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WHAT DOES
IT MEAN

TO BE

PRO
ISRAEL

IN

2025?

A MOMENT BIG QUESTION

What does it mean to be pro-Israel? After October 7, this question is especially fraught, often accompanied by emotions ranging from anger to fear to indignation. Yet the question may be more important than ever, with Israel and Hamas embroiled in an existential clash that has transformed how many people around the world—including Jews—view the Jewish state.

This is not the first time *Moment* has asked this question. In 2012, we posed it to 24 prominent people from across the Jewish world and political spectrum who gave very different answers. Looking back, that seems like a relatively peaceful time, five years after Hamas began to govern Gaza and some ten months before the next war would break out between Israel and the terrorist group. With so much transpiring since then, we felt compelled to revisit this topic.

We spoke with the same people who participated in our 2012 Big Question project, or at least, as many as we could. A few, sadly, are no longer with us, so we turned to individuals close to them. Others felt they couldn't respond. One explained that a new job precluded him from offering his opinion this time around; another was "too heartbroken by the horrifying events of October 7 and all that has followed."

Our 2025 redux adds a layer: "What does it mean to be pro-Israel, *and what, if anything, has changed for you?*" We were struck by the very different lessons our respondents have taken from the grim events of the past few years. At times, they speak as if they have been living in many separate realities. Despite the chasms, we hold out hope that bringing these disparate perspectives together may help spark new ideas and build bridges in our divided world. —*Moment* editors

DAVID K. SHIPLER

To ask what it means to be "pro-Israel" today is to ask: Which Israel? The juggernaut in Gaza? The vigilante in the West Bank? The humane democracy? The refuge for Jews?

Those multiple Israels coexist as overlays on a complicated map—of power and vulnerability, of bigotry and decency, of trauma and resolve. You can pick and choose among them, or you can accept them all as parts of a whole, a set of contradictions that constitute a very real country that is not just an idea, not a myth, not a wish, but a hard place to live and often a hard place to love.

Ugly labels have been attached to Israel's extreme military onslaught following the atrocities committed by Hamas on October 7, 2023: War crimes. Ethnic cleansing. Genocide. The debate over these terms blurs an important line—one that differentiates Israeli policy from its society, military action from civic culture, and the Jewish state from the Jewish people. Some critics and protesters blur that line by absurdly insinuating global Jewish culpability for Israel's anti-Palestinian assaults. Some pro-Israel advocates blur that line by calling any denunciation of Israel antisemitic. There is plenty of antisemitism, to be sure, but

it cannot be fought effectively without discernment and focus.

To state the obvious, then, it is possible to condemn Israel without being antisemitic, and it's reasonable to be pro-Israel without being pro-government. This is demonstrably so during the right-wing Netanyahu era, just as being pro-American does not mean being pro-government in this autocratic Trump era. There is more to a country than its government, and you can't see it by blinding yourself to a nation's varied facets.

My five years living in Jerusalem as bureau chief for *The New York Times* (1979-1984) prevent me from putting Israel into a neat box. I wrote extensively about its flaws as I made deep and lasting friendships with compassionate people, both Jews and Palestinians, who were driven by their yearning for human rights and neighborly understanding.

One of my Israeli friends, Clinton Bailey, died recently after a long, inspirational career recording and publishing Negev and Sinai Bedouins' oral poetry and defending them against displacement by Israeli authorities. He was one of Israel's many anomalies: a Jewish admirer of and advocate for Arab culture. Another Israeli Jewish friend, Yehuda Litani, also deceased, was a clear-eyed journalist and short-story writer who reported from the West Bank, produced an Arab-language TV news show and

held firm convictions of distress at the plight of Palestinians and the failings of his country.

I cannot think about Israel without thinking about them—and about other Israelis I know who do not compromise their fierce devotion to country but also hold dear the noble enterprise of a just, inclusive democracy. When I answered this question in 2012, I noted that, according to a Hebrew University poll at the time, 70 percent of Israeli Jews favored a Palestinian state despite rocket attacks from Gaza. As of July 2024, that support had plummeted to 21 percent in a joint Israeli-Palestinian poll, the lowest since the early 1990s. Twice as many, 42 percent, voiced support for

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“annexation of the West Bank without equal rights for Palestinians.”

Following the traumatic October 7 attacks, Israel lost its moral high ground in the rubble of Gaza. But the test of any society is its capacity for self-correction. Being pro-Israel means believing in that capacity.

David K. Shipler is the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land. His latest book is The Interpreter, a novel set at the end of the Vietnam War.

JUDEA PEARL

In 2012, I concluded my answer to this question: “Those who do not see Israel as the central piece of Jewish life are not pro-Israel, and I doubt they are pro-Jewish.” Today, in 2025, being pro-Israel requires a deeper appreciation of Israel’s centrality in Jewish life, along with a fresh understanding of the underlying forces that have led to the tsunamic upsurge in antisemitism and anti-Israelism following October 7.

