



ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

Commentary...

The Looming Choice for Diaspora Jews By Melanie Phillips

Is it time for the Jews of Britain, Europe and America to leave?

This question is increasingly being asked by Diaspora Jews reeling from the volcano of antisemitism that erupted with the Palestinian pogrom in southern Israel on Oct. 7 and has continued to spread its lethal effluent over the world.

To Jews in Israel, the answer is obvious. Of course, it's time for Diaspora Jews to leave, they say. How can this even be a question?

It's certainly impossible to ignore the astonishing scale and nature of the Jew-hatred now manifesting itself across Western societies.

This has progressed far beyond the pro-Hamas demonstrations in Western cities and on campus that are continuing to spread incitement, intimidation and violence against Jews with minimal pushback from law enforcement, administrators or politicians. Jew-hatred and the campaign to destroy the Jewish state have become mainstream.

In New York this week, the homes of the Jewish director of the Brooklyn Museum and its Jewish board members were vandalized with red paint and graffiti that included inverted red triangles, the symbol by which Hamas marks its intended victims for murder.

Two days earlier, outside an exhibit in Lower Manhattan commemorating the hundreds who were slaughtered at the Supernova music festival during the Oct. 7 atrocities, hundreds of Hamas supporters lit flares and shouted: "Long live the intifada" and "Israel, go to hell."

On the New York subway, a keffiyeh-masked mob on a train shouted: "Zionists identify yourselves, this is your chance to get out." When they declared: "OK, no Zionists, we're good," there were cheers.

In Britain, an opinion poll revealed that 54% of respondents aged 18 to 24 agreed with the statement: "The State of Israel should not exist."

When an El Al flight landed at London's Heathrow Airport, a customs officer who noticed an Israeli flag on a piece of luggage pulled all the passengers from that flight into a room to have their luggage specially scanned. According to the UK Lawyers for Israel, when one of the passengers said: "We are Jewish, why are you doing this to us?" the official replied: "I am a customs officer, and I can do whatever I want."

In the first three months of this year, French authorities registered 366 antisemitic attacks—a 300% increase over the same period last year, while the number of antisemitic acts recorded in 2023 was quadruple the figure for the year before. In May, Normandy police shot dead a man suspected of attempting to burn down a synagogue in Rouen. In April, a Jewish woman in a Paris suburb was kidnapped, reportedly raped and threatened with murder by an attacker who wanted to "avenge Palestine."

According to Sammy Ghozlan, president of the National Office for Vigilance against Antisemitism, almost all violent antisemitic acts in France for more than two decades have been committed by Muslims.

Left-wing parties across Europe are increasingly genuflecting to the Muslim agenda. In France, the main left-wing party La France Insoumise is virulently anti-Israel, and its leader, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, calls Hamas a "resistance" movement.

In Britain, Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer is attempting to balance his pledge to make the party safe for Jews with the vicious anti-Israel feeling rampant among his members and Britain's Muslim community. His deputy was filmed groveling to Muslims in her constituency and promising to "recognize a state of Palestine."

The party's election manifesto says "Palestinian statehood is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people" and that it is "not in the gift of any neighbor." It commits Labour to recognizing a Palestinian state "as a contribution to a renewed peace process which results in a two-state solution with a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and

sovereign Palestinian state," which leaves up in the air the question of whether a Labour government would recognize "Palestine" unilaterally or not.

Regardless of such ambiguity, since British Muslims number some 4 million

compared to a mere 280,000 affiliated Jews the idea that a Labour government would resist the increasingly brazen anti-Israel and anti-West Muslim agenda is a fantasy.

All of this obviously strikes a frightening historic nerve. The refusal of the Jews of Europe to realize the Nazi threat until it was too late is burned into Jewish consciousness.

Today's situation, however, is different. Unlike in Nazi Germany, the antisemitism rampant in the West today isn't state-sponsored. It is the product instead of an alliance between the hard-left, woolly liberals and the Muslim world. The threat is therefore not limited to a regime based in one specific country. It is instead something more insidious—a war from both inside and outside the West against both the Jews and Western civilization.

