

Israel is a Mortal Danger to the Jews | Prof. Yakov Rabkin

Israel blew up a synagogue during the Jewish holiday of Passover. The synagogue was standing in Tehran and either intentionally or by accident became a victim of the US/Israeli war of aggression against Iran. The episode stands paradigmatically for the grave threat that Israel and Zionism pose to the life and safety of Jews (and non-jews) around the world. While we mostly think of Zionism as a danger mainly for the muslim population of West Asia, it is fundamental to understand that also native local Christian and Jewish populations are in danger, as are Jews around the globe and even Jews inside Israel. The violence of Zionist ideology poses a universal threat to those who disagree with its core-premises. This is what I discuss today with my guest, Dr. Yakov Rabkin, Professor Emeritus of History at the Université de Montréal, scholar at the Montreal Centre for International Studies (CERIUM) and founding member of Canada's Independent Jewish Voices. He is the author, most recently, of *Israel in Palestine and Zionism Decoded in 101 Quotes*. LINKS Support us on Substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Our shop and donations: <https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com> PROF. RABKIN'S WORKS (www.yakovrabkin.ca) *Zionism Decoded in 101 Quotes*. [<https://www.amazon.com/s?k=yakov+rabkin+zionism+decoded&crd=2GCL3IJ11Y7MN&srefix=yakov+rabkin+zionism+decoded>]

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. My name is Pascal Lottaz, and I am joined again today by Professor Dr. Yaakov Rapkin, professor emeritus of history at the University of Montreal, a scholar at the Montreal Center for International Studies, and a founding member of Canada's Independent Jewish Voices. He's the author, most recently, of **Israel in Palestine** and **Zionism Decoded in 101 Quotes**. Yaakov, welcome back.

#Yakov Rabkin

Thank you.

#Pascal

Yaakov, you recently wrote this article that we published on my Substack. It's called **Israel: A Danger to Jews and Non-Jews Alike.** In it, you wrote about the synagogue that was destroyed on Passover by Israel in Tehran. Could you first unpack a little bit what exactly happened, and then talk to us about what you think this means for Israel and Jews worldwide?

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, the episode itself was apparently a rocket that fell on a synagogue in Tehran and destroyed it. It also destroyed many of the holy books. I don't know if it was targeted on purpose or if it was collateral damage, but there's tremendous symbolism in that. Here you have a state that claims to be a Jewish state, destroying the holiest Jewish place—if you like—the synagogue, the books, the scrolls, and so on. That's why I wrote about it, because I'd been to that synagogue. I was in Iran about ten years ago, I visited Jews there, and I even wrote a little travelogue about it, which I can put in your description if you like.

The Jews in Iran that I met were living really full Jewish lives, while at the same time being full Iranian citizens. I think it's very important to understand that the view of Jews as alien—which was common in Europe and may still be common in parts of Europe today—is not something Jews experienced elsewhere. We tend to project this European image of Jews onto Jews in other places. And I think that in the countries of Islam, without idealizing them, life was a lot more harmonious and peaceful. In the case of Jews in Iran, they've been there for 25 centuries. They saw the arrival of Islam, they saw all kinds of things, and they feel—and are perceived—as Iranians, not as an alien group. And here comes the difference: for Israel, every Jew is a potential citizen of Israel, because according to Israeli ideology, the only safe place for a Jew to be is Israel.

And Jews don't belong anywhere, because sooner or later they will be persecuted, murdered, or discriminated against. Anti-Semitism is eternal, and therefore the only solution to the Jewish question—the *Judenfrage* of Theodor Herzl—was to concentrate Jews in one ethnic nation-state, and then Jews would live happily ever after. Well, this is the scenario that many Jews didn't accept. It was a European—East European, to be more exact—idea, rooted in the ethnic nationalism of Eastern and Central Europe, and it was totally alien to Jews elsewhere. Avishai Margalit, a colleague of mine from Oxford University, wrote a wonderful memoir recently, and he mentions that he once asked his mother what Zionism was when he was a kid. And she said, "Oh, it's an Ashkenazi thing. It's not our thing."

#Pascal

Ashkenazi.

#Yakov Rabkin

For European Jews, it was "not us." And indeed, I think in the 1930s, Jews from the countries of Islam made up less than one-half percent of the delegates to the Zionist Congress. So we're talking about a European phenomenon that was alien to Jews elsewhere. And that's a long answer to your question. The symbolism of striking the synagogue in Iran, for me, was too great not to write this article.