First, Israel’s centrality encompasses not only its historical, cultural and spiritual significance to Jewish identity but also its embodiment of Jewish “normalcy.” The existence of Israel is a necessary ingredient for ensuring that Jews everywhere are treated as equals—not as a unique, tolerated, respected or admired minority but as equals. No Jew can be truly equal in the family of man before Israel stands equal in the family of nations.

Second, in examining the surge of antisemitism and anti-Israelism, we must acknowledge our own responsibility for this escalation. For 76 years, we have treated anti-Zionism as secondary to antisemitism—dangerous and distasteful, yes, but only when it threatened to spill over and trigger the real menace: antisemitism. To be pro-Israel in 2025 is to understand that anti-Zionism per se, or Zionophobia as I prefer to label it, threatens every Jew, even when it is devoid of traditional

antisemitic tropes and laden with Judeophilic assurances. We now recognize that Zionophobia, not antisemitism, is the virus fueling hostilities on our college campuses. Our obsessive fixation on antisemitism has allowed Zionophobes, left and right, to dig Hamas-inspired intellectual tunnels under our campuses and institutions—tunnels that have had a lethal effect after October 7.

Finally, being pro-Israel entails addressing Israel’s faults candidly yet empathetically, understanding that many of these shortcomings—including excesses, blunders, divisions and alleged crimes—are products of an entrenched, relentless and absolute Arab rejectionism of Jewish sovereignty in any form. I often call this rejectionism the “elephant in the room” because the Western world refuses to see—let alone acknowledge—its giant presence, even though it remains the paramount obstacle to peace, dwarfing all others. Being pro-Israel thus means pursuing lasting peace bravely yet not blindly. It means proclaiming loudly and unceasingly the Zionist vision of peace: “Two states for two peoples, equally legitimate and equally indigenous,” as I have formulated it, and insisting, unyieldingly, that peace begin with both sides accepting the latter part of the vision—“equally indigenous.”

Judea Pearl is professor emeritus of computer science and statistics and director of the Cognitive Systems Laboratory at UCLA. His latest book, Coexistence and Other Fighting Words, will be published in July.

CECILIE SURASKY

A decade ago, I argued that the mainstream American Jewish insistence that being pro-Israel—and a Jew in good standing—required either ignoring or actively supporting Israel’s cruel and illegal violations of Palestinian human rights was dangerous. I said that this was a form of “loving Israel to death,” and I still stand by my statement. What is dif-

ferent is that after so much bloodshed, the number of American Jews who share this view has grown exponentially.

As anyone who interacts with young Jews knows, a large portion of our youngest generation understands that there is no Jewish future built on the subjugation of others. We should be proud of them, not punish them, for learning the many ethical lessons we taught them. For many, like me, the only way to be pro-Israel is to hold that every person who calls this land home—from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea—deserves a life of safety, dignity, opportunity and freedom.

In 1923, Ze’ev Jabotinsky correctly proposed that the indigenous Palestinian population, like anyone, would resist having an exclusionary Jewish ethnostate imposed on them. His solution—overwhelming them with an “Iron Wall” of military might to force negotiations for eventual peace—wrongly assumed that freedom could be won at the expense of another.

Instead of leading to coexistence, some eight decades of Jabotinsky’s model has instead yielded an endless cycle of repression and reaction that continues to hurt, kill and dehumanize virtually everyone—both the Palestinians who have borne the overwhelming brunt of this “wall,” made possible in large part by the U.S. military, and everyday Israelis forced to live as dominators and occupiers. It has also emptied out the meaning of Judaism for countless Jews.

Far from being a zero-sum game, it should be apparent to all that in this state of forever war there are no winners. No cumulative death counts can ever capture the trauma-filled equivalent of a nuclear bomb that is detonated each time one person, one home, one family or one community is lost.

And now, Jews around the world must do the unthinkable: explain to our bewildered and utterly heartbroken children why the state they were told was meant to be a safe haven for Jews is not only demonstrably unsafe but has committed what so many prominent experts, including Israeli scholars Omer Bartov and Raz Segal, have called genocide against Palestinians.

If we want a future, we must reimagine what it means to love Israel, honoring every person's right to belong on this land. We must reject perpetual war and remember that our fates are intertwined, that the "other" is a deliberately manufactured illusion and that our survival depends on embracing one another as equals—if not kin. If we did so, the world would rejoice and lift us all on its shoulders.

Cecilie Surasky is the director of communications and narrative at the Othering & Belonging Institute and the former deputy director of Jewish Voices for Peace.

MARTIN PERETZ

I'm not sure that it's possible for me to become *more* pro-Israel than I was in 2012, when this question was first posed to me. After all, I am 85 and have loved Israel for 76 of those years.

