



PERSPECTIVES

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The Machiavellian Opponents of the Nation State Law

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The public debate attending the Nation State Law is a clear indicator of Israel's vibrant democracy and an illustration of the freedom of expression that characterizes the Israeli state of mind. Arabs, Druze, and Jews expressed their views on this matter, both pro and con, notwithstanding the fact that the core argument is essentially political rather than substantive. With that said, the protests in Israel against the new law are a red alert. They reflect an emerging tendency among liberal streams in Israeli Jewish society to undermine the long-accepted principle that Israel is the national home of the Jewish people.

In June 1922, when he was Secretary of State for the Colonies, Winston Churchill wrote the following in a British White Paper:

When it is asked what is meant by the development of the Jewish National Home in Palestine, it may be answered that it is not the imposition of a Jewish nationality upon the inhabitants of Palestine as a whole, but the further development of the existing Jewish community, with the assistance of Jews in other parts of the world, in order that it may become a center in which the Jewish people as a whole may take, on grounds of religion and race, an interest and a pride. But in order that this community should have the best prospect of free development and provide a full opportunity for the Jewish people to display its capacities, it is essential that it should know that it is in Palestine as of right and not on sufferance. That is the reason why it is necessary that the existence of a Jewish National Home in Palestine should be internationally guaranteed, and that it should be formally recognized to rest upon ancient historic connection.

Together with the Balfour Declaration and the League of Nations' Mandate for Palestine, Churchill's White Paper could be considered the backbone – the international foundation – of the Jewish state in the Land of Israel (or Palestine as it was renamed in Roman times). In fact, the basic principles highlighted in the document above were adopted as part of the Israeli Declaration of Independence.

A well-grounded justification of the idea of a nation-state for the Jewish people was also expressed during the Napoleonic era. On April 20, 1799, Napoleon Bonaparte reportedly prepared a proclamation known as "Letter to the Jewish Nation" making the Land of Israel an independent Jewish state. Characterizing the Jews as the "rightful heirs of Palestine" and as "a unique nation, whom, in thousands of years, lust of conquest and tyranny have been able to deprive only of their ancestral lands, but not of name and national existence," he would invite "all the Jews of Asia and Africa to gather under my flag to re-establish the ancient Jerusalem."

The public debate that has emerged after the approval by the Knesset of the Nation State Law is a clear indicator of Israel's vibrant democracy and an extreme illustration of the freedom of expression that characterizes the Israeli state of mind. Arabs, Druze, and Jews expressed their views on this matter, both pro and con, notwithstanding the fact that the core argument is essentially political rather than substantive.

With that said, the protests in Israel against the new law are a red alert. They reflect an emerging tendency among liberal streams in Jewish Israeli society to undermine the long-accepted axiom that Israel is the national home of the Jewish people.

The fiercest critics of the law claim that it lacks a firm reference to the equality principle. This assertion of supposed injustice embedded within the Nation State Law, an assertion that threatens the fragile equilibrium Jewish Israelis share with non-Jewish minorities living within the sovereign boundaries of the country, seems to be motivated more by the desire to topple the present government than by genuine concern for the (supposedly) affected values.

The object appears to be to incite the small Druze community living in Israel, whose bond with the Jews is commonly referred to as *Brit Damim* – a "Covenant of Blood." This refers in particular to the fact that Druze young people are recruited into the Israeli security forces along with Jewish youngsters.

By intentionally spreading a false interpretation of alleged evils deriving from the Nation State Law, mainly the travesty that the Druze are considered by the

state to be second-class citizens, the anti-government activists are endangering the long-lasting *modus vivendi* based upon the loyalty of the Druze to Israel.

This is not the first time this Machiavellian approach to undermining the government has reared its head in the Jewish State. In his book *Churchill and the Jews*, Martin Gilbert writes, “Churchill was surprised and shocked when [Herbert] Samuel informed him that the Arabs had been provoked to riot [in Jaffa in November 1921] by a hard core of Jewish Communists.” Churchill replied that it was Samuel’s responsibility to purge the Jewish communities and newcomers of Communist elements, “and without hesitation or delay have all those who are guilty of subversive agitation expelled from the country.”

The modern-day version of this Machiavellian approach had an immediate effect among radical fragments of the Druze, who managed to overshadow the traditional moderate leadership and lead a mass protest in Tel Aviv. The Druze senior retired officer, Amal As’ad, in an open letter to Prime Minister Netanyahu (July 21, 2018), bluntly expressed his distrust of the most fundamental canon of Israel as the national home for the Jewish people. In his words, “From where do you [Jews] draw the temerity to state that the land belongs to you? What is the basis for the Jewish claim to the right of ownership of the land? If it is just that messianic belief in God’s promise, why wouldn’t you wait for the Messiah’s arrival?”

A stunning phenomenon following As’ad’s letter was the broad and vocal support it received from high-ranking Jewish Israeli retired officers and security officials. They emphasized the “Covenant of Blood” between the Jews and the Druze and offered not a single word of criticism for As’ad’s anti-Zionist diatribe.

We should not, therefore, be surprised that a distinguished retired IDF general (Ami Ayalon, who also served as Head of the Shin Bet) called for senior retired defense officials to join him at a mass demonstration of Israeli Arabs initiated by “The Higher Arab Monitoring Committee.” This radical organization rejects the principle of Israel as a Jewish state and advocates for a binational state that will wipe out any particularity of the Jews in Israel.

There is a worrying tendency emerging among Jewish Israeli leftists to cling to universal liberal values by turning their backs on the idea of the nation-state and preaching for globalization principles to be applied to Israel – but not to the Palestinians, whose right to statehood they staunchly uphold. This trend is a modern version of the self-styled “New Historians,” who portrayed the Zionist idea as a colonialist movement and doubted the historic linkage of the Jews to the Land of Israel.

Undermining Israel's *raison d'être* since the birth of the Zionist movement and selectively adhering to universal ideals as vehicles with which to act against the legitimate incumbent government can be considered acts of subversion. The demand by the Israeli Arab leadership that the Jewish state become "a state of all its citizens" is little more than a handy euphemism for Israel's transformation into a Muslim Arab state in which Jews will be reduced to a permanent state of minority, or "dhimmitude" as it is known in Islam.

These fierce internal attacks on the new National State Law could have fallout among the international community, and could certainly affect future ties between Israel and liberal Jewish communities abroad.

It should be a matter of urgency to launch a government initiative to refresh mainstream educational programs, particularly strengthening the topic of Jewish History. Israeli young people must be taught the ways in which Israel is a special case among the nations of the world. So too must they be instructed that Judaism and democracy are complementary rather than mutually exclusive values. A Jewish nation-state guarantees the future of Israel in its historical territory.

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