

LETTERS

ISRAEL ASUNDER

THE VERY ELEGANT AND CONCISE cluster devoted to Israel ["Inside Israel," Summer '10] begins with the famous quote of Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, that the making of Israel, and indeed its existence, is a miracle. This is true. But the existence of Israel is also a nightmare for the Palestinians, and I wish that such a distinguished publication as *The Wilson Quarterly* had not ignored this disquieting aspect of the Zionist project.

One sees this in "The Despair of Zion," by Walter Reich, in which discussion of the victims of Zionism and Israel is absent. The Israeli mood and attitudes toward peace with the Palestinians as described by Reich are not familiar to me as someone who was born in Israel and has lived there all his life. I am not suggesting that the Palestinians or their tactics should be idealized. But to describe Jewish Israel in 2010 as a peace-loving nation is a distortion of the truth. For the most part, Jewish Israel is a society intolerant of Arabs at best and openly racist toward Palestinians at worst.

After more than 60 years of existence, Israel is an ethnocentric society whose military and political leaders—regardless of political affiliation—have no interest in peace or desire for reconciliation with the Palestinians whom they dispossessed

by force in 1948 and continue to dominate. I respect Reich's opinion but would have loved to see an opposing point of view.

Ilan Pappé

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AS AN ISRAELI, I TAKE EXCEPTION to Walter Reich's diagnosis of despair. The only people in despair in Israel, the only ones who want their children to emigrate rather than live in the greatest national miracle the world has ever seen, are members of the starry-eyed Left, who have believed the Palestinians' rhetoric about peace, who have refused to listen to what the Palestinians have been saying to one another and, most important, teaching their children, who have been blind to the reality that every single Israeli concession—without fail—has led to further terror and bloodshed. Those who insist on seeing reality as it is never expected the so-called peace efforts to bring anything but failure, and ergo, are not disappointed or in despair.

We Israelis know that we are here to stay, and only when the Palestinians realize this will we be able to coexist peacefully. As for despair—how can a developed country with one of the world's highest birthrates and fastest-growing economies, a

country that contributes more than any other per capita to global knowledge, that is finding cures for cancer and numerous other diseases, be considered to be in despair? Israelis—with the exception of the lunatic left fringe—are for the most part happy with life in Israel, and numerous studies and surveys bear this out. Instead of pontificating on the basis of the sad comments of his academic friend, Reich should go out into the street and speak to real people.

Ruchie Avital

*Ofra, Israel
Posted on wilsonquarterly.com*

AS A SOCIAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL psychologist who has lived in Israel since

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1963, I suggest that we look for a process in Reich's article that the American social psychologist Leon Festinger called dissonance reduction, and that psychoanalysts call rationalization: rejecting opinions or facts that conflict with one's self-understanding and understanding of the world. According to Reich's article, for example, on the maps used by Palestinian students, Israel does not appear. At the same time, on the Israeli road maps I use to get around Israel, there is no Green Line separating Israel from the Palestinian territories—in fact, there is no mention of the Palestinian territories at all. The driver is directed seamlessly from Netanya in Israel to Tulkarm in the West Bank without any indication that he is crossing through areas where different cultures and legal systems exist. Within Israel itself, destroyed Arab villages appear as the Israeli villages or kibbutzim that have replaced them. So, who is delegitimizing whom? What psychological ends are being served?

Israelis, says Reich, feel that their concessions will never be seen as enough. But the most meaningful concessions Israelis could make, such as stopping construction in the West Bank and accepting the Saudi pan-Arab proposal for peace, have been rejected. To think that one side has made generous concessions and the other side has made none is another way to reduce dissonance. Perhaps if both sides rid themselves of the processes that blind them, they could find a way to peace.