The second big difference is that a pushback against the wellspring of all this is now underway in Europe. In last week's elections to the European Parliament, a variety of "populist," anti-immigration or "hard-right" parties made record gains.

In Britain, where according to the opinion polls Labour is on course to win the general election on July 4 by a huge majority, a similar revolt is under way. This is spearheaded by Nigel Farage, who galvanized millions of British citizens to vote for Brexit and who stormed back into frontline politics less than two weeks ago as head of the hitherto insignificant Reform Party.

Denouncing the Conservatives for having failed to stop uncontrolled immigration and Islamization, for having done nothing to combat intimidatory identity politics and for having committed Britain to the ruinous Net Zero green agenda, Farage is poised to pounce in the event of a predicted Tory wipeout at the election and become leader of a transformed conservative movement.

Although these "populist" parties are all very different from each other, they have one big thing in common. Like Donald Trump in America, they represent an insurgency against an entire political establishment that ignores, scorns or punishes eminently reasonable and indeed necessary concerns over Islamization and mass immigration, the growth of coerced cultural conformity and the erosion of the rule of law.

Diaspora Jews tend to hold their noses at anything on "the right" because they associate "the right" with antisemitism. They need to wake up fast. While there are certainly troubling increases in neo-fascist groups, the main threat to the Jews today is posed overwhelmingly by left-wingers and Muslims.

Some European "populist" parties are indeed unsavory. Others are merely authentically conservative. Most support Israel, although some have troubling antisemitic roots.

In other words, this is a mixed picture. And as a result, the pushback against those determined to destroy the West is likely to be messy and complicated.

Whether or not it's time to uproot is a personal decision. However, Jews remaining in the Diaspora will find themselves having to choose between the devil and the deep-blue sea. Quite apart from any dangers, the political choices they face are likely to make for an uncomfortable ride.

This alarming situation didn't suddenly burst out of nowhere on Oct. 7. The writing has been on this particular wall for decades. But most Diaspora Jews refused to see it.

In America, the majority of Jews have actually signed up for the liberal ideas that are driving anti-Israel hysteria and Jew-hatred. In Britain, most Jews have been too frightened, too craven or too muddled to talk publicly about the threat from Muslim antisemitism and mass immigration.

Of course, Diaspora Jews can reasonably point out that, at present, Israel is hardly a safe haven. And unfortunately, there may well be yet more horrors for that beleaguered little country to endure.

But Israel is where everyone knows what they're fighting for. It's

where there is zero ambiguity about their enemy or its genocidal intention. It's where the overwhelming majority understand that they are living through another seismic moment in the sacred history of their people. It's why they know they have no alternative but to win.

That's why Israel will survive. The same cannot be said for the West. (JNS Jun 13)

Israel Must Maintain Security Control By Farley Weiss

Israel's goal in the current war is to destroy Hamas. Destroying Hamas does not mean that Hamas is left so depleted that they cannot conduct another Oct. 7 attack. There can be no permanent end to hostilities until the organization is destroyed, its rocket threat eliminated and all its hostages returned, including the remains of deceased hostages and soldiers.

Israel's position on this is not extreme. It is normal for any country in such a situation. President Joe Biden's recent ceasefire plan does not meet any of Israel's basic requirements and Israel should reject it.

As for what should occur after the war, a new Pew poll showed that the people of Israel are firmly behind Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's view that Israel must exercise security control over Gaza for some time. No alternative scenario received significant support.

It's not surprising, then, that opposition leader Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid party has dropped considerably in the polls. It is likely because of Lapid's support for the Biden administration's view that the Palestinian Authority should rule Gaza.

Benny Gantz's National Union party has been leading in the polls. But since he took an equivocal stance on Israeli military control of Gaza, he too has seen a drop in support. Netanyahu is now the most favored candidate to serve as prime minister.

