confident enough to welcome anyone who wants to *choose us*. Confident enough to allow their unique cultures and perspectives to etch new crowns of Torah on our Jewish practice and observances. *Am Yisrael* will again be a mixed multitude.

And we may just look over Nebo and glimpse the Promised Land.

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Shalom Carmy

My father, an immigrant factory worker who studied Talmud and sacrificed to keep Shabbat, would have been satisfied to know, 60 years ago, that his son would uphold his religious standards. Had he known that I would spend my life with hundreds of first-rate students, living for the study of Torah and religious observance, even while vigorously engaging Western culture, and that I myself would feel at home among non-Jewish intellectuals who respected Shabbat, honored *kashrut*, and valued Torah, he might have thought the Messiah was nigh. Had I told him that support for Israel, in 2015, would be an acrimonious issue dividing liberals and conservatives, he would have been puzzled and dismayed, but not wholly incredulous. Had I suggested that the cultural elites would despise people like us for professing traditional family ethics, he would have accused his bright boy of arguing for effect. Such is the fate of prognostication.

How many contemporary Jews have genuinely encountered a religious individual, meaning a person whose life is centered on the service of God? I don't mean well-informed Jews, even those plugged into Jewish practice and organized religion. Those who know saintly men and women in their sober joy, their undistracted attentiveness to their fellows, who are swept up in the passionate intellectual precision of their quest for God in Torah, and infected by the sheer matter-of-factness of their uncompromised and undivided commitment to God, are driven and inspired to live and transmit their vision, as best as we can.

Can this make a difference for a larger public? Everything militates against it: the weakness of religious institutions, the trivialization of religious language, the ascendancy of relativism, utilitarianism, and entertainment as lifestyle axioms. Why should spiritual life be less commodified and impersonal than the rest of late capitalist culture? If these trends reign, external religious observance may yet survive; age-old rituals continue to fill psychological needs and enact ethnic pride or political pageant; charismatic leaders, harmless or malignant, will still attract followers; and a lush variety of superstition may proliferate where living models of service to God are absent or invisible. But the lines of communication between the un-extinguished and indomitable pockets of God-anchored life and mass society will have been severed.

Burke's great secular wisdom: The stock of reason of each transient coterie is small; we must draw on the "general bank and capital of nations, and ages." It goes without saying that the dominant dogma of "presentism," which for current "enlightened" opinion makes truth, cuts off communication with previous generations and with all ways of thinking that are not aligned with the political correctness of the moment. That includes revealed religion. And so the resonance of traditional Judaism within the broader society depends on our success in countering the narrow parochialism that asserts its dominance in the public square and private psyche. I suspect that will require personal education. The mere conveying of information will not suffice. And that will also require vital, mutually fructifying encounters between us, the pillars of Orthodoxy, and those thinking individuals for whom those lines of communication still matter.

In 50 years, the fate of the Jewish people will appear to have been determined by many macro and micro developments we cannot foresee: the accidents of military technology and political fashion, the effects of environmental change, the vicissitudes of economic and social progress or degeneration. Within those limits, our destiny is what we make of it.

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Phyllis Chesler

Those who still believe that Jewish history can never again repeat itself must dispense with that illusion. Jewish history has always repeated itself and may continue to do so until the coming of the Messiah.

Fifty years from now, despite the cognitive war against the Jews—a global campaign whose big lies far overshadow all previous blood libels and which has accomplished a “perfect storm” alliance between Holocaust-denying Islamists and a politically correct Western intelligentsia—Israel, the world’s Jew, will still be here, a shining beacon of humanity.

In 1980, on the front pages of the Israeli media, I declared that anti-Semitism was on the rise; that anti-Zionism would be central to the new anti-Semitism; that politically correct Westerners, employing the left’s language of liberation, would lead the unholy charge. Israeli and Diaspora Jewish organizations did not listen. By the early 21st century, Zionism was considered a “Nazi, apartheid, colonialist” conspiracy; human bombs were “victims”; and Israel, who defended rather than endangered both her own and “enemy” civilians, was the “aggressor.” Anti-Zionism allowed anti-racist racists to enjoy their Jew-hatred without guilt.