Charles Greenbaum

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BOTH YORAM PERI ["ISRAEL AT 62," Summer '10] and Dan Senor and Saul Singer ["What Next for the Start-Up Nation?," Summer '10] refer to the brisk growth of Israel's economy and the country's emergence as an innovation leader. There is no denying this, but the picture is incomplete. As documented in a recent report by Jerusalem's Taub Center for Social Policy Research, Israel also has poverty and inequality rates that are among the highest in the Western world. While better-educated citizens are launching start-ups, 65 percent of men in the ultra-Orthodox community don't participate in the labor force. Rates of non-participation are also extremely high among Arab Israelis, thanks largely to discrimination and inequality in the education system. The problems are "severe and existential," in the view of David Ben-David, author of the report, not least since the ultra-Orthodox and Arab communities are among the fastest-growing in the country.

The growing ranks of religious Jews, noted by Peri, have also transformed the institution that would be responsible for implementing a large-scale withdrawal from the West Bank should a settlement with the Palestinians ever be reached—namely, the Israeli military. An estimated 50 percent of soldiers in officer training courses today are religious. Members of the national-religious camp increasingly dominate the Israel Defense Forces' combat units and upper ranks, raising the question of whether, even if political backing

for an evacuation of the West Bank could somehow emerge in the near future, the army would be able to carry out the job.

Eyal Press

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IN YOUR EXCELLENT "INSIDE Israel" cluster, Walter Reich relates how fed up we Israelis are with the inability of the Middle East to come to terms with us. Then Yoram Peri explains the ways in which Israelis, and especially our political system, are to blame for the diplomatic standstill. Both authors allude to, but fail to focus on, what is perhaps the most dramatic reality that Israel confronts in the 21st century, namely the shifting security paradigm.

Broadly speaking, Israel's active enemies are no longer its Arab-state neighbors. Rather, they are nonstate actors, mostly militant Islamists— Hamas, Hezbollah, even (in areas of international legal and public relations confrontations) the Palestine Liberation Organization—as well as a non-Arab state, Islamist Iran. The Arab states have basically come to terms with Israel's existence, but they are weak and in disarray. Islamist actors, on the other hand, are determined as ever to call Israel's existence into question.

Neither Israel nor the West has figured out how to defeat or contain Islamist actors militarily or politically. Yet two developments in the Arab world that could conceivably offer some relief are ignored by both Reich and Peri. One is Syrian president Bashar Assad's consistent offers to renew peace talks with Israel. This possibility has been embraced by Israel's security establishment

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[Continued from page 6] because it presents a possible diplomatic strategy for blunting Iran's penetration into the Levant. Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has unfortunately rejected Assad's overtures.

A second development is Palestinian prime minister Salam Fayyad's relatively successful unilateral state-building project in the West Bank. His efforts are designed to culminate in a diplomatic endgame a year from now, when international recognition of a Palestinian state could provide a first step toward resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—precisely because that conflict would no longer pit Israel against a non-state liberation movement. The Obama administration could make a big contribution by successfully mediating these developments.

Yossi Alpher

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THE DECISION TO PUBLISH Galina Vromen's and Walter Reich's articles on Israel side by side was a smart one, since it exposes readers to two distinctive versions of contemporary Zionism. In the Reich piece, the reader sees the Zionist discourse that focuses on blaming the other, ignoring Israel's faults, and feeling victimized, while the Vromen piece ["Israel Through Other Eyes," Summer '10] shows a Zionism that is aware of the price paid by the Palestinians, and tries to build bridges to the Arab world without giving up its Zionist beliefs.

A person who had read only Reich's article might believe that Palestinians live safely while Israel is under constant attack (though the number of Palestinians killed since 2000 is six times the number of Israelis killed); that Israel

has done its best to achieve peace with the Palestinians (though it has built hundreds of settlements in the West Bank); and that Israel recognizes Palestinian history (though mentioning the *Nakba*—the Palestinian catastrophe of 1948—is not permitted in Israeli schools). If the reader knew nothing about contemporary history, he or she might be led by Reich's article to believe that the United States is a veteran supporter of the Palestinians and grants them billions of dollars every year while ignoring Israeli needs.