Gantz's recent decision to leave the Netanyahu government in the middle of a war will likely further erode his standing in the eyes of the Israeli public. It should be remembered that Gantz was Israel's defense minister until late 2022. He helped put in place the military policies that failed miserably on Oct. 7. As a result, he likely does not have credibility with the Israeli public when he claims that his plan for Gaza will protect Israel's security.

It is alleged by Netanyahu's political opponents that he has worked to keep Hamas in power over Gaza in place of the P.A. Netanyahu was not in power when Hamas conquered Gaza, however. He did allow Qatari money to go to Hamas, believing this would keep Gaza quiet, which proved to be a terrible mistake. Even if the military did not inform Netanyahu of the indications of a potential attack, the prime minister held overall responsibility for military policy and could have changed it before Oct. 7. However, the current war shows that outside of direct Israeli military action, there was no way to remove Hamas from power.

Netanyahu has given sufficient support to the P.A. to prevent Hamas from seizing control of Palestinian areas in Judea and Samaria. But the P.A. supported the Oct. 7 attack. Israel needs a new policy on Judea and Samaria, as neither P.A. nor Hamas rule of Judea and Samaria is good for Israel's security or the possibility of peace.

Before March 2002, the P.A. ruled Judea, Samaria and Gaza. As a result, Israel learned a deadly lesson, as the P.A.'s terror campaign murdered 135 Israeli civilians in March 2002 alone. Despite strong public opposition from President George W. Bush's Secretary of State Colin Powell, then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon launched a military operation and reimposed Israeli security control over Judea and Samaria. As a result, terrorism dropped significantly. The P.A. has not fired rockets at Israel because Israeli security control prevents them from doing so. Thus, Israeli history proves that, regardless of whether the P.A. or Hamas is in charge, Israel must maintain security control if it is to have peace.

Moreover, now that Israel has discovered many tunnels from Rafah into Egypt used to smuggle weapons to Hamas, it is ludicrous to think that Egypt can play a positive role in Gaza.

In fact, there is no alternative to Israeli security control. Polls show that over 70% of Palestinian Arabs in Gaza support Hamas rule and the Oct. 7 massacre. This is not surprising, since an ADL poll several years ago found that 93% of Palestinian Arabs are antisemitic—the most of any people in the world.

Many people like Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer claim

they support Israel but not Netanyahu. Others falsely claim that Netanyahu is constrained by his right-wing coalition partners. Yet in November 2023, Netanyahu agreed to a short ceasefire that led to the release of 110 hostages, even though that ceasefire was opposed by his right-wing coalition partner Itamar Ben-Gvir.

It is obvious that the attacks on Netanyahu, including President Joe Biden's false claim that Israel is engaging in "indiscriminate bombing," are politically motivated. Democrats believe the Gaza war is hurting Biden politically with his left-wing base. Thus, they want it to end immediately, even if it harms Israel's security.

Israel must maintain its position that the war does not end until Hamas's terrorist capabilities are destroyed and all the hostages are returned. This is a commonsense position that the Biden administration should support. (JNS Jun 11)

International Law is not the Problem By Aharon Friedman

There is much room to improve international law in order to deal with terrorism and the use of force by non-state actors. But that is not essential to fighting terrorism. The law matters but is not always either the problem or the solution. It was not the lack of applicable law that resulted in the Oct. 7 massacre and the international criticism of Israel's response has nothing whatsoever to do with the law.

International law already prohibits the terrorism and genocide being waged by the Palestinian Authority and Iran (directly and through proxies including Fatah, Hezbollah, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad) against the Jewish people. Such law also permits not only Israel's current military strategy and tactics but much more aggressive responses.

Generally, international law requires combatants to follow the principles of distinction and proportionality. Distinction requires a combatant to avoid specifically targeting non-combatants but does not prohibit attacks on military targets in which non-combatants may be harmed.

The principle of proportionality is not governed by treaty. It is covered by customary international law, which is the practice of countries out of a sense of legal obligation. There is no such state practice that Israel is even arguably violating. On the contrary, Israel is going well beyond any such practice of other nations.