#Pascal

So, I mean, it's a very good point you bring up. It could be on purpose, or it could be an accident. The one thing it's probably not—I saw some tweets online saying, "Oh, this was the Iranians who blew it up as a false flag"—but that makes absolutely no sense. As you said, they're fully integrated, and actually the Jews of Iran condemned Israel's attacks against their state. So I think it's very important to understand how Judaism in Iran functions. When you were there, did you have any more observations about how this faith exists among others within the Iranian state?

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, the Islamic Republic takes religion seriously, not surprisingly. Therefore, they treat religious minorities with respect—Zoroastrians, the old religion of Iran, and Jews. Now, what does that mean in practice? When I arrived in Tehran, I visited several synagogues, and after being in Europe, what struck me was that there were no guards, no police cars in front of them, because there was no need for that. In one case, there was an old-age home and a kosher restaurant, and you could just drive in with a truck. I mean, it was perfectly open, normal. That normality is what struck me. Another aspect is that the Islamic Republic imposed religious education on all students, on all schoolchildren. As a result, young Jews—young Jewish schoolchildren—have been sent to rabbis to study for ten years. The level of Jewish literacy and observance of commandments is certainly a lot higher today than it was before the Islamic Republic.

#Pascal

Wow.

#Yakov Rabkin

And another thing—you know, I was there during the holidays, and it was Shabbat. Of course, I was invited to the table, and there was alcohol, as usual, in Jewish homes on Shabbat. I asked, "Well, is it legal to have alcohol?" He said, "Yes, as Jews we're allowed to have alcohol, and there's no problem."

#Pascal

You know, I have this anecdote because I have a close Iranian friend here, and he brought me wine—actually from Azerbaijan—but he's from the Azeri part in the north, from Tabriz. He brought me wine and said, "We make the same wine near our city." And I said, "Oh, really?" But yeah, again, I was bewildered because, isn't it a Muslim country? Isn't it supposed to be forbidden? And then he looked at me and said, "But look, Pascal, winemaking is much older than Islam, right? It was there long before Islam, and Islam is just one of the newer things—they didn't stop that at all. I mean, they tried to tone it down, but winemaking is still part of it." So Iran, in a sense, the image we're fed here in the West—of Iran being a place where every woman walks around in a big black carpet and whatnot—is just utterly ridiculous, isn't it?

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, when I was there, I saw that indeed most women—practically everyone—had their heads covered. But the word “covered” includes a whole range of things, from a serious black chador to, I would say, a scarf or something almost invisible on the head. I remember on my first Shabbat in Tehran, I walked through a park and saw couples behaving like couples do anywhere else, right? So I didn’t see anything unusual there. Of course, there was this insistence on covering the hair and not drinking alcohol and all that. But in a way, it reminded me of the Soviet Union under Brezhnev—there was the social ideology that people paid tribute to, and then there was reality, and the two didn’t quite coincide.

#Pascal

And maybe let’s go back a bit to this issue of how Israel tries to portray itself as the only safe place for Jews, and actually as the country of the Jews. Our colleague Jeffrey Sachs kept saying several times that it makes him mad. He says, “No, Netanyahu is not my president. Just because I’m a Jew doesn’t mean he represents me at all.” When it comes to the Jews in West Asia—in Persia, in Iran—can you talk to us a little bit about the impact of Zionism and Israel on the lives of Jews in those different communities, in Tehran, in Baghdad, and so on? I know Avishai Margalit also wrote about that very famously. But can you tell us a bit about what the impact of Zionism was on those local communities?

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, as I said, Jews from Arab lands—or Arab Jews from lands of Islam—had not played any important role in the emergence or development of either Zionism or the Zionist settlement in Palestine. However, when the state was unilaterally declared in May 1948, Jews were associated by some leaders with Israel, particularly because Israel itself was saying that it was the state of all Jews in the world. So there was some tension. In the case of Iraq, there had also been violence in 1941 against Jews, so there was a certain background, though unrelated, as far as I know, to Zionism. But what happened after 1948, for example in Iraq, was that the Israeli government negotiated a deal with the Iraqi government that would allow Jews to leave.

