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Living the Past Year in a Time Capsule: And How Israel Is the Envy of the Western World

By Amy Neustein | October 10, 2024

For many Jews, the past year began on Simchat Torah when a joyous holiday of celebrating the annual conclusion of the Torah readings turned into a bloodbath of epic proportion. A music festival and towns in southern Israel on October 7 were ambushed by Hamas terrorists that killed 1,200 innocents and took 251 hostages. Universities around the world ignited vociferous attacks on the Jews reminiscent of 1930s Europe. With the one-year remembrance of October 7, which falls on the Gregorian calendar just days after Rosh Hashanah, we begin the year on a far different note. Israel's tour-de-force intelligence gathering, military superiority, and technological prowess prompted a major feat against Hezbollah in its long-term efforts to eviscerate the axis-of-resistance. Its military and intelligence gathering capabilities have proven once again to be the envy of the Western World.

In fact so much so, that the same day that Hassan Nasrallah — the redoubtable terrorist leader responsible for the killing of 238 U.S. marines in October 1983 and for the March 1985 kidnapping of Associated Press Bureau Chief Terry Anderson — was assassinated by the IDF's bombing of the Hezbollah central headquarters hidden beneath a building in Beirut, Moody's credit rating agency downgraded Israel two notches to a Baa1 from an A2 rating. In so doing, Moody's maintained a negative outlook for Israel, placing it below investment grade and in league with countries such as Spain and Bulgaria, whose GDP per capita are remarkably below those of other European Union member states.

Moody's, with the stroke of a pen, hammered Israel within hours of the news of Nasrallah's (later confirmed) demise simmering in media outlets, intelligence communities, and among denizens of countries in four hemispheres. Was this a coincidence? I think not. My proof is that to justify the unsubstantiated and undeserved credit downgrade, Moody's ignored Israel's robust real estate market, booming tech sector, and other sectors that are equally sanguine while reviving the judicial reform dispute as one of the grounds for the current downgrade. Certainly, this was not a new phenomenon, nor is it incomprehensible to have a debate of this intensity in a country that accords with democratic principles of free speech and the right to assemble. Most importantly, any discourse over the role of Israel's courts had not ignited protests in Israel for quite some time. So, why revive an erstwhile issue to justify the assault on Israel's credit rating, thereby impugning their economic stability?

Recently, Israel's Aliyah Ministry released encouraging statistics showing that 31,000 individuals have immigrated to Israel despite the shadow of war. This stat is almost three times the number of those who have left, primarily for employment opportunities, which would have occurred even if there had not been a pending war. It's hard to find an analogous model of immigration patterns in a comparable Western country that could claim they had an influx of immigrants while its military was fighting on three fronts and its citizens were on high alert for attacks in residential quarters at any time of the day or night.

What these immigration stats show is that notwithstanding the penumbral halo of war, and its ever-present uncertainty and insecurity, families and individuals have made the decision to relocate to Eretz Yisrael. They followed their heart, for it is understood that the place where we live is the grounding of our soul. For this reason, conflicts and wars will never alloy our passion to come home to the place of our destiny and origin.

The fact that Jews are rooted in history, identity and determination provokes envy in others. This is because the human condition causes most people to be peripatetic. They struggle to find themselves. They travel to exotic places; they engage in multiple relationships; or they travel via the psychoanalyst's couch to their past or even to past lives. In contrast, Jews are not itinerant. They have a purpose; they have a home. And it is the mooring of Jews that shows up the weaknesses of other nations that do not share this privilege. They call Jews "clannish" but what they really mean is that Jews have a socially viable and vibrant network of support — working together as a community and watching out for one another.

The bonds among Jews are so strong that even before Israel was a state, the Jews were a nation. As history has proven, God blessed Israel with a grounding so strong that no war, genocide, or persecution could destroy the Jewish community. What other ethnic group is *pari passu* or on equal footing with the Jews? Sadly, instead of others learning how we survived as a nation beleaguered by the hostilities of mankind, we are torn down: criticized, mocked, and repudiated in the universities, public discourse, and, most recently, in the financial sectors that dole out nasty credit ratings just at the moment of Israel's tour-de-force technological and military victory. This is no doubt a sad commentary on the ravages of unbridled envy and how left-leaning interest groups can create enough static in financial markets to impugn Israel's creditworthiness though there is not an iota of evidence to substantiate Israel's undeserved credit downgrade.

We have marked the one-year anniversary of October 7 three days after Rosh Hashanah. The timing can be seen as comforting, as the Jewish New Year ushers in renewed hope, strength and vitality to all Jews in Israel and in the Diaspora. We will mark the remembrance of the first year since the massacre of innocents and the tragic fate of hostages, who either died in captivity or were executed by Hamas shortly before their release under a planned Israel-Hamas ceasefire deal, emboldened by the vigor of a New Year.

But we will also mark the first year of remembrance exuding pride, for we have shown once again — just as we have in biblical and in modern times — that Israel's military proficiency and its intelligence gathering have proven to be exceptional even among countries that benefit from large defense-spending budgets and military sophistication. Envy by others is unfortunately the inevitable consequence of success. Israel has succeeded in the past year to prove it can overcome an existential threat to its survival. We should not allow the envy expressed by others to deter, dampen, or alloy our commitment to Israel's security above all else. Let the New Year release us from a time capsule and begin our journey toward permanent security for Israel and all Jews in the Diaspora.

Editor's Note: An earlier version of this article appeared in the Jerusalem Post.

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