Israel's enemies are committing numerous war crimes by, amongst other actions, deliberately targeting non-combatants, attempting genocide against the Jewish people and locating their military assets amongst civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Alan Baker, a former Israeli ambassador to Canada and Foreign Ministry legal adviser, has repeatedly and persuasively argued that Israel is abiding by international law while its enemies are not.

Nonetheless, in "Israel under fire: Can international law cope with terror?" Baker concludes that the "essential question still remains as to whether" the "international community" will "adapt international humanitarian law to the urgent and vital needs of today in dealing with modern terror."

Baker cites the 1970s Protocols to the Geneva Conventions as providing ammunition to those claiming Israel is violating international law. The Protocols, especially the provisions criticized by Baker, are a perversion of international law. For example, they give preferential treatment to those "fighting against colonial domination and alien occupation and against racist regimes in the exercise of their right of self-determination."

Those provisions and many others in the Protocols are not binding international law on countries that have (wisely) not ratified the protocols, such as Israel and the United States—as even the Biden administration acknowledges in the Department of Defense Law of War Manual, updated just this past July. There is zero state practice that would make these provisions customary international law.

It is true that the Protocols purport to grant privileged status to certain combatants even if they do not wear insignia or always carry their weapons openly. But this is not international law.

In any case, there is nothing in the Protocols that permits attacks such as Oct. 7 or prohibits Israel's right to self-defense.

The problem is not that the United Nations believes the Protocols constitute binding customary international law. It is not as if Israel's critics defend its military campaign and criticize Hamas for targeting civilians and hiding amongst civilians, but defend Hamas not wearing

uniforms, as arguably permitted by the Protocols.

The problem is not the law as it exists (or any reasonable interpretation of that law) but the perversion of the law. Those like the United Nations who make a mockery of existing law are not going to abide by improved law. And is it that far-fetched to believe that such new laws on terrorism would just be turned against Israel?

Germany being a signatory to a genocide treaty would not have stopped the Holocaust. The Genocide Convention was enacted in reaction to the Holocaust. Yet the International Court of Justice is baselessly using that Convention to attack Israel.

The International Criminal Court is without jurisdiction over Israel, which never joined it. In addition, the ICC is prohibited by its operative Rome Statute from taking up cases being investigated or prosecuted by a country that has jurisdiction unless that country is unwilling or unable to genuinely carry out the investigation or prosecution.

Thus, Baker concluded in 2021, "The threats to institute action in the ICC are unrealistic and fail to consider the requirements of the statute of the ICC." Baker is correct on the law, but profoundly wrong on whether the law matters to the ICC.

Unfortunately, this approach is reflective of Israel's legal bureaucracy, which scheduled extensive meetings with ICC prosecutor Karim Khan's team before he sought arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant.

An Israeli newspaper reported: "Israeli officials were stunned by Khan's last-minute and unexpected announcement. Khan had prepared this announcement and even recorded a video, despite knowing his team was on their way to Israel for meetings."

What is stunning is that the Israeli officials believed the law and whether Israel is following the law had any relevance to the ICC.

Attributing reasonable disagreement over the law or the slightest good faith of any sort to the lawless bodies masquerading as courts that are attacking Israel is a dangerous misdiagnosis. (JNS Jun 11)

Notes from the Safest Place in Europe for Jews

By Jonathan S. Tobin

This is a perilous time to be a Jew. The world responded to the greatest mass slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust with a surge of antisemitism and sympathy for those who committed the atrocities of Oct. 7, rather than its victims. Israel's efforts to eradicate the genocidal terrorists of Hamas who launched that attack have not just been opposed but demonized in a way that enlightened liberal opinion did not condemn the orgy of murder, rape, torture, kidnapping and wanton destruction that occurred on that day.

And while Jews everywhere celebrated the heroic rescue of four hostages this past weekend by Israeli security forces, the same mainstream corporate media that has been acting as Hamas's stenographers throughout the eight months of the current war reacted by emphasizing the deaths of the Palestinians holding them captive.