In the past, local blood libels led to pogroms, massacres, and exiles. It is unlikely that Israel and Jews will totally escape the consequences of a defamation campaign gone viral.

Unlike other countries, however, Israel has been forced to become the world’s leading expert in counterterrorism because of continual and intolerable attacks. In response to the slow-motion Holocaust launched against it in 2001–2002, Israel stanching the flow of blood by building a much-maligned security wall and utilizing the Iron Dome. At high cost, Israel will continue to defend herself—even as other nations fall to ruin.

Prime Minister Netanyahu is fighting for the survival of Western values. Most European and American leaders are not.

Unchecked, Islamic barbaric atrocities will escalate, and nuclear catastrophes could be inevitable. This will affect many nations. The question is whether the Jewish state will be spared.

History teaches us that Jews have survived and flourished even after the gravest of devastations. Thus, the promised “remnant” of Jews will endure. Israel will continue making unexpected allies: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, India.

Diaspora Jews—not Israel—are spiritually endangered by their abandonment of Israel. Fifty years from now, secular, assimilated, anti-Zionist Jews—indifferent to or hard-hearted toward the fate of Israel—may disappear without a trace. As individuals, they may find themselves as vulnerable to anti-Semitic persecution as Jews were before 1948.

Can our Judeo-Christian civilization be saved? Its ideals and values are being vanquished in the Muslim world—and Europe is under siege.

Perhaps Europe has reaped a terrible, karmic destiny. The continent that repeatedly massacred millions of nonviolent and assimilated Semites (the Jews) has now reaped the whirlwind of 40–50 million hostile, unassimilated Semites (the Muslims) who are determined to destroy post-Enlightenment Europe.

A half-century from now, Europe will no longer be an enlightened, Judeo-Christian civilization. The Jews of Europe will have gone elsewhere.

America's fate hangs in the balance.

Under Barack Obama, we have lost our standing and our soul. America has made common cause with Islamist barbarians who behead, stone, crucify, and publicly gang-rape the innocents, both Muslim and infidel.

America may be in for some terrible times—Israel is used to dealing with that as a given. America is not.

Judaism's children (Christianity and Islam) mounted a bloody rebellion against Judaism's parental authority. Historically, Christians worshipped a dead Jew whose crucifixion redeemed them; they continued killing Jews who denied this, repeating the patricide. Muslims felt theologically offended, dishonored, by anyone who did not convert to Islam. After 21 centuries, Christianity began to change. Islam is only 13 or 14 centuries into the game and may need another seven centuries before it initiates reforms.

Until then, do not expect those Muslims who are consumed with infidel hatred and jihad compulsions to renounce their views of Western-style freedoms, infidels, apostates, dissidents, women, or the “wrong” kind of Muslim.

Since Jews have always been travelers, perhaps Israel should invest in space travel and make preparations for lift-off in the event of nuclear holocaust. Let it lift the nation, holy unto God, its plants, animals, people, cities, archeological levels—the very earth itself—aloft, as in a Chagall painting, until it is safe to return.

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**WHAT WILL BE THE CONDITION OF THE JEWISH
COMMUNITY 50 YEARS FROM NOW?**

Ben Cohen

Had the keenest Jewish minds of 1945 been asked to imagine the Jewish future 50 years thence, it is likely that their predictions would have been distinctly cautious. All around them was the dawning realization of the Holocaust's scale, the continuing persecution of Jews in the Communist and Arab countries, and, above all, the absence of a sovereign Jewish state. How many would have ventured that, come 1995, a nation called Israel would be on the cusp of its jubilee, with a stable population and a dynamic economy? Or that the Jews living outside its borders would do so with full civil rights, widespread affluence, and a comparative absence, by today's standards, of mainstream anti-Semitic expression?