But Jews were in no rush to leave. See, this is very important, because Jews had lived there for centuries, and like Avi Shlaim, they were settled, they spoke Arabic, they were Arabs for all practical purposes—just with a different confession. So Zionist activists had to do something to prod them to leave. And here we come to a very sad episode, a sad page in the history of Zionism, when Zionist activists actually committed acts of violence against Jews and against Jewish institutions in order to push them to leave. You know, there was an explosion in Jewish institutions in Iraq. There were similar events in Egypt. In Morocco, Zionist activists frightened Jewish girls.

Well, the Zionist activists actually told me—one of them told me this whole story—and it may be worth telling you. They would dress like Muslims, be taken to another town in Morocco where no one knew them, and they would harass Jewish girls in order to frighten their parents. The worst thing that could happen was that a girl might be molested. And that really moved quite a few people out of Morocco to Israel or somewhere else. Many years later, after I heard the story, I met a Moroccan Jewish woman who actually confirmed that she was on the receiving end of it in her town. She said, “No, there was a very strange episode where some Arabs attacked us, but they didn’t beat us up very badly. They were just yelling and screaming more than anything else.” But that was enough to frighten her parents.

I mean, that was bad enough. And that’s very—again, it’s understandable, but for the Zionist movement, for Ben-Gurion, for those who created the state, the most important thing was the *raison d’état*, the *Staatsräson*. That’s how they behaved during the Nazi genocide. And famously—or infamously—Ben-Gurion said he would rather save half of the Jewish children if they could be sent to Palestine, rather than all of them if they were sent somewhere else. So for them, Jews were human material. The European human material was exhausted because of the genocide, and that’s why they had to resort to human material from Arab countries, from Iran, and so on. For them, Jews were a means to create and strengthen the state. The state was far more important than the individual.

#Pascal

Hey, very brief intermission—because I was recently banned from YouTube, and although I’m back, this could happen again anytime. So please consider subscribing not only here but also to my mailing list on Substack. That’s pascallottaz.substack.com; the link’s going to be in the description below. And now, back to the video. This is something that is, I think, very fundamental about the entire political movement, and we need to point that out. When we talk about Zionism—I’ve learned that from you—what we’re talking about is a political movement, a movement that wants to create Israel as the home of the Jews, by the Jews, a Jewish state.

And that’s the whole goal. Now, when you create something like that, what you need in modern parlance would be, of course, users, right? Any kind of big app that wants to be important needs users. And Israel needed users—it needed takers. And it could only take from a very confined pool of Jews available worldwide, right? So these incidents you’re describing are Jewish terrorism against other Jews in certain places, especially in the Arab world, in order to increase the number of users of Israel, isn’t it?

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, I wouldn’t call them users. I’d say subjects—but it’s a matter of terminology.

#Pascal

Okay. Do we have other instances where Zionism was directly involved in, you know, riding the wave of what in Europe, of course, is a very old and very nasty tradition—the pogroms, right? Pogroms against Jews. And those were real for hundreds of years, in Prague and so on, sporadically. You'd have the Christian majority trying to throw out these Jewish communities with really horrible methods, right? Do we have instances where the Zionists used such stereotypes to convince other Jews around the world to actually flock to and settle in Palestine?

#Yakov Rabkin

Yes, indeed. I would say that the word "pogrom" is a Russian word that really applies to areas we now call Ukraine, Moldova, and the Baltic republics. That's where the real pogrom violence against Jews took place. In Central and Western Europe, there were expulsions, mass murders, blood libels—all kinds of things. But it wasn't entirely a dark history. There were episodes of violence, yes, but it's totally wrong to present the history of Jews, even in Europe, as a lachrymose history, as someone once put it. So yes, there was violence, and the pogroms became better known because they were happening at the turn of the 20th century, when many Europeans believed they had become enlightened—and then suddenly saw that these things were still happening.

How is this history presented today in most Israeli schools and most Zionist schools elsewhere? As I said, this history is presented as an uninterrupted chain of abuses, murders, expulsions. In other words, Jews were always maltreated. And antisemitism—or hatred of Jews, I'm not going to go into the difference between the two—is eternal, and it's impossible to uproot. These are the cardinal articles of faith for the Zionists: antisemitism is eternal, it's impossible to uproot, and therefore the only solution is for all Jews to live in their own state, which is not very different from ethnic nationalism in Eastern Europe.

#Pascal

Yeah.

#Yakov Rabkin

So indeed, it comes from the same root. And that's why you had fascist regimes between the wars in practically all the ethnic nation-states created after the Versailles Treaty. The Baltic republics, Poland, Hungary—they all ended up having fascist regimes well before the Nazis.

