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## *Netanyahu and Israel in Decline and May Take Biden Down With the Them*



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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is a dead man walking. He needs to continue the war in Gaza in order to maintain his position as prime minister. When the war ends, Netanyahu's record-setting years of rule in Israel will also end.

Along with Netanyahu, the Israeli nation is in decline legally, morally, and economically. The actions of the International Court of Justice reflect the legal and moral decline. Foreign investment is down, and Moody's Investors Service (Moody's) has downgraded Israel's foreign currency and local currency ratings. One outstanding question is whether Netanyahu's fall and Israel's decline will lead to the political defeat of President Joe Biden as well in November's election.

Even before the large-scale Israeli ground invasion of Gaza on October 27th, Netanyahu had transformed from a risk-averse conservative to a right-wing reactionary. A decade ago, it was obvious that Israel's image as a progressive and largely secular nation had become badly tarnished with Netanyahu at the helm. Last year, Netanyahu had to bring into the government the worst kind of right-wing reactionaries, led by Bazalel Smotrich (Finance Minister) and Itamar Ben-Gvir (Minister of National Security). The country was moving to the right, and Netanyahu moved to the right along with it.

In its first 75 years of existence, Israel had no fascists such as Smotrich or Ben-Gvir in its government. Both men were disciples of the late Meir Kahane, whose fascist party was banned in Israel in 1994. Kahane's party, Kach, was banned by the Israeli cabinet under the 1948 anti-terrorism laws following its statements of support for Baruch Goldstein who massacred 29 Palestinians at the Cave of the Patriarchs. Kahane himself was banned from Israeli politics in 1988, but in the last Israeli election six extremists of the Kahane variety won seats in the Israeli Knesset.

The transformation of Israel over the past ten-years means that Israeli leaders and their followers have become less interested in Israel as a democratic state and far more interested in Israel as a Jewish state. The government has no interest in protecting the civil rights of the two million Arab citizens within Israel's borders, who make up around 20 percent of Israel's population. Netanyahu also has no interest in respecting Israel's Supreme Court and its essential role of judicial review. His campaign to neuter the Supreme Court led to the huge protest campaign that was interrupted by the Hamas attack on October 7th. As far back as 2016, a Pew public opinion survey determined that 80 percent of Jewish Israelis favored "preferential treatment" for Jews, indicating the acceptance of discrimination against Arabs.

It seems bizarre for U.S. leaders to continue to emphasize the importance of a two-state solution, when Netanyahu and his cohort have stressed that there will be no negotiations toward such a solution. For the past ten years, again before the Gaza War, Netanyahu has been moving to make permanent the occupation of East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The Trump administration supported these steps, moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem and supporting Israel's policies of occupation. Trump and Netanyahu's recklessness and moral perversity are quite similar. Now, the Israeli government is in the process of making Gaza totally uninhabitable. The Biden administration is complicit in the excesses and war crimes of the Israeli military campaign.

There is no justification or explanation for the horrors that the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) have brought to Gaza, which include the deaths of as many as 12,000 Palestinian children. The fact that Israeli Jews, who have been united around “never again” in the wake of the Holocaust, are responsible for this tragedy is particularly ironic. I grew up in a Jewish ghetto in Baltimore as a Zionist who believed that the IDF was a progressive force playing a major role in transforming Jewish immigrants from the world into a national force. I traveled to Israel for the first time as a teenager, and met Jews from America and Europe who had volunteered to work in Kibbutzim where they joined with the warrior-pioneers who had made their way to Israel in the wake of the Holocaust.

There is no indication that the Israeli assault against the Palestinians will diminish in intensity, let alone pause, and the weaker security environment will ultimately create greater security risks for Israel itself. The potential of renewed war on the northern border with Lebanon is certainly possible, particularly in view of the terrible strategic decisions Israel made in 1982 and 2006 regarding Lebanon. A weaker security environment will create greater social and political risks as Netanyahu becomes even more beholden to the right-wing zealots in his coalition. At the same time, Israelis may become more aggressive in order to keep Netanyahu in power.

It is ironic that President Biden has put his reelection chances at risk on behalf of Netanyahu who has no respect for the president or the United States. Unlike other Israeli prime ministers, Netanyahu has displayed no interest in trying to satisfy or even address U.S. demands or requests, and Israel in general appears to believe that it can go it alone without any international support. President Barack Obama gifted Israel with the greatest military aid package in U.S. history in 2016, but he was regularly vilified by the Israeli press and received a lower favorability rating in Israel than almost anywhere else in the world.

Biden has shown deep concern about the fate of the hostages, particularly the American hostages, but very little concern about the 2 million Palestinians in Gaza. Netanyahu has never been concerned with the five million Palestinians on the West Bank and in Gaza, and rarely demonstrates concern with the hostages. His goal is to make Gaza uninhabitable. The Biden administration doesn't seem to understand that, which explains the feckless missions of Secretary of State Antony Blinken and CIA director William Burns, and the more feckless conversations Biden keeps having with Netanyahu.

I know what Israel gains from the United States in terms of billions of dollars worth of lethal weaponry and political cover. I wonder what the United States gains from Israel.

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