Yet as bad as the situation has become in the United States, where elite college campuses have become hotbeds of support for Hamas, it is arguably worse in Europe. It is not just a matter of the governments of Western Europe opposing Israel's military campaign and seeking to prevent the defeat of Hamas in concert with the Biden administration. Spain, Norway and Ireland chose to reward the Palestinians for their terrorism by formally recognizing their fictional statehood. More than that, a sinister red-green alliance of leftists and supporters of political Islam has created a situation in which Jewish communities throughout the continent feel themselves under siege. Many are choosing not to wear religious markers such as kippahs and Stars of David, and still others have taken off the mezuzahs once affixed to their homes.

Spend a week in that Eastern European country, as I just did, and the one thing you can count on is that you won't see its landmarks being the site of mass demonstrations of supporters of jihad and Hamas terror, as is the case elsewhere, including the United States. That is something that would be unimaginable right now in America, but the reason is that the Hungarian government has banned pro-Hamas demonstrations. They've deemed it an open expression of antisemitism and a threat to public order. Their rationale is to treat pro-Hamas activism as morally equivalent to open advocacy for Nazism, which in Hungary and most other places in Europe is illegal.

As I discovered in conversations with both liberal and Orthodox

Jews, as well as non-Jews, the Jewish community in Budapest feels safe in a way that is not the case in London, Paris or Berlin. When you visit Hungary, no one tells you not to wear kippahs or Jewish stars in public. Orthodox Jews are not an uncommon sight on the streets of the Hungarian capital and act as if they have no fear of being attacked for their beliefs.

Meanwhile, the Hungarian government is easily the Jewish state's best friend in Europe. As knowledgeable sources have made clear to me, Budapest is Jerusalem's only reliable ally within the European Union, always ready to disrupt the E.U. Commission's quest for consensus on behalf of its consistent anti-Israel agenda, sometimes displaying more willingness to fight supporters of the Palestinians than the Israelis themselves.

What is the reason for this alliance that, at least on its surface, has little basis in the history of the Jewish experience in Hungary? It boils down to the decisions of a single highly controversial person: Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

Orbán, widely despised by American liberals, is routinely denounced as a tyrant and opponent of democracy, or as an ally of the even more-hated Russian President Vladimir Putin. He's often accused of being an antisemite because of his long-standing feud with the Hungarian-born leftist billionaire George Soros, who remains a convenient punching bag for Orbán and his Fidesz Party. Fidesz is often likened to other right-wing populist parties that are on the rise in Europe. Such comparisons, as well as those of Orbán to former U.S. President Donald Trump or Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, with whom he has close relations, are simplifications or just plain misleading. Love him or hate him, Orbán is a remarkable and singular figure. Though this is just one prism through which one can view him, his stance as a bulwark against European antisemitism needs to be both understood and appreciated.

His career began in the last decade of the Soviet Empire when, as a young law student and activist, he was part of the opposition to the Communist government. It is no small irony (and one that is often pointed out) that he earned a scholarship to Oxford University in Great Britain—from the Soros Foundation since during that era, the billionaire's philanthropy was primarily focused on promoting freedom behind the Iron Curtain. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the birth of Hungarian democracy, Fidesz grew from its student-activist origins into a parliamentary faction that was considered a moderate liberal party. But under Orbán's leadership, it turned to the right on social issues while becoming populist in terms of its opposition to pure market capitalism.

In a stunning victory, Orbán led Fidesz to power for the first time in Hungary's 1998 elections. He served as prime minister for four years in what was generally considered a successful term in office but failed to win re-election in 2002.

Not unlike Netanyahu, who also served a single term as Israel's prime minister from 1996 to 1999 before being defeated, Orbán learned from his mistakes. His victory in 2010 was also similar to that of Netanyahu, whose return to power in 2009 was as much the function of the political incompetence and the abysmal policy failures of his opponents as his own brilliance. Orbán became prime minister again after liberal leader and Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány (whose wife, Klára Dobrev, who is Jewish, now leads one of the parties opposing Orbán) was caught on tape boasting of lying nonstop to the public to hold onto power.