For many American Jews, especially those more lax in their Zionism, October 7 was a reminder of the very real dangers

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that Israelis face every day from those who would have the world entirely rid of Jews. And then, to see the response in many academic, left-wing and Arab circles (on October 8, before any counterattack had been mounted) further reinforced the point that a Jewish state is necessary.

I said in my previous response that a "qualification for being pro-Israel is to not get hysterical about every internal happening in Israel." That may hold true. But I do not think it's hysterical to say that Bibi has steered Israel into dangerous waters and should be held to account for his dereliction. This, by the way, is the wish of most Israelis as reflected in opinion polls.

We can fault him for many things: bungling the return of the hostages, allying himself with the worst elements in Israeli politics, allowing the settlers to run wild in the West Bank. But worst of all might be that, under his watch, the attack happened at all—this in itself is disqualifying. It's not anti-Israel to acknowledge these failures. In fact, I would say it's the responsibility of anyone who loves Israel.

One can say this and still remain clear-eyed about the identities of the architects of this destruction: Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran. The blood that has been shed in the last year and a half—Palestinian and Israeli—is on their hands.

Martin Peretz is the former publisher and editor-in-chief of The New Republic. His memoir, The Controversialist, was published in 2023.

PETER BEINART

In 2012 I said that being pro-Israel means helping Israel live out the words of its declaration of independence, which promises a Jewish state that will provide complete social and political equality, irrespective of race, religion and sex.

I would now make a distinction between being pro-Israel and being pro-Israeli; I consider myself the latter in the sense that the safety and flourishing of

Israelis is extremely important to me, but I am opposed to the Israeli state as it exists today. There's a fundamental problem in that it's built on legal supremacy of one group over another. Ultimately, this is dangerous for Israelis.

I've noticed that in American Jewish discourse, the term "Israeli" is used synonymously with Jewish Israeli, but that's not how I mean it. I'm using it to describe all of the people who have citizenship rights in the country and all the people who live under the control of the state, even though many of them cannot become citizens. I think all the people who live in this territory would be better served by the principle of equality under the law rather than one that gives legal privilege to one ethno-national group. And because Israel is the name of the state but also the name of the land and of the Jewish people, it can't represent those who live there who are not Jews. An equal, binational state might be called Israel-Palestine or Palestine-Israel.

Certainly a state can cease to exist because the people within it create a different political system. To take one obvious example, when apartheid ended in South Africa, the entire structure of the political system changed. A new constitution was written. The country's name happened to stay the same, but it was a very legitimate form of reconstituting. In the case of the People's Republic of China, I would love to see the day when it ceases to exist as a repressive state and becomes one that provides greater human rights to its people.

The appeal in the declaration of independence to the Jewish people throughout the diaspora to rally around the Jews of Eretz Israel "in the great struggle for the realization of the age-old dream, the redemption of Israel" refers to the idea that the state is part of a messianic process. In a weird way, that last phrase is asking Jews around the world to gather in the State of Israel in an effort to awaken God to send *Mashiach* (the Messiah), to transform the world. Which is probably not the way that most American Jews think about Israel. It's a religious Zionist idea that also raises a very fundamental question: whether Zionism itself

requires going to live in Israel. Very early Zionists were clear in their argument that it basically didn't make any sense to call yourself a Zionist if you weren't actually going to live in Zion.

Regardless, if you think of Jews as a people who have obligations to God and obligations to one another—Jewish solidarity—Jews should have a sense of concern about the actions of the state that are done in the name of the Jewish people, wherever Jews live.

I've grappled pretty publicly with the evolution of my own views, which have changed in large measure because of a deepening role in conversation with Palestinians and my efforts to incorporate the Palestinian experience into my understanding of what I see as good for my people, for the Jewish people. I sometimes see other folks in the Jewish community struggling with the idea that support for the Jewish state is sacrosanct, and yet they feel deeply alienated by the particular Israeli government or by particular Israeli policies. To me those things are, in a deep sense, inseparable.

A lot of my evolution had already occurred in 2012, but in some ways, I've traveled ideologically since then. In 2012, I would have supported the idea of a Jewish state living alongside a Palestinian state. I came to the conclusion around 2020 that partition wasn't possible and that it wasn't the most just outcome either, and that's when I began arguing for an equal, binational state. Who knows what I'll believe if you do this again in another 13 years.

Peter Beinart is a journalist, commentator and former editor of The New Republic. His most recent book is Being Jewish After the Destruction of Gaza: A Reckoning.

JENNIFER
LASZLO
MIZRAHI

A decade ago, I said we must be both educated on and engaged with Israel—its

opportunities, challenges and neighbors. That has never been truer. Part of being pro-Israel today means navigating difficult conversations. The discourse has grown more polarized, and anti-Zionism—often a thinly veiled form of antisemitism—has made public support for Israel more challenging. The global landscape is shifting, requiring greater vigilance in defending Israel's legitimacy and the safety of Jews worldwide.