#Pascal

The big difference with the Zionist project, though, is that Zionism is also inherently settler-colonial, right? It wants to implant itself in a place and dominate that place, which already has—or had—another population there. To what extent does this aspect of, you know, this being... I should maybe clarify that there were always Jews in Palestine. We know that. And some of them are actually still

there, and they are anti-Zionist. But because they don't identify with the Ashkenazis, they also have a complicated relationship.

#Yakov Rabkin

They may be Ashkenazi themselves, but they don't identify with the Zionists.

#Pascal

Can you unpack that a little more—this aspect of the settler-colonial nature of the Zionist project?

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, originally the Zionist project was about creating a state for the Jews—not a Jewish state. Herzl's work, **Der Judenstaat**, literally means "a state for the Jews." So these were utterly secular, many of them socialist Jews who had abandoned religion and decided to create a new Hebrew. They wouldn't even use the word "Jew"—a new Hebrew in a new land that would be full of justice, harmony, and peace. They created settler colonies in Palestine. Many of them were kibbutzim, where indeed there was justice and equality—no private property. They were creating a new society, educating a new Hebrew man: intrepid, courageous, daring, the very opposite of the antisemitic stereotype of the Jew. In the book you mentioned, **101 Quotes About Zionism**, I quote Jabotinsky, one of the ideologues of Zionism.

And he said that in order to understand what kind of new Hebrew we want, we have to look at the **yid**—he uses the Russian word **zhid**—and create someone diametrically opposed. So here's a very important point. Whereas the nationalism of Poles, Ukrainians, or Lithuanians strove to preserve cultural heritage and language, the Zionists wanted to break away from Jewish continuity. They were carrying out a revolution. They disdained their native, their mother tongue, Yiddish, and created a new vernacular: modern Hebrew. So it was a revolutionary project, definitely different from those of the Eastern European nation-states. And since they were doing it in a country that was already populated, that created tension. For some of these early Zionist settlers, it was a difficult problem to resolve—how to reconcile their colonial state, so to speak, with their ideals of justice and equality.

#Pascal

But they understood that, right? I mean, in your book you also have quotes from—I forget who it was, not Herzl, somebody after him—who said, "Well, we must understand why the Arabs in Palestine do not receive us with open arms."

#Yakov Rabkin

Yeah, well, it was quite clear. And actually, the early Zionist settlers were quite open about it. They knew there had to be a preponderant military force to terrorize the locals so they would never rise against us. And that's the policy Israel pursues to this day—to terrorize the local population and neighboring states so they won't rise against us.

#Pascal

And this, then, has to do with the new type of Jew that a good part of the Zionist movement wanted to create. You also used a German word—the *Muskeljude*, or “muscle Jew,” right?—to explain what kind of very macho and militarized Jewish identity these people were striving for, which, in my view, links directly to the IDF. But what was it that the early Zionists thought—why was violence such a necessary part of the project?

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, I think part of the reason was that they had experienced pogroms and violence themselves, or at least saw violence around them, and they thought that was how things should be done. Moreover, they saw themselves as part of the colonial movement, which, at the beginning of the 20th century, was perfectly acceptable in Europe. So for them, the opinion of the local population didn't really matter that much. They essentially created a separate society—developed a separate society apart from the locals. But they also had a kind of vision of a state.

And that's why the Zionist leaders rejected the British idea of convening a representative assembly in the 1930s as a way of preparing Palestine for independence. Because the normal scenario would be to create this kind of pseudo-parliament, and then that parliament would take over from the British. Well, that didn't happen. So I think that living by the sword is something that's part of Zionist ideology and part of the colonial experience anywhere. Look, we don't know any settler colony that developed in peace—be it Argentina, the United States, Australia—it doesn't really matter. It always resulted in violence. And Israeli historians are very open about it.

They say that's the predicament. And Hannah Arendt, whom I quote in my book, said in 1948, during the war that Israel waged against its neighbors, that it doesn't matter how far the borders of Israel are extended or how many citizens it has—it will always face hostility from the population that was displaced, that was expelled, and so on. And, you know, it's very important to realize that this isn't something unusual. It has nothing to do with a clash of civilizations or some eternal hatred of Jews. I think if Palestine had been colonized by the Swiss, there would be tremendous anti-Swiss feeling in Palestine.

