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The Lester and Sally Entin Faculty of Humanities
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The Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry publishes commentary and analysis on Jewish identity and culture. You are welcome to share your thoughts on our Perspectives with us: cst@tauex.tau.ac.il. We are glad to share with you the fifty-ninth issue of Perspectives.

AIPAC Undone?

American voters sent a loud and clear message. Will Israel and its friends listen?

Uriya Shavit

It is always difficult to admit a mistake, but here it is: I was wrong about Donald J. Trump.

I thought that this godless, dark-hearted, narcissistic, corrupt and vulgar confidence-trickster would bring about the collapse of the Union that had led the free world for about a century.

The potential was there. Despotic tendencies, disregard for the rule of law, lack of basic civility and fair play, and fondness for tyrants met a submissive, Republican-controlled Congress, a partially corrupt conservative Supreme Court, media and tech moguls eager to serve, and a Democratic Party in turmoil.

Despite it all, the United States and its democracy have survived.

I misjudged how incompetent Trump is in anything other than as a lawless campaigner and how ineffectual his second term would be in anything other than enriching his family.

More importantly, I misjudged American society and its potential to again defy the fate of other great empires and revive.

The danger of disintegration is still very much out there. Trump was never the disease but its grotesque symptom. His humiliating midterm defeat has not changed the basic facts. The United States has remained a deeply polarized, declining power that is effectively bankrupt and in need of urgent constitutional reforms, massive infrastructural investments and a spirit of national reconciliation which powerful agents of chaos will do their best to prevent.

Yet if I were an American, I would feel very optimistic today, and not only because the voters punished their President so resoundingly.

I would feel very optimistic because several of the young politicians who led the blue wave are made of the stuff that once made America great and can make it great again. They are ambitious, yet morally driven. They recognize how deep the national crisis is, but their vision about what America should become is not detached from what America actually is. They preach faith-based progress and represent merit-based mobilization and diversity rather than empty identity politics.

The conventional wisdom is that Trump and his party lost because of the failed Iran war.

Nonsense.

Iran has only made a bad situation much worse.

Trump eagerly bought the promises the careless Benjamin Netanyahu sold him about an easy win against the mullahs because every other ambition he entertained during his second term ended in disaster, and he was eager for a legacy.

His economic theory that he can lower the cost of living by increasing taxes proved wrong.

His ambitions to annex Canada and Greenland – using, regarding the latter, rhetoric that belongs to the dark side of the 1930s – ended in nothing but ridiculing the office of the President and discrediting the United States on the world stage.

His black-umbrella betrayal of Ukraine met with a courageous, defiant Ukrainian President and public.

His climate-change denial has not impressed Mother Nature.

His crusade against illegal migrants, grounded in legitimate concerns, turned violent and highly unpopular.

His efforts to utilize the judiciary for personal vendettas did not yield.

Iran was and remains a just and strategically crucial cause, but he targeted it, typically, in a whimsical and destructive way, once again not appreciating that making wild threats without being able to make good on them is to expose weakness.

Many Israelis and American Jews still believe Trump was, and is, good for Israel.

Indeed, like a broken clock that shows the right time twice a day, Israel is the one place where he had his heart in the right place.

Yet has he made it stronger?

His decision to move the American embassy from Tel Aviv to where it belongs – Jerusalem – has hardly been followed by any other country, thus serving only to highlight the controversial status of the city and the diminished influence of America in the world.

His Abraham Accords finally stripped the Palestinians of the veto power they held on regional normalization, but he failed to utilize the new situation to pressure both the Palestinians and Israel to show greater pragmatism.

His first contribution regarding the war in Gaza was selling Israelis the dangerous fantasy of full ethnic cleansing. He then imposed on Israel a deal that saw Hamas remain in power, without a realistic path to eliminate it.

When the Iranian people rose against their evil regime, he talked a lot but missed the hour. When he finally launched an attack, it was too late and too little. The mullahs will fall, sooner rather than later. It will not be his doing.

During his second term, Israel became a toxic brand worldwide and particularly in America. For the first time in history, more Americans expressed support for the Palestinian side in the conflict than for Israel. His low approval ratings reflected on his most faithful ally; the low approval ratings of his most faithful ally reflected on him.

In a last-minute effort to save his party from electoral ruin, he stated just before the midterms that Israel would be denied the American financial assistance it had been given for decades, paving the way for future presidents to act in kind and more.

As his political saga approaches its end, Israel is entering new and dangerous grounds.

Its government has lost the Democratic Party. Republicans blame it for their electoral disaster.

On November 3, 2026, American voters stated loud and clear that they reject the current nature of the Israeli-American alliance. They also said loud and clear that they resent the involvement of big advocacy money in American politics.

Under these circumstances, pouring – directly or indirectly – donations in support of candidates perceived as pro-Israeli risks being counter-productive.

Where the interventions are successful, they fuel allegations that American support for Israel is not based on American national interests but on the financial motivations of cynical politicians.

Where the interventions fail, they encourage Israel-haters to double down on their rhetoric.

AIPAC and other philanthropists and advocacy groups whose main mission is to safeguard the American-Israeli alliance and the existence of the Zionist enterprise need to stop for a moment and rethink what the best way to serve their mission is.

It was only a year ago that Miriam Adelson stood next to Donald Trump, who was already highly unpopular, at a Hanukkah reception at the White House and told him in a heavy Israeli accent that he should run for a third term and that she would give him 250 million dollars to that end. Trump, grinning, responded that his generous donor Sheldon, Miriam's late husband, cared only about Israel.

Scenes like that endanger the status of Israel in America more than any Qatari money poured into West and East Coast campuses.

The majority of the American public has just decreed that it does not consider the current Israeli government a worthy ally.

The majority of the Israeli public has just decreed that it wants a change of government.

The most useful thing true friends of Israel in the United States can do at the moment is to see to it that the two majorities get what they want. Helping show Netanyahu the way out is where their energy should be invested in the next few weeks. And aggressively so.

If they hesitate whether intervention in Israeli politics is legitimate, they can give Trump a call.

Uriya Shavit is Head of the Center.

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