



ISRAEL MATTERS!

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Poland Tries to Curb Holocaust Speech — Israel Fights Back

Editorial: Goodbye, Hello

Almost two years ago, on the occasion of the publishing of the 100th issue of *Israel Matters!*, I wrote an essay in which I tried to encapsulate what being the Chair of the Israel Affairs Committee of TBS has not only meant to me, but the effect it has had on me. As I write this, my resignation as Chair of the Committee has been accepted. It has been a good run of more than a decade, and like all good things there is a time to realize it has come to an end. This is that time for me.

As I wrote then, when putting together each issue of *Israel Matters!* my intent was always to provide a balance of Israeli geopolitics, whether internal or external, but always to leave the reader well-informed with examples of the indomitable Israeli spirit. To me, Israel is truly a beacon among nations and I tried to reinforce that message as often as I could. Naturally, there were/are times when actions of the Israeli government left me puzzled and/or disappointed. But those were in the significant minority and on balance, Israel seldom failed to make me proud.

I also noted in my previous essay that chairing the Israel Affairs Committee and putting together *Israel Matters!* each month has not been for me a one-way street. For, during my tenure as I tried to live up to my marching orders of increasing awareness of Israel, doing so made me a stronger advocate for Israel, a role I relish. As some of you might know, I especially relished those few times when I was privileged to address the congregation on Yom Kippur for the annual Israel Appeal.

At this point, as I say goodbye, my appreciation goes out to Steve Salinger and George

Even as international pressure mounted on Poland to back away from a new law that would make it illegal to blame Poles for crimes committed by Nazi Germany, the Senate passed the legislation. The bill, which sets prison penalties for using phrases like “Polish death camps” to refer to concentration camps set up by the Nazis, is subject to the approval of President Andrzej Duda. Supporters are urging him to sign it, even at the risk of rupturing relations with Israel and the United States. In response, Mr. Duda said that he would review the legislation closely before deciding whether to sign, but he added that he was “absolutely outraged” that the Israeli ambassador had criticized the legislation during a ceremony to commemorate the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi concentration camp on Polish soil. “I don’t know if there is some misrepresentation or misinformation in regard to how the Israeli side understands parts of this legislation,” Mr. Duda told the state broadcaster. “But we, as a state, as a nation, have a right to defend ourselves from an evident slander, an evident falsification of historical truth, which, in this case, for us is a slap in the face.”

Even Poles who do not support the law consider the phrase “Polish death camps” deeply offensive and historically wrong. A draft of the legislation to ban the phrase has been in the works for more than a year. The current measure, passed the lower house of Parliament on the eve of Holocaust Remembrance Day, seemed planned to provoke a reaction. It got one.

“The law is baseless; I strongly oppose it,” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement released in response. “One cannot change history, and the Holocaust cannot be denied.” Subsequently, the Israeli Foreign Ministry said Israel would seek to postpone a planned visit by a top Polish national security official. “On the backdrop of the approval of the bill by the Polish Senate,” the ministry said in a statement, “Israel has requested the postponement of the planned visit of the head of the Polish National Security Council.”

Yair Lapid, leader of a centrist opposition party in Israel and the son of a Holocaust survivor, wrote on Twitter, “There were Polish death camps and no law can ever change that.”

Poland was invaded and occupied by Germany in 1939, but unlike in neighboring countries, there was no collaborationist government in Warsaw. Roughly three million Polish Jews were killed in the Holo-

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caust, and another three million Polish citizens died.

Several international organizations have been quick to condemn the law, including Yad Vashem, Israel's official Holocaust memorial; the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; and the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles. The United States has asked Polish officials to rethink plans to enact the bill, arguing that it is a threat to freedom of speech and to Poland's international relationships. But even as international condemnation poured in, the Polish Senate took up the measure for debate. The body, controlled by the governing Law and Justice party, moved swiftly, ignoring all of the opposition's amendments. The legislation passed 57 to 23, with two abstentions.

But even some Law and Justice lawmakers thought it was reckless. "How is it that nobody had foreseen that it was a terrible idea to accept this bill on the eve of the an-

niversary of International Holocaust Remembrance Day?" Senator Anna Maria Anders, the daughter of a Polish war hero, asked during the debate. "We could have done it a week, two weeks later," she said. "And now we have a terrible, terrible international crisis. The crisis is not just in Poland and Israel. The American Congress has begged Poland not to pass this bill. This is so unnecessary. Why didn't anyone predict that this would be the reaction?" The deputy justice minister, Patryk Jaki, responded that Poland "could not have predicted this reaction because the Israelis had never expressed any criticism in regard to this bill."

Donald Tusk, the president of the European Council and a former Polish prime minister, suggested in a Twitter post that the Polish government was guilty of the very thing the law was intended to fight.

[nytimes.com]

Alexander for their ongoing assistance in the publication of *Israel Matters!*. Thanks also go to Al Harary for including topics on Israel into the Adult Education Program curriculum and to Rabbi Scolnic for his ongoing assistance. And, finally, to my wife and *Israel Matters!* proofreader extraordinaire, Randy, for her constant support as Co-Chair of the Committee.

While it is difficult for me to walk away from a role I've enjoyed for so many years, I am heartened that the work of the Israel Affairs Committee will be assumed by two members of the congregation who each bring not only impeccable credentials to the role but, even more so, possess a demonstrated love and passion for Israel. At this time I am pleased to introduce Dr. Martin Laskin and Allan A. Myer as the incoming Co-Chairs of the Israel Affairs Committee. I am confident they will be supported as well in their efforts by the congregation as I have been.



Dr. Martin (Marty) Laskin (upper photo) teaches in the Department of Sociology and the Program in Judaic Studies at Southern Connecticut State University. Among the courses he teaches are Sociology of Modern Israel, Sociology of American Jewry, and the Sociology of Religion. For a number of years Marty worked for various government agencies and public institutions in Israel. As a frequent visitor to Israel, he intends to keep TBS members up to date and objectively informed as to developments there. He has been a member of TBS since 1990 and has published a sociological study of the Temple, *An Ethnographic Study of an American Conservative Synagogue*.



Allan A. Myer (lower photo) serves as

portfolio manager with RMB Capital Management, an asset and wealth management Wall Street firm based in Chicago. Allan is also Chairman of The Israel Project, a non-partisan American educational organization dedicated to informing the press, policy influencers, and the public about Israel and the Middle East. He also serves as Program Director of the Frankel Foundation, a charitable family foundation; is a member of the Board of Advisors of the Crown Center for Middle East Studies at Brandeis University, and serves on the International Board of Advisors of the Israel Democracy Institute, an independent, nonpartisan think tank located in Jerusalem.

Allan's government service includes Speechwriter to President Reagan and Director of Defense Programs on the National Security Council, and 25 years service in the U.S. Army rising in rank from private, retiring at the grade of Colonel. His military service included command of artillery units in Vietnam, and with the 82nd Airborne Division and the 1st French Armored Division in NATO. He also served in strategic planning assignments in the Pentagon and on the faculty of the National War College, the Command and General Staff College, and the Army's Field Artillery School.

Allan holds an MA from Georgetown University and is a graduate of the USA Russian Institute. He and his wife Jeannie, a neurobiologist, live in North Haven. They have a nine-year-old daughter Katie who is a third grader at The Foote School and is a student at Temple Beth Sholom. Allan has three children (ages 55, 52, and 49) from an earlier marriage.

I trust you will join me in wishing Marty and Allan every success in their new roles as Co-Chairs of the Temple Beth Sholom Israel Affairs Committee.

Am Yisrael Chai!

Ed Berns