While I no longer work at an Israel-focused organization, I still wake up in the middle of each night to check the news. Have any of the hostages been found or released? Are Israelis under attack? Thanks to WhatsApp, I stay in close touch with friends, family and former colleagues there. I wear a yellow ribbon and a #BringThemHome dog-tag necklace in public—a constant reminder of those still held captive.

I'm not in Israel, but Israel is always inside me.

But loving Israel doesn't mean agreeing with everything its leaders or people do. Both Israel and the U.S. share the values of democracy, freedom of speech and minority rights—yet both are struggling to uphold them. To be pro-Israel today is to love Israel enough to see it clearly—not as perfect, but as family. It means fighting for the hostages, supporting those suffering from war-induced trauma and advocating for climate solutions that benefit Israelis and the world. It means rejecting efforts to demonize Israel while also championing efforts to make it better.

The country's challenges are relentless, but so is its potential. Loving Israel can't just mean wringing our hands. It must mean rolling up our sleeves—supporting its people, innovations and future.

In 2012, I said that I dislike the term "pro-Israel" because it often implies being "anti" something else. That hasn't changed. I oppose terrorism, war and hate—but I am not anti-Palestinian. While peace feels distant, I still believe in its possibility.

The horrors of October 7, 2023, underscored the depth of hatred fueling

violence against Jews and Israel. Every person being held hostage keeps us awake at night. Being pro-Israel today means demanding their release while also grieving for innocent Palestinian victims who suffered greatly from what Hamas started. It's also grappling with the painful compromises required to bring the hostages home.

But supporting Israel must be about more than reacting to crises—it must also be about building a better future. Some of my past work focused on empowering people with disabilities, and in Israel, the psychological toll of war is staggering. PTSD and trauma affect not just soldiers but civilians and children. Supporting organizations that help Israelis with mental health and disabilities is an essential act of love and commitment.

Today, as a full-time climate advocate, I see another urgent connection: Israel is both highly vulnerable to climate change and a leader in climate solutions. With more than 800 startups tackling climate challenges, Israel's ingenuity is helping the world develop alternative energy, revolutionize agriculture and build resilience. Supporting Israel means nurturing these innovations and expanding global collaborations.

Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi is cofounder of the Mizrahi Family Charitable Fund and former head of The Israel Project. She writes a blog for The Times of Israel on the intersection of Jews, Israel and climate solutions.

MORTON
KLEIN

Thirteen years ago, I said that the Palestinian Arabs' real goal was to destroy Israel (rather than to establish a peaceful Palestinian state in Gaza and/or Judea/Samaria and/or Jerusalem). This was unfortunately confirmed by events of the past 13 years, most dramatically by the horrors of October 7: the gleeful participation of Hamas terrorists cheered on by Gazan sympathizers; vows to repeat

October 7 until there is no more Israel; the deadly “knife intifada” wave of terror incited by Palestinian Authority (PA) terrorist dictator Mahmoud Abbas from 2015 through today; the PA’s \$400 million a year “pay to slay” policy rewarding Jew-killers; and more. Their real goal is to murder every Jew and destroy the Jewish state. Both the PA’s and Hamas’s charters call for that.

My calls then were for Jewish leaders to educate people much more and to inform people of Israel’s rights. The real threats Israel faces are as important as ever, given the onslaught of lies about Israel.

Today, I would expand my call for rabbis and other Jewish organizational leaders and Israeli leaders to promote the pro-Israel cause by fighting anti-Israel propaganda lies: the lie that Israel is an “occupier” of her own lawful, G-d given land; the lie that Jerusalem is holy to Muslims (it is a lie that Mohammed visited Jerusalem, almost no Arab leader visited Jerusalem when Arabs controlled it, and Jerusalem is never mentioned in the Quran); the lie that Israel commits “genocide” (in fact, Israel goes to extraordinary lengths to avoid civilian casualties); the lie that Israel is an “apartheid” state (in fact, Israeli Arabs have equal rights in Israel); and the lie that Abbas and the Palestinian Authority are “moderate” (in fact, they are as bad as Hamas; the PA’s ruling party Fatah bragged in a video that its members participated in the October 7 attack, adding “We killed them...and stepped on their heads”).

I would likewise expand my call for rabbis and Jewish and Israeli leaders to support the United States in withholding any aid to the Palestinians while the PA continues to violate the Oslo Accords. The PA still refuses to arrest terrorists and collect arms; glorifies terrorists; names schools, streets and sports teams after terrorists; pays terrorists lifetime pensions, rewarding them for murdering Jews; and engages in anti-Israel lawfare at the UN, the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice.

Pro-Israel Jewish leaders should also support the virtually unanimous resolution of the Knesset and the Israeli people opposing a Palestinian state; support the Israeli government and a clear majority of Israelis who support Arabs’ emigration from Gaza; support the right of Jews to live in the Jewish homelands of Judea and Samaria; and support Israel in not giving away any more land, because any land given away becomes an Arab terrorist enclave.