Reich believes that the Obama administration should be sensitive to Israeli needs and fears. I agree, but suggest that the U.S. government approach the situation as Vromen does: by looking at the world from more than one perspective.

Hillel Cohen

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TWO VIEWS ON TURKEY'S FUTURE

MICHAEL THUMANN PRESENTS a lucid account of the extraordinary changes that are transforming Turkey ["Turkey's Role Reversals," Summer '10]. At a moment when some in Washington are pressing the panic button and demanding to know who lost Turkey, this article points out that Turkey is in no way "lost" to the cause of freedom.

The presence of religion in the lives of Turks is now more visible than it used to be, and secularists no longer monopolize public discourse. But, as Thumann writes, the ruling Justice and

Development Party (AKP) is not an Islamist group, but a pragmatic coalition whose most often proclaimed goal is to make Turkey one of the world's 10 biggest economies. (It now ranks 16th.) Nor is Turkish society becoming more religious. What has happened is that fuller democracy has allowed Turks to express the religious beliefs that past generations held but were discouraged from expressing.

Finally, Turkey's new activism in regional and global affairs does not undermine Western interests. The Turkish model is the one the United States should promote in the Middle East. Anything that increases Turkey's influence and helps it promote its successful capitalist democracy—whether by electing a government of pious believers or differing with the United States on policy toward Iran and Israel—is good for the West.

The United States is in desperate need of a new approach to the Middle East. We need strong partners there, countries whose advice we would heed. Turkey is the best choice.

Stephen Kinzer

Author, *Reset: Iran, Turkey, and America's Future (2010)*
Truro, Mass.

MICHAEL THUMANN HIGHLIGHTS some very important trends in Turkish society and politics. I would like to expand on some of the issues he addresses from the perspective of the secular middle class.

At a personal level, secular Turks are disturbed by the monopoly that conservatives have established over Islam. Many secular Turks grew up in religious families and practice Islam without enacting their faith in the public sphere. Conservatives who present

themselves as true Muslims and use their faith for political purposes are disconcerting to secular Turks.

The secular middle class is also uncomfortable with the fact that “the devout bourgeoisie” has expanded substantially during the AKP’s tenure. The municipalities controlled by the AKP have favored the conservative middle class with construction bids and other patronage, as a series of corruption accusations in recent years has revealed.

Finally, the secular middle class is suspicious of the democratic credentials of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has exhibited authoritarian tendencies. Skeptics also view the ongoing Ergenekon trials as a violation of legal norms and individual rights as well as an attempt by Erdogan to suppress the opposition. For many secular-minded Turks, Erdogan is an aspiring sultan rather than a democratic leader.

The tension between the secular and devout middle classes will persist in Turkey as long as power remains concentrated in the center and Erdogan resists improving the system of checks and balances. In such an environment, the political initiatives taken by the AKP government, including the September referendum on constitutional reforms, will only generate polarization, not pluralization, in Turkish society. And in a polarized society, the first casualty is always democracy.

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IMMIGRATION TODAY

KATHERINE BENTON-COHEN’S article [“The Rude Birth of Immigration Reform,” Summer ’10] shows that



If Woodrow Wilson
were alive today, he'd be
blogging for the *WQ*.

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the current wave of anti-Latino immigrant bashing is but the latest variation on a very old American theme.

The current wave is different from the one she describes in two ways: the undocumented status of so many immigrants and the degree of repressive force directed against them. At present, some 11 million immigrants are unauthorized, constituting one-third of all foreigners in the country. But among Mexicans the proportion is more than half, and among Central Americans it is even larger. Never before has the United States housed such a large population of people outside the law.