Since then, Orbán has consolidated and retained power by skillful maneuvering with the aid of wealthy supporters who dominate the Hungarian media. His government has been notoriously corrupt, though whether it is more corrupt than those in many other post-Communist nations (such as Ukraine, whose far more flagrant political and economic corruption has been ignored because of the Russian invasion) is debatable.

With only slightly more than three decades of experience as a free country, Hungary is far from being a perfect democracy. And while he is routinely denounced as an authoritarian, there are no political prisons or gulags in Hungary, and his opponents are free to denounce him wherever they like. Though Orbán ruthlessly uses the advantages of incumbency to keep winning elections to the dismay of foreign critics, his political opponents have gained ground in recent years and control the country's largest cities, including Budapest.

Indeed, even as right-wing populist parties won victories across

the continent in Sunday's elections for the parliament of the European Union, Fidesz saw its margin of support reduced because of the emergence of a new party led by a former supporter Peter Magyar, who ran on an anti-corruption platform.

All of this means that for all its flaws, Orbán's Hungary is a democracy. His supporters don't dominate Hungary's press to any greater degree than the left dominates the corporate media in the United States or Israel. That many of those who call him an authoritarian cheered on the Russia collusion hoax employed by Democrats to hamstring the Trump administration, the conspiracy of Internet moguls and mainstream media outlets to cover up evidence of Biden family corruption in the final weeks of the 2020 election and then the attempt by Democrats to bankrupt and then imprison the leader of the opposition to the current U.S. government (something Orbán has never stooped to) shows how lacking in credibility that charge truly is.

But if Orbán isn't really an authoritarian, then why does the left hate him so much?

Part of it stems from a 2014 speech in which he said his vision for Hungary was for an "illiberal democracy." Since then, neither he nor his allies have ever been able to adequately explain what that phrase meant. But suffice it to say that it represented a desire to push back against the free-market capitalist spirit that dominates the E.U., which, in the view of some of the union's smaller countries, stands for the domination of the continent's economy by Germany and other Western powers.

It also symbolizes his embrace of social conservatism. Hungary, like the rest of Europe, is afflicted by rapidly declining birth rates, as well as a collapse of faith in traditional values and faith. Orbán has prioritized policies that reward families for having more children, and he opposes the embrace of the LGBTQ+ agenda in a way that no other European or American leader has done. Still, there are no anti-gay laws or prohibitions, and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is illegal in Hungary. Yet unlike in the rest of Europe or the United States, public buildings in Budapest are not bedecked with rainbow flags during the gay-pride month of June.

But as grievous as that may be in the eyes of many people, it is his stand against unlimited immigration, especially from the Middle East and North Africa, that has earned Orbán the enduring enmity of liberals. While much of the E.U.—and specifically, Germany under the leadership of former Chancellor Angela Merkel—threw open the gates of their nations to largely Muslim emigrants and millions of refugees from the Syrian civil war in the 2010s, Orbán viewed this wave of immigration as a threat to Hungary's identity and future.

While much of Europe is being transformed by mass immigration, Hungary has held the line against it and helped lead other Eastern European countries to do the same.

With memories of the long Soviet occupation, as well as their nation's heroic and tragic 1956 revolt against communism (during which the United States and NATO never lifted a finger to help them) not forgotten, it would be a mistake to see Orbán or most Hungarians having much sympathy for Putin or Russia. However, they also have the same history of resentment against Ukrainians and are deeply suspicious of the West. Their history as the only non-Slavic or Germanic people in the region, coupled with having a language that is unrelated to any other in Europe other than Finland, marks them as outliers.

That explains a lot about both their past (during which they suffered terribly during invasions of Europe by Mongols and Ottomans) and the present, including Orbán's dubious decision to embrace China as an alternative to domination by Western Europe or the United States. Still, there is a common ground between the ideas that motivate Fidesz and that of other conservative movements around the globe, reflected in the work of the Danube Institute think tank, whose members I spoke with. Yet Hungary is a special and different place, and Hungarian policies and ideas should be viewed in their own context and not that of other nations.