#Pascal

But an inherent part of the entire project is, of course, the claim that it's not a settler colony—that the Jews are the original heirs of the land. It's the Arabs who are the unwelcome intruders, who took

over long after the Jews were actually given the land, right? So this... probably—correct me if I'm wrong—but a diehard Zionist would get angry at me if I said they're a settler-colonial state, right? They'd say, "No, no, no, we're the locals. They're the intruders," right?

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, it's a matter of terminology. The largest bank in Israel, Bank Leumi, was founded in the early 20th century under the name Jewish Colonial Trust. Right. I just wonder why.

#Pascal

No, I mean, the question I have in my mind is how Zionism is such a huge problem, and that it brings with it a lot of violence. The source of that violence, for me, is quite clear at this point. But how do we induce a change of thought among Zionists, to get to a place where the violence goes away, and where Zionism opens up to something that can reconcile with society—into the larger regional society? Do you think anything like that is thinkable, possible? You know, not from today to tomorrow, but over the next 30 or 40 years?

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, this was the vision of quite a few German Zionists in Palestine, including Martin Buber, and including Einstein—who wasn't in Palestine but was sympathetic to this idea. They thought that Palestine should be open for Jewish settlement, without, however, displacing the local population, and that they should live in peace with them. There were many organizations of that sort created before 1948. Of course, they withered afterwards. But I think that—and I wrote about it in 2002, so I have to own up to it—I think the only way to bring about peace and an end to violence is to do what Jews do everywhere else, namely, live as a minority in different countries.

And the area between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River has pretty much equal numbers of Jews, Palestinian Arabs, and others. So if there is equality—political equality, civil rights given to everyone, with certain measures of economic compensation and so on—I think things could be worked out. They cannot be worked out if the idea is to expel everyone, to kill, like in Gaza—genocide in Gaza—and the slow but pretty active expulsion of Palestinian Arabs from the West Bank. There's harassment, there are murders every day, every day.

#Pascal

And southern Lebanon—Lebanon in general—I mean, everything surrounding Israel is basically under a constant threat of being bombed by Israel, with new security parameters extended, right? What we've seen in Syria, in the Golan Heights—this is just constant, this constant drive to have

more and then protect more, to create more and then protect what you have more. This expansionary impulse is almost part and parcel of how Zionism has been working for the last hundred years, right?

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, there is one important element in all that: most Israelis believe that all these acts are acts of self-defense. Right. And moreover, because of this ideology of being the eternal victim, they think the Palestinians are today's reincarnation of the Nazis. Yes, you hear that very openly. And therefore, it gives them tremendous—how would I put it—tremendous force to do the horrible things they've been doing, all the while considering themselves to be victims. Yeah. This is the most interesting part of it: this tremendous self-righteousness, daring, and habitual self-weaponization of the memory of anti-Jewish violence, be it in Europe. So, for example, I follow what happens in Israel, among other things, by looking at Israel National News, which is the site of the settlers—where you get the real thing, the real thinking of people who are the vanguard of Israel today.

#Pascal

Do they speak in English or in Hebrew?

#Yakov Rabkin

Oh, you can do it in English, in Russian, in Hebrew—maybe they even have it in French as well. So just go there; you know, I'm doing a commercial for them—Israelnationalnews.com. And you'll see how self-righteous they are, how convinced they are of the justice of their cause, that no one has any right to criticize Israel. Look how one of the Israeli ministers recently attacked Chancellor Merz for timidly criticizing Israel. So you have to read these kinds of people; you have to know what they're thinking, because they are the motive force of Israel. The time when the eloquent and elegant Abba Eban, the foreign minister of Israel, would deliver wonderful speeches at the United Nations is over. Now they speak a very rough language—the language of force, the language of dominance. So you don't have to uncover anything; it's in your face. Yeah.

#Pascal

But I wonder what that is, because, you know, for the longest time, this kind of brute force—the violent nature of Israel—was actually quite well hidden. I mean, internationally, right? Just imagine: a mother of two somewhere in rural Japan, a father of three somewhere in the mountains of Switzerland—they would have a very different image of Israel, maybe the way it was portrayed in that Hollywood movie **Exodus**. No, no, I'm sorry, not **Exodus**—the other one about the German guy who saved many Jews. Oh, **Schindler's List**. **Schindler's List** is shot in black and white, and it, of course, depicts the horrible suffering of the Jews during the Holocaust and how this man saved a few of them.