The presence of so many “illegals” contributes to the stereotyping of Latinos as criminals and serves to justify ever more repressive policies, though immigrants have

lower crime rates than U.S. natives. Since 1990, the number of deportations has increased 13-fold to reach a record of nearly 390,000 per year. Meanwhile, the immigrant detention system has ballooned by a multiple of five in order to process 360,000 people per year. At the same time, the size of the Border Patrol has quintupled and its budget has increased more than 20 times, even though net undocumented migration fell to zero in 2008 and since then has been negative. Hardly any undocumented immigrants are coming in and some are trickling out, yet ever more resources continue to be directed to internal and border enforcement.

I agree with Benton-Cohen that what we need is to see today’s immigrants not as an invasion of barbar-

ians, but as Americans in the making. The place to start is with a legalization program for people who have peaceably lived and worked in the United States, and their children who have grown up here. The longer we put off this regularization, the worse it will be for all of us.

Douglas S. Massey

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LONELINESS UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

HAVING WRITTEN A BOOK ON long-term loneliness, I took great interest in Daniel Akst's "America: Land of Loners?" [Summer '10]. I agree with Akst that friendship is in a perilous state in America today, but I don't agree, as he suggests, that we "overlook" friendship or take it "far too lightly."

I hear quite often from people for whom friendship is extremely important. There's a thesis out there—which Akst repeats—that friendship peaked in the 18th and 19th centuries, and that we've been dismissive of it ever since. But to talk to lonely people is to understand the opposite. Rather than get by on what Akst calls "mere familiarity," isolated people long for friendship more than ever.

People do not need to be reminded of how crucial friendship is, as Akst suggests. They know it's crucial. They know that friends may extend life spans and make the time between birth and death infinitely richer. People who lack friends talk about being denied something critical in life. Cultural factors are what make worth-

while friendships harder to form and maintain today. This is quite different from thinking that we're all making do with "friendship-lite."

Emily White

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DANIEL AKST PAINTS A GRIM portrait of Americans' interpersonal relationships. I do not doubt that we are plagued by loneliness, but I wonder how different or unique things today really are. Historians tell us that friendship in the modern sense is a recent development, a legacy of the capitalism that undermined the strict relational orderings of earlier times. But even in a relatively recent period, the 1950s, people (especially women) were encouraged to remain close to their families at the expense of outside friendships. Although families were not as threatened as they are by the geographical mobility that is the norm today, friendships were less valued than would become standard during the upheavals of the 1960s.

It seems more likely that our contemporary expectations are colored by the golden age of friendship, in the ancient Greece of Aristotle. Then, it was not families—at least traditional families—that were valued as the source of meaningful relationships. Peers and the families formed from communities of peers were what offered the promise of intimacy and solidarity.

If this is right, then the urgent question facing us today is less one of how lonely we are than of how we are lonely. How are today's relationships different from those of the 1960s, the '50s, or even the '80s? What forces

are pulling us from one another, what are drawing us together, and how are they doing this? What phenomena, such as Facebook, are doing both at the same time? We should look at our relationships and our loneliness both historically and contextually to see ourselves aright and to address the particular loneliness that afflicts us now.

Todd May

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ART, SCHMART!

YOUR ITEM ON THE SANTA MONICA annual art sale by artists identified only after purchase ["But Is It Art?," Findings, Summer '10] reports the glee with which Will Kopelman purchased Ed Ruscha's sketch *Cup of Coffee*. The article concludes, "It was, after all, the scrawled signature [on the back of the drawing] that made *Cup of Coffee* . . . certifiable art." I would hope so. From the reproduction of the sketch that ran in the *WQ*, the Ruscha is something that could have been drawn by any talented high school art student. In fact, if 20 such students were asked to do such a drawing, how sure would Kopelman be that he'd select the Ruscha? If the bidders were buying a signature, why not have Ruscha sign the back of every one of the museum's selections and make all the winners richer?

Just putting your name on something doesn't make it "art," any more than having won a Pulitzer makes everything you write a masterpiece. No matter what the critics say!

Fred E. Hahn

Golden Valley, Minn.