Yet hindsight reveals that there were reasons to be positive even in the dark aftermath of World War II, among them the confirmation that America's exceptionalism applied to its treatment of the Jews too, and the renewed drive of the Zionist movement in Mandate Palestine to achieve Jewish statehood. Out of these combined nation- and community-building efforts, the age of Jewish empowerment was born—a period of Jewish history that, in the experience of the majority of Jews, has been more benign and more encouraging than anything that has gone before.

Still, the angst remains. Every debate, it sometimes seems, is accented by an unarticulated fear of what the future holds. Every challenge, from intermarriage, to the destiny of Jews in Europe, to the form and content of Jewish education, carries a barely disguised warning that failure to resolve the problem under discussion will erase the Jewish people from existence.

No apocalypse awaits the Jews: That much I will predict. But how we manage a future that is still to be made will be determined, in the last analysis, by how we use the modern freedoms—national self-determination, full civil rights—that earlier generations secured for us.

In that regard, we would be wise to assume that the Jews will continue to face enemies and adversaries in 2065, just as we always have. True, anti-Semitism in this century is turning out to be far less violent than during the previous 200 years, and no Jewish community of significant size currently suffers from legalized discrimination. That, however, does not tell the whole story.

The sources of anti-Semitism in our time are multiple and overlapping. In Europe, electoral successes on the extremes of left and right, along with more frequent instances of anti-Semitic thuggery, contribute to an insecurity that calls into question the long-term ability of Jewish communities to remain in places such as France and Hungary. In the Middle East, the rise of Iranian power poses the destruction of Jewish sovereignty as a genuine threat, and not the mere slogan our current crop of Western leaders pretend it to be. In America, the political center of Diaspora Jews, the whispers of “dual loyalty” are growing louder and more impatient, particularly from the citadels of progressivism.

Hostility to the existence of the Jewish state has, since the Holocaust, established itself as the principal vehicle for anti-Semitic agitation. This development was certainly not unexpected because, ironically, Zionism enabled the Jews to be the masters of their own future for the first time in more than two millennia. Resentment toward this reality runs deep and wide—a discordant chorus of languages and accents, cutting across a range of cultures, instantly available through myriad virtual communities, and embedded most of all in those Muslim countries where there are barely any Jews left. The anti-Semitism of the future will be shaped from this present context; the more we understand it now, the better positioned we will be to contain and perhaps, dare I say, substantively defeat it by the time 2065 rolls around.

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Eliot A. Cohen

From a secularist's point of view, this is the first period of Jewish history in which the Jews' fate is in their own hands; from the believer's point of view, in some measure it always has been. I incline more to the latter.

The rough shape of Jewish demography in 2065 is clear: two large, thriving communities in North America and Israel, with smaller Diaspora communities that will be at best static, at worst shrinking or disappearing, but in any case dependent on the two greater communities. The first problem the Jews will have to address is how those two poles of Jewish life will deal with each other.

That relationship, even now, is built on false premises. In the United States, there is a hard core of Zionist true believers who think of Israel as an imperiled little pioneering experiment or the earthly paradise where they aspire to live; there is a much larger group of Jews who have either modest interest or none at all in the Jewish state, or they are embarrassed by it. On the Israeli side, there is a pervasive dismissal of American Jews as being simply too lazy or comfortable to join them—mixed with a not always subtle envy centered on studying, working, or transplanting here.

Both sides need to renegotiate the relationship. Israel is no longer a poor and struggling Sparta in the Middle East but rather the “start-up nation,” in mortal danger, to be sure, but prosperous, armed to the teeth, and self-confident. It no longer needs bond drives and the saccharine Zionism they signify, but it does need the perspective of Jews who are wholly at home in a much larger world. For that, Israelis will need to develop an understanding of and respect for their American co-religionists that most of them do not have.

American Jews, for their part, will neither move en masse to Israel nor assimilate away (although many will drop out), but they need the vibrancy of Hebrew and Jewish culture emanating from Israel, which will in many ways become the center of the Jewish world. Working out a new relationship will endanger the prestige and power of existing Jewish elites and institutions, and undermine the self-confidence and influence of not a few intellectuals and leaders on both sides. It is overdue by some decades.