And at the end of the movie, it turns into color, and it's set in Israel, right? Where they remember the dead, and Israel is shown as the land that's now going to save the Jews once and for all. A lot of people have that image. But the underlying violence that was needed to make that happen is completely hidden—and it has been hidden for a long time. Now it's coming to the fore. And this is where it connects to Israel blowing up a synagogue in Tehran—it's becoming clear, obvious, that this violence is part and parcel of the Zionist project. And it's also violence against Jews, against anyone who's not aligned with the political project. And that's kind of something new, isn't it? That it's so obvious now.

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, it's obvious for scholars, intellectuals, and people who have studied it. And I think one of the reasons Benjamin Netanyahu started the war when he did, forty-something days ago, is that he felt the ice under his feet was melting. Support for Israel is melting in the United States. Today, the majority of Americans are pro-Palestinian, not pro-Israeli. That's unprecedented. And that's been the case in Europe for a long time. It's just not being translated into government policies. Well, this has something to do with the peculiarity of democracy. But what we do see is that Israel is losing support. You know, the fact that a member of the Polish parliament recently displayed an Israeli flag with a swastika in the middle instead of the Star of David tells you about the breaking of the consensus concerning Israel.

#Pascal

Right.

#Yakov Rabkin

So the propaganda can only work so much. Of course, it's still there. I think a study was done on BBC coverage of violence between Israelis and Palestinians, and one Palestinian death is worth thirty-four times less than one Israeli death in terms of BBC coverage per capita. Horrible. But this has to do with the old, I would say, venerable European tradition of white racism. So it has to do with that. And, you know, recently the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution about reparations for slavery. And three countries voted against it: the United States, Israel, and Argentina. And the European Union abstained.

#Pascal

Yeah, everybody — including Switzerland.

#Yakov Rabkin

And Switzerland — I didn't know that — but as far as I remember, Switzerland didn't have any colonies or slavery, for that matter.

#Pascal

Yes and no. Not their own, but they piggybacked on everybody else. Wherever you had European colonizers, you had the Swiss doing the trades the primary colonizer didn't want to do. They picked up the crumbs — piggyback colonialism.

#Yakov Rabkin

I see. So... there's a movement to rehabilitate colonialism.

#Pascal

Yeah.

#Yakov Rabkin

Seriously. There are signs of it. And the fact that the United States accepted a few thousand political refugees last year — all of them white South Africans.

#Pascal

Yeah.

#Yakov Rabkin

That tells you something about the changes we're living through. So, on the one hand, yes, the support for Israel is melting, and people are realizing what Israel is about. On the other hand, there are strong forces trying to return us to a time of colonial domination and white pride, European pride. And we shouldn't forget that the colonial past is very, very recent.

#Pascal

Yeah. And I keep saying that Europeans — or the general population in Europe — think of colonialism the way they think of feudalism. They know it's part of their history, they know it was bad, but they think, like, oh, it's long gone, we stopped that, we know that. But no, it's not. It continued straight into today. And now the interesting thing is, as you say, there are forces, especially in the United States, with the speeches of Pete Hegseth, but also others — Donald Trump and, of course, Marco Rubio — who say, like, no, we should be proud of our colonial past.

And it's actually a shame that the beautiful colonial empires made way for this unruly jungle, as Josep Borrell would call it. So there's a real danger that parts of North America and Europe will slip back into a mentality of, like, "Actually, we need to control it in order to make it beautiful." And now we're under threat from this jungle on the outside, which is very similar to the Zionist ideology of being under threat from their immediate environment. So there's still a lot of compatibility, in my view, between Zionism and European colonial dominance.

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, again, it's quite obvious, because Israel hosts conferences of right-wing movements in Europe. Right. And Israel is the example to follow for right-wing parties in the Netherlands, in Germany, in Hungary. Because that's how you deal with these not-quite-white people — that's the real thing. Israel is admired. And you may have noticed that even those who tried to attack the Capitol on January 6th, after the election of Joe Biden — they were unhappy about Trump's loss — some of them went there with Israeli flags. You know, Israel is the embodiment of the most right-wing, racist ideology today, and when you look at the friends that Israel has, it tells you something about Israel.

Again, it's important not to demonize the people, because I think many Israelis are, first and foremost, victims of their own state. That's why there's quite a bit of exodus from Israel — not only because of the war and the difficulties of living under constant threat, but because many don't want to be part of it. They prefer to live in normal countries where they don't have to run to shelters three times a day. So I think this message is being received in Israel: that all the previous wars were waged somewhere else.