I would also expand upon the list of actions that should accompany being pro-Israel. Being pro-Israel also means writing letters and articles promoting pro-Israel Jewish groups and positions; supporting and sending one’s children to Jewish day schools (day school graduates are much more supportive of Israel and often become informed pro-Israel activists); buying Israel Bonds; making Israel a priority when deciding whom to vote for; sending one’s children on Israel trips sponsored by ZOA, Birthright or other pro-Israel groups; urging one’s college-aged students to do a pre-college year learning in Israel or a mid-college year at a university in Israel; and learning Jewish history.

My statement in 2012 that exchanging 1,000 terrorists for Gilad Shalit was a terrible mistake was also sadly confirmed by the fact that released Hamas terrorist Yahya Sinwar and 40 other released terrorists led the horrific October 7 pogrom. I am deeply concerned that Israel is making the same terrible mistake again today by releasing thousands of Arab terrorists with Jewish blood on their hands.

I would change one aspect of what I previously said: At this point, I believe that those who still want a Palestinian Arab state in Gaza and/or Judea/Samaria and/or Jerusalem are either ill-informed, delusional (in that they fail to understand or appreciate the real threat) or anti-Israel. While I understand that someone who wants a Palestinian state may be well-intentioned or believe that he is pro-Israel, in fact promoting a Palestinian Arab state is not a pro-Israel position. The Israeli people understand

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that such a state would be an existential threat to Israel and every Jew. Indeed, in July 2024, the Knesset voted overwhelmingly to reject a Palestinian Arab state, with only the nine Arab Knesset members opposed.

Morton Klein is the president of the Zionist Organization of America, having served in that position since 1993.

DANIEL STERADSKI

Seems like I was on the money in 2012 in terms of what the mainstream definition of pro-Israel is in the United States, which I said was “to deny the existence of Palestinians as a people and their right to statehood, freedom and equality, to portray Arabs as blood-thirsty terrorists who seek no more than to murder Jews, and to denounce as an antisemite anyone who suggests any legitimacy to the Palestinian narrative or right to statehood.” Only it has gotten dramatically worse, now including open (rather than oblique) support for criminal lawlessness, vio-

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A LOVER OF ISRAEL WHEN THE ISRAEL YOU LOVE NO LONGER EXISTS AND, IN TRUTH, NEVER REALLY DID?

lent state repression and genocide. Our communal leaders now go so far as to “hechsher” far-right antisemites while calling for young Jewish dissenters to be federally investigated.

What does it mean to be a lover of Israel when the Israel you love no longer exists and, in truth, never really did? How does one love a state that will happily feed you to the wolves if it means never having to take responsibility for its actions toward Palestinians and others harmed by the policies it vilifies you for having opposed? A nation where our only common bond is blood and soil, rather than shared social, cultural and spiritual values, cannot rightly be called a Jewish nation.

Thus the best way to be pro-Israel—that is, for the endurance of the Jewish people and our faith, culture and values, not for the state—is to oppose this Israeli government and its reflexive supporters with every fiber of our being until they and Israel reflect the values that inspire rather than mortify liberal and progressive diaspora Jewry. We must stand up and firmly tell them, “No. Not in our names.”

Daniel Sieradski is a writer, activist, designer and strategist. He was the founder of the blog Jewschool.com.

RONEN SHOVAL

In 2012, I talked about a three-phase attempt by those who were bent on destroying Israel: first through war, then through terrorism, then, when those failed, by waging a culture war to cast Israel as an apartheid, guilty-of-war-crimes state. Today those battlefields merge, and at the same time Iran is trying to get a nuclear weapon, and Hamas and Hezbollah are trying to murder innocent kids and mothers and fathers and families. Basically, the last phase, the delegitimation process, is happening with billions of dollars coming from Qatar and other places into groups that describe themselves as NGOs and are trying to eliminate our right to exist.

I think many Jews in America were in denial about the last phase. Then they woke up after October 7 and saw what was happening inside universities and in society, and they understood what I was talking about in 2012.

The main question here in Israel is, who are we? Anti-Israel people around the world say that Judaism is a religion. We are not a religion. We are a nation, a state. We are a people: the Jewish people. This distinction is very important, and it raises a big question of identity for Jews in America. Because if we are a people who have a right to our homeland, then, the Jews in America ask themselves, what are we doing in the diaspora?

What is it to be pro-Israel if you are not Israeli? It's about being able to identify good from evil, right from wrong, and to make the moral decision to understand your part in the history. We have a huge challenge in our generation because there are many temptations toward a non-moral world, and Israel is standing out as something that you have to be courageous to support. Christians, Muslims and Jews who identify themselves as pro-Israel are people who have moral courage. This has been the test of human beings since the beginning of time: Are we going to support the right cause or go with the stream toward what seems to be popular?