The second great challenge is one of faith, the reshaping of Jewish practice and beliefs. Particularly in the United States, the problem will be keeping together the major sub-sects of the Orthodox, Reform, and the dwindling Conservative community. It will mean accommodating some of the newer movements (partnership minyanim being a prime example). It will mean tackling both the absurdities of some Orthodox practice (my candidate for a quick win would be the second day of the holidays) while deepening knowledge of Hebrew, Jewish literature, and respect for traditional practice in the less observant community. The most serious issue is conversion: Without some accommodation by both sides—modifying Orthodoxy's absurd restrictiveness on the one hand, without succumbing to laxity on the other—the Jewish community in the United States will continue to shrink, and to miss a demographic opportunity.

The Jews are peculiar, because they are a people and a faith, an ethnicity and, as Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik often put it, a covenantal community. Today, they are hemmed in, to some extent, by ossified institutions and habits of thought across the spectrum of observance. They are, as they have ever been, vulnerable to mere indifference about the deeper meaning of their pact with the Almighty. But I do not for a moment doubt that 50 years hence, the Jews, having survived for this long, will, with their perseverance and genius for creativity and the help of Providence, find a way.

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Eric Cohen

Many years ago, Irving Kristol gave a lecture in Jerusalem on the “political stupidity of the Jews,” whom he accused of being misguidedly committed to economic socialism and naive internationalism. His solution: Jews need to go to school with Thucydides to learn about the realities of power, with Adam Smith to learn about the nature of economic liberty, and with Edmund Burke to learn about the complex relationship between tradition and politics.

The Jewish tradition probably has more political wisdom to offer than Kristol acknowledged. But he was basically right in pointing to the need for a Jewish political reformation as the only route to Jewish success or even survival. That reformation, alas, has not yet come.

In the ultimate sense, the fate of the Jews is probably in divine hands. And the genius of rabbinic Judaism—both in perfecting the God-seeking moral life and in preserving the earthly Jewish community through exile—deserves the greatest respect. The heart and soul of Judaism remains the distinctively Jewish way of sanctifying sex and family, eating and time, welcoming into life and mourning in death. If Jews forget this, all is probably lost, and the struggle against the potential sources of Jewish demise, whether via destruction or assimilation, loses its deepest purpose.

But rabbinic Judaism has little to offer, alas, when it comes to the current political crisis of the Jews. And in the realm of politics, Jews seem pathologically silly, despite the fact that the creation of the Jewish state is arguably the most impressive political founding of the past century. In America, Jewish liberalism is an old story, and in Israel the polity seems to oscillate between triviality and crisis management with a leadership deficit that should frighten us.

So what would political success look like in the decades ahead, and what would a bright future for the Jewish community look like 50 years hence?

In America, Jews should be focused on promoting school vouchers, the only hope for expanding the day-school movement and unleashing a new generation of Jewish educational entrepreneurship; on fighting to defend religious liberty, the only hope for ensuring that traditional Jewish beliefs and institutions are not marginalized by a hostile secularist culture; and on electing political conservatives, the only ones who still believe that Jewish nationalism is a noble cause and that American power is necessary to preserve decency and order in the troubled Middle East.

Yet whatever we might achieve in America, the fate of the Jews will probably depend on the fate of the Zionist project. And in Israel, we must acknowledge a very hard truth: Even the greatest Israeli political leaders, even an Israeli polity with otherworldly political courage, even the strengthening of the already impressive Israeli military force—all that might not be enough. Navigating a nuclear Middle East, as a tiny and hated nation, might simply be impossible.

But it is sinful, especially in politics, to give in to despair. And so what is needed, instead, is the birth of a true Israeli conservatism and a reinvigoration of Jewish nationalism. This means fighting preemptive wars to clean up the neighborhood, ideally before the Iranian nuclear umbrella is built; reforming, in a dramatic way, the Israeli economy, which is bogged down by regulation, high taxes, and the legacy of a socialist ideology that nearly every Israeli knows doesn't work but feels obliged to support; promoting conversion for those who seek to tie their fates to the Jewish people; and doing everything possible to facilitate a mass exodus of Jews from Europe to Zion, where they will live or die with the dignity of national self-respect.