If you want to know why Hungary is a place where Jews live in safety when compared to nations like Britain and France, which are considered far more democratic by observers, a big part of the answer lies in Orbán's immigration policies. If there is no red-green alliance in Budapest that can send throngs of protesters to the streets to intimidate both governments and Jews—as is the case in London and Paris—it is

because there is no large Muslim immigrant community there that seeks to impose their culture and antisemitic views on their new homes.

Liberal observers viewed with alarm the gains of populist parties that are against unlimited immigration in the E.U. elections, as well as other recent votes. While some of these parties have roots in the continent's fascist past, their popularity is based on the justified fears of people about their nation's future so long as they cannot control their borders or prevent their heritage from being transformed into something they no longer recognize by Muslim immigrants who don't share their cultural or political values.

To confuse opposition to Soros with antisemitism might be more understandable in Hungary with its unfortunate history. But there, the billionaire is a symbol not so much of Jewish villainy as of support for leftist policies that hurt Hungarians, much as his campaign to elect pro-crime prosecutors in the United States has done more damage to America than perhaps that of any other individual. To label Orbán an antisemite because of his Soros-bashing isn't any more legitimate than when Democrats do the same to Republicans in the United States over their noticing the baleful influence of his massive giving to leftist (including anti-Israel) causes.

In Hungary, Fidesz joined with other parties to essentially drive the openly antisemitic Jobbik Party out of the mainstream in the last decade. Both Jews and non-Jews I spoke with conceded that antisemitism—which played a major role in the past there, and evidence of which is abundant in the Holocaust memorials in Budapest that commemorate the slaughter of most of its Jewish population in 1944—is far from dead in Hungary. Indeed, polls have shown that antisemitic attitudes are present in a significant percentage of the population and perhaps far higher than in other countries where Jews do live in fear.

Hungarian Jews have a history of engagement with their nation. It was a stronghold of the Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment, in the 19th century as Jews embraced secular learning and integration into their host countries. The beautiful Great Synagogue in Budapest was built by and is still run by the Neolog movement, which is somewhat analogous to Conservative Judaism in the United States. Zionist leaders like Theodor Herzl (who was born across the street from the Great Synagogue) and Moses Hess were Hungarian.

Budapest, Hungary, "Shoes in Danube River" "Shoes on the Danube River" memorial to Hungarian Jews killed during World War II and the Holocaust, many of whom were shot, killed and thrown into the Danube in Budapest, June 2024. Photo by Jonathan S. Tobin. While Orthodox Judaism is undergoing something of a revival there thanks to the brilliant outreach efforts of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, which has close ties to Orbán, the majority of the approximate 100,000-strong Hungarian Jewish community are still loosely affiliated with the Neolog stream. The majority of them are politically liberal and oppose Orbán. But even liberal Jews told me that they understood that he was the main reason why antisemitism was kept in check and they are so secure. Though only a fool would underestimate or count him out, sooner or later, his time in power will come to an end. When that happens, Hungary's status as a bright spot for Jews as well as a fiercely loyal ally of Israel will be in doubt.

For now, that means a stay in Budapest means encountering a nation where there is no sign of the antisemitic surge that is part of everyday life in Western Europe and even the United States.

Mass pro-Hamas demonstrations, such as the disgraceful orgy of Jew-bashing that took place last weekend across from the White House in Washington, D.C., or the besieging of an exhibit about the attack on the Nova music festival in New York City, don't happen in Budapest. The capital's synagogues don't have to worry about antisemitic graffiti and the poster of the Israeli hostages taken by Hamas on the gates of the Great Synagogue hangs proudly and untouched by vandals. And rather than sniping at Israel or supporting efforts to criminalize its efforts to defeat Hamas and rescue its hostages, Hungary is holding the line in defense of the Jewish state.

To many who think Orbán is beyond the pale, his support for Jews and Israel is an unimportant detail. Yet at a time when Jewish lives and rights are at risk everywhere, to ignore the truth about Hungary and the Jews today would be as irresponsible as it would be self-destructive. (JNS Jun 11)