Can one criticize the Israeli government and still be pro-Israel? It depends, because there are two types of criticism. One type is when you criticize someone in order to improve them and make them better. A different type of criticism is in order to break someone. We Israelis take responsibility for shaping our future by voting, fulfilling our democratic right. To those outside Israel who are criticizing our government, I say, if you want to take responsibility for what's happening right now, you're more than welcome to make aliyah and participate in the long history of the Jewish people here, to help us by voting and being part of the society.

I have been in the army since October 7, something like 150 days. I left my family, I left my home, I left my friends, and I went to the battlefield, okay? So, if somebody wants to be serious with criticisms, make aliyah and you can criticize your state from inside. I do it all the time, in public appearances, on X, in whatever I'm writing. Sometimes I agree, sometimes I disagree. That's our project.

If anything has changed in my thinking since 2012, it's that I'm less optimistic. I believe that Israel will only survive long-term if the West survives—and I'm not optimistic regarding the West. And so being pro-Israel right now is to be pro-Western civilization, pro-Judeo-Christian values. It's looking to our roots and understanding that the tree cannot grow to the sky without them and that if the roots crumble, the tree falls.

Ronen Shoval is an Israeli professor of political philosophy and author. He is head of the Argaman Institute and was dean of the Tikvah Fund.

FANIA OZ- SALZBERGER

“A very common sentimentalist mistake...is to assume that first we have to cure hatred and become friends and then we can make peace,” Amos Oz (1939-2018) said in 2012. “Throughout history it has worked the other way around.

First peace is made between enemies with clenched teeth and even with bad intentions. Then eventually, sometimes, an emotional healing occurs.”

“This may take generations,” my father concluded. Indeed. Perhaps even longer than he thought.

Amos Oz was a humanist, a Zionist and a peace seeker. Unlike for many of his left-wing peers, his vision of peace was not starry-eyed. He peppered it with stark realism, unapologetic pride in Israeli and Hebrew culture and some good old kibbutznik pragmatism.

Based on this, he believed that the model of two neighboring states, Israel and Palestine, is the only solution that will not shed rivers of blood. Neighboring states, mind you, but not immediately friendly or trusting. A decent, well-negotiated divorce.

At a time when left-wing dreams of peace imploded and right-wing visions waxed imperial and messianic, Oz kept a solid balance of realism and hope. He was never enamored of the Palestinian leadership. He despised Yasser Arafat (who led, he said, one of the bloodiest national emancipation movements in modern history). In the wake of the Oslo Accords, when the Palestinian Authority emerged as a viable peace partner, Oz had no illusions about a sudden emotional conciliation and flaming affection between Israelis and Palestinians. “Make Peace Not Love,” he insisted.

By contrast, Oz shrewdly observed that Likud, under Benjamin Netanyahu, had a clear pro-Hamas strategy. By nurturing the Islamist fanatics, Likud hoped for them to take over (as they eventually did in Gaza), thus killing off the Oslo Accords and any other prospective peace plan. In parallel, Netanyahu spent decades cleansing Likud itself of every remaining moderate. The Hamas-Likud mutual interest was to perpetuate war until one side won and the other side vanished. Oz’s prophecy has proved eerily accurate.

I cannot know for sure what his humane and sensitive mind would have made of October 7 and the Gaza War. His absence at this horrible time is a

public loss and a private blessing.

But one thing is clear: Oz embraced the two-state solution precisely in order to prevent October 7 and similar catastrophes. He foresaw them. (“I don’t envy my children and grandchildren,” he often said, “if we don’t reach a tenable compromise with the Palestinians very soon.”) He also foresaw, and accurately diagnosed, Israel’s other calamity, the rise of a racist and messianist nationalism bent on making the Arabs disappear, led by a cynic bent on destroying democratic checks and balances to escape his own conviction in court.

Today, more than ever, the global community stretches all the way from people who say “Right or Wrong, it’s Israel we have to stick behind” to those who say, “Israel was born in sin and shouldn’t be there.” Oz tried to address the fanatics and de-fanaticize them. My own wish is humbler: It’s the moderates I try to engage.

Can Israel and Palestine “divorce,” aided by tough love from the international community, or under the colossal foot of the unpredictable Donald Trump? After October 7, I am far more aware of the tectonic cultural changes and the grimly realistic security arrangements requisite for such a scenario. I find myself negotiating tougher terms for my late father’s vision: a long-term demilitarization of the future Palestine. Amending and monitoring hate-ridden school curricula. Deradicalizing both societies—more so the Islamist-jihadist Palestinians but certainly also the racist and increasingly violent Israeli far right.

This may indeed take generations, but it has to start now. The young Israel always claimed to have one hand on the gun and the other stretched out for peace. We must revive this claim and prove we’re dead serious regarding both hands.

As to my father’s powerful belief in the future of Israel, I am glad to keep the torch and pass it to my sons. But, as he taught me, not every future Israel is worth defending or dying for.