Horrible as it is to say, war in the past century has been good for the Jews: victory in World War II, rather than being slaughtered by the Nazis; victory in 1948, when a new state was born; and victory in 1967, when Jerusalem was retaken. Jews have fought bravely and reaped their just rewards. Yet the kinds of wars that might be required to establish some measure of peace in the Middle East over the next 50 years will probably require America's moral will and military might. On the other side of those wars, I hope for a million circumcisions, and an eternity of children dancing with Torahs, and the restoration of Jewish holiness in the holy land. This is too much to expect in a mere 50 years, but one hopes that by then all hope will not be lost.

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THE JEWISH FUTURE

/ A SYMPOSIUM /

Steven M. Cohen

The past 50 years, as seen in 2065:

In September 2011, during the run-up to the Israeli elections, political newcomer Yair Lapid generated a good bit of favorable attention by informing *Haredi* higher-education students that their sector had “won” and secular Jews had lost:

We lost and you won. It's a fresh victory, just a few years old, but it's already here. And the initial significance of this victory is that we, the secular Jews, have to admit that our vision, the vision of a state that we run without you and in which you're only guests, was a failure.

Just two years later, the Pew Research Center's *Portrait of Jewish Americans 2013* delivered essentially the same message vis à vis American Jews. Demographically, if not in other ways, Orthodoxy was in ascendance while other American Jews were poised for decline. At the time, Orthodox Jews made up only 10 percent of American Jewish adults but as many as 27 percent of Jewish children and 35 percent of Jews younger than five. In New York City, a 2011 study showed that three-quarters of Jewish children were Orthodox.

Among the non-Orthodox, non-marriage, late marriage, intermarriage (running about 80 percent among Reform-raised Jews), and low birthrates (an average of 1.7 births per woman) were working to diminish their numbers in coming generations.

At the same time, ever-expanding Israeli settlement in the West Bank, ongoing friction with the Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, and even Israel proper, combined with the turmoil in the Middle East, all worked to perpetuate the occupation and make withdrawal from the

West Bank undesirable, if not unthinkable, to the increasingly nationalist and beleaguered Israeli public. In the years to come, Israel would be militarily strong enough to ensure its security, but its ceaseless rule over another indigenous people would provoke isolation from much of Europe and condemnation by liberal sectors in the United States. Commercially, Israel would increasingly rely upon China, India, and a host of nondemocratic states.

The demographic forces in the United States and the rest of the Diaspora combined with the political dynamics related to Israel increasingly alienated erstwhile liberal Jews from Jews, Judaism, Israel, and other things Jewish. Either culturally liberal Jews produced few, if any, Jewish grandchildren, or the small numbers who were born Jewish saw a Jewish community with which they could not engage, and an Israel which they did not love. And those who tried to participate were in effect driven out by conservatives who relentlessly and repeatedly accused liberals of...naiveté, disloyalty, subversion, transgression. Where few, if any, liberal Jews sought to prevent their conservative counterparts from participating in Jewish life or questioned their Jewish bona fides, quite the opposite is true of the way conservatives often (typically?) relate to Jewish liberals.

While liberals constituted half the American Jewish population in 2015, and their counterparts were sufficiently numerous to make the 2015 elections in Israel something of a horse race, the political divisions in 2065 became lopsidedly conservative—in both countries and even around the world. Not only had conservatives expanded their numbers, Jewish liberals and their descendants essentially dropped out of the Jewish population or, in like fashion, emigrated in droves from a more and more militant and theocratic Israel in which *Haredim*, ultra-nationalists, and wealthy plutocrats increasingly asserted their values, interests, and agendas.

The summary above is offered more as a cautionary tale than a confident prediction. It presents an extreme version of a reasonable worst-case scenario that builds upon and extends current and genuine socio-demographic, religious, cultural, and political trends in Israel and the United States.

George Santayana is thought to have said, “Those who cannot remember the *past* are *condemned to repeat it*.” Similarly, those who cannot anticipate a tragic future and work to counteract it are doomed to confront it.

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