Not the Netanyahu Israel, in which so-called Judaism has declared a war of life and death against democracy. Not

the Smotrich and Ben-Gvir Israel that has ditched Jewish and Western universal values, including humanism and equal rights. Not the Israel of religious zealots, happy to trample all over the prophets’ legacy while celebrating an eternal war against an eternal Amalek.

The alternative, the Israel for which we are “pro,” is simple. A state for the Jews *and* all its citizens, peaceful to its neighbors, a law-abiding member in the international community. Far from being an Amos Oz invention, this is Theodor Herzl’s basic Zionist creed.

Hence, a thriving Palestinian-Israeli and Druze-Israeli minority, emanating its moderation across the border to a future Palestine. Hence, many sorts of Jewishness, and other worldviews, flowering side by side.

A secure Israel? For sure. But security is never only military. Security hinges on social solidarity, which must rise

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from its current ruins (ask the hostages' families). Security is also the ancient Jewish talent, badly eroded in recent years, for open-minded and respectful internal debate.

And one day, who knows? "The state is not holy, not a fetish but a vehicle," my father said. One day, in a world without states, the Jews might relaunch the prophets' ancient universalism. Until then, both he and I believed in the Israel we have loved, that superb vehicle of Jewish emancipation: fiercely democratic, open-mindedly Jewish, ever argumentative, wisely defending itself from within its internationally recognized borders, and very carefully peace-seeking.

Fania Oz-Salzberger is an Israeli essayist, political activist and history professor emerita at the University of Haifa. Amos Oz was a renowned Israeli writer and public intellectual.

JEREMY BEN-AMI

Today, as we stare into the moral and strategic abyss toward which Benjamin Netanyahu and the far right are dragging Israel, the debate over what it means to be pro-Israel in the United States seems more urgent than ever.

It remains hard for many who, like me, have deep connections to and deep love for Israel to find a welcoming home in traditional "pro-Israel" advocacy where support for Israel—right or wrong—is demanded, even when it comes to the most reckless policies of the sitting Israeli government. This powerful and emboldened right wing has a crystal-clear vision: They believe Jews have a divine right to all the land between the Jordan and the Mediterranean (and maybe more), and they have no qualms about Israel always living and dying by the sword or denying other people equal rights in the same land.

This "pro-Israel" vision, I fear, would condemn our children and grandchildren to never-ending violence and bloodshed

and, in asking us to be anti-Palestinian, anti-human rights and anti-international law, undermine the Jewish values and principles on which I was raised and on which I raise my children.

Thankfully, there is another path, another definition of pro-Israel that, yes, promises security through strength, but even more so through the very hard-nosed diplomacy that's landed lasting peace deals before. This alternative path for Israel is rooted in its founding values of equality, justice and democracy. It's a path where we hold fast to the aspiration to be a light among nations.

Where I have changed my views in recent years is that I no longer define this path narrowly as leading to a "two-state" solution to the conflict, but rather I believe it's a path to a much bigger deal.

Following the horror of October 7, the devastation of the Gaza war, and ongoing political shifts in Israel, we clearly need a new vision if we're going to move Israelis and Palestinians toward the durable "win-win" scenario I described in this magazine well over a decade ago. I call it the "23-state solution"—a comprehensive, regional security and economic development agreement that normalizes Israel's relations with all its neighbors and facilitates meaningful regional cooperation to create and launch a successful Palestinian state next to Israel. Arab states get the chance to resolve the region's conflict with Israel once and for all and to reap the security and economic benefits of fully normalized relations with Israel. Israelis get recognized borders, true regional integration and guaranteed security and global acceptance. Palestinians get the chance to recover and rebuild supported by massive international investment, while finally achieving the freedom, self-determination and security of statehood.

This is a pro-Israel vision that offers everyone a chance to chart a new future and build a better life for the next generation. The majority of American Jews support this vision. Despite loud and well-funded voices on the fringe, poll after poll shows our community opposes Netanyahu, supports a peace agreement that leads to a

Palestinian state, and rejects an ever-expanding settlement movement. Public opinion surveys among Israelis and Palestinians also show that even in the wake of October 7 and the horrific fighting of the past year and a half, majorities of both societies can be rallied in support of this vision of regional integration, cooperation and security.

To my mind, this pro-Israel vision is the only way to guarantee a future for the Israel my parents and grandparents fought to build. And I know it's the only vision for Israel that my children will fight for as well.

Jeremy Ben-Ami is the founder and president of 7 Street and author of A New Voice for Israel: Fighting for the Survival of the Jewish Nation.

CAT ZAVIS

In 2012, my late husband Rabbi Michael Lerner (1943-2024), with whom I worked as co-editor of *Tikkun* magazine, spoke of Israel operating from a stance of power and domination, and he essentially said that to be pro-Israel was to brook no criticism of Israeli policy and to ignore the treatment of the Palestinians. This stance, he said, bred hatred for Jews around the world. He also argued that "most Jews have made Israel their substitute for the God who didn't show up to save us during the Holocaust," likening it to a kind of pathology or post-traumatic stress disorder.

I think he would say the same thing today. Most Israelis and Jews were comfortable with the occupation until October 7, and now, many are really struggling to see the humanity of Palestinians and are not confronting their PTSD. And he would still say that if we're going to continue to wreak havoc on Palestinian lives, it's going to make Jews unsafe.

Instead of thinking about what it means to be pro-Israel, he was much more concerned about Jews and Judaism, and what we need to do in Israel and in Palestine to

create humanity, dignity, justice and liberation for all people, from the river to the sea. That may mean a one-state solution. It may mean a two-state solution. It may mean a confederation. But most importantly what it means is uplifting the Palestinian voices that have been marginalized, oppressed, jailed or killed, and the voices of their allies that are calling for liberation of Palestinians. Palestinian liberation would ultimately bring forth liberation for Jews and Judaism.

Michael was a liberal Zionist. He talked a lot about Israel as idolatry—that it had become the God under which Zionism equals Judaism, and so if you're anti-Zionist, you're antisemitic. That's just not our tradition. Israel is a state with a lot of Jews. It is not a Jewish state. It's not enacting Jewish values. Michael ultimately didn't believe in nation-states, and neither do I. He believed there should be regional ways of negotiating and working together, kind of like the European Union. But in the current construction he would favor a nation-state or a confederation that ensured everyone's rights and then also addressed the historical wrongs. He would support reparations, repairs and some right of return for Palestinians. He would also put strict limitations on Jewish immigration.

He was horrified about what was happening in Gaza after October 7. He would have called it a genocide, and I know that he would want the United States to stop funding this war to push Israel to real peace. He also taught and wrote and talked a lot about settler Judaism, how it had become the mainstream Judaism in Israel, in many ways to allow settler attacks and pogroms. This is part of the Zionist playbook. And so I think he'd be way more critical of Israel now, and he might be willing to admit that the Zionist political project, as a project that aimed to ensure Jewish safety and a Jewish democratic state, has failed.

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HILLEL HALKIN

One goes from sense of outrage to sense of outrage. At an army command that should have, and easily could have, prevented October 7 from happening and didn't. At the thievish gang of rabid nationalists, religious scoundrels, bootlicking opportunists and once honorable politicians who have sold their souls, led by a conscienceless man long convinced that his and his country's fate are identical, that Israel has the misfortune to be governed by at the worst possible moment. At a hypocritical world that accuses this government, as if it were not bad enough, of monstrous crimes it has not committed. At a Democratic administration that lacked the spine to censure the moral and intellectual lunacy of pro-Hamas agitation on and off American campuses. At a harebrained Republican president of the United States whose Middle East policies encourage the most sinister forces in Israeli political life. At American Jews on the left who have joined the enemies of their people. At American Jews on the right who urge Israelis, from the comfort of their living rooms, to go on killing and being killed forever. If there is anyone I'm not outraged by these days, it's Hamas, both because it's pointless to be angry at beasts for being beasts, and because by now we've killed enough of them, as well as enough ordinary Gazans (few of whom deserved to die, though most cheered the October 7 massacre when it took place), for some of the fury to have abated.

What does it mean to be pro-Israel in 2025? It's easier to think of some of the things it does not mean. It does not mean blaming Israel for most of the carnage in Gaza. It does not mean exonerating Israel of its measure of responsibility for the hatred Palestinians bear toward it. It does not mean hectoring Israel to implement a two-state solution that has not been implementable for years. It does not mean supporting Israeli annexation of Judea and Samaria, which should be hoped for by Palestinians who dream of getting back all of Palestine, not by Israel-

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lis who wish to preserve their share of it. It does not mean backing nutty schemes for evicting Gaza's Palestinians and lining its coastline with Trump Towers. It does not mean calling everyone who criticizes Israel an antisemite. It does not mean being sure you know what is best for Israel when many thoughtful Israelis are far from sure themselves, since while there may be workable solutions for Gaza, there are none in sight for the Palestinian problem as a whole—and this problem, if not resolved, will cause Israel to become either an apartheid or a binational state and, in either case, will spell its doom. And if the thought of Israel's doom does not cause you genuine anguish, you cannot possibly be pro-Israel.

And there is this, too: If you happen to be Jewish, you need to understand that, should Israel not pull through, your people's history will have come to an effective end. Without Israel, Jewish life the world over, in America as elsewhere, would not be worth continuing another day. If you care about being a Jew, you have to care desperately that Israel survives and prospers, not just for its sake, but for your own. More pro-Israel than that you couldn't be.

Hillel Halkin is a translator, political commentator and author of many books, including Letters to an American-Jewish Friend: A Zionist's Polemic. 📧