Of course, there were Israeli soldiers killed, and families mourned and all that. But Israelis didn't run to shelters. There were no missiles falling on Israel—no serious missiles. There were kind of homemade Hamas missiles. But now you have sophisticated Iranian missiles that have fallen on Israel. We still don't know, because of censorship, what exactly they did in Israel. But if people were running to the shelters three times a day, well, they must be doing something. So I think there may be an awakening within Israel, among part of the population, that they might be better off in Brooklyn.

#Pascal

Right. Which would, of course, be quite a large threat to Zionism. Maybe just—what can we do? Because there is this danger, of course, and you write about it in your essay. Let me just show it again. I mean, you actually created a title called *"Israel: A Danger to Jews and Non-Jews Alike?"* And I think this question is very important—that the way Israel and Zionism work, they pose a threat not only to today's Jewish communities in the Arab world and abroad, but that maybe this will again invite violence against Jews, because people connect these things in the wrong way. You make that point: a lot of the Jews in Israel are actually victims of their own state. What can we do to prevent, if the pendulum ever swings back, this false association of all Jews with the Zionist project?

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, one thing we can do is act in our own countries. I think we have greater impact where we live. And one very important issue is to explain that the state of Israel represents the state of Israel—it doesn't represent the Jews.

#Yakov Rabkin

And Jews have always been divided when it comes to Zionism and Israel. Many Jews, especially younger ones, are very active in anti-Zionist movements and in criticizing Israel and so on. I've explained some of this before—since I once did a commercial for Israel National News, I feel free to do one for my own book, **Israel in Palestine**. It's a very short book that helps people understand that it's completely wrong to associate Jews in their own countries with Israel. People might say, "Well, look at the Jewish institutions." Well, I don't have to go far—in Montreal, every official Jewish institution has an Israeli flag in front of it, even an old-age home.

And they're consistent—claims by the organized Jewish community: "We stand by Israel now," and all that. What people don't see, because it's more hidden, is the role of Jews in denouncing Israel. Independent Jewish Voices, which I had the honor of helping to found, does tremendous work in the press and media. But even among regular people, it's important to realize that many Jews—particularly the so-called ultra-Orthodox Jews, the most visible ones, you know, in black-and-white attire—are also the most vulnerable. Because if someone associates Israel with Jews and says, "Well, I'm going to hurt the Jews for what they're doing to Palestinians," the easiest Jews to find would be those, because they're identifiable, they're visible.

You can't tell a Zionist from a non-Zionist—they look the same. But you can easily recognize an ultra-Orthodox, a Haredi Jew. So it's very important, in our own countries, to debunk the myth of the Jew as an eternal victim, and to fight against anti-Semitism, because one of the main purveyors of anti-Semitism is the state of Israel. And this is not something accidental, or, as they say in French, a **concoeur de circonstances**—that is, circumstantial. Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, wrote very clearly in his diary: "Anti-Semites will be our most reliable friends and anti-Semitic countries our most reliable allies."

#Pascal

It's so—you know, history is littered with ironies, but this one isn't even a real one. It's the use of hate in others in order to accomplish your own goals, which themselves have something to do with hate or spite toward another group. It's a very sick sociological phenomenon, this ping-pong that's going on here. I wonder how to break the chain to get away from it. But as you said, clarifying the concepts and clarifying what causes it is probably a major part of it.

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You know, it's very simple. On the 60th anniversary of Israel, I published an article in a German newspaper, the **Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung**, on the lessons of the Nazi genocide. And I said there were two kinds of lessons you can learn. One, you have to be very vigilant not to allow a democracy to degenerate into a racist or oppressive state, and you have to develop human and democratic rights in the country and protect them. That's one lesson. The other lesson is: we were weak, we should be strong. They killed us because they wanted to have a pure German state, a pure Aryan state. So we will be strong and create a pure Jewish state. And that's the lesson the Zionists have learned. So there are two lessons, which are obviously incompatible.

#Pascal

They are. They are. And learning the right lesson is always the most difficult thing from history. I just want to point out again to everyone that you can find Yaakov's essay on my Substack, **Israel: A Danger to Jews and Non-Jews Alike**, and also this wonderful book that I highly recommend, **Zionism Decoded in 101 Quotes**. We're still working on a project about this, so stay tuned—there's more to come. Yaakov Repkin, thank you very much for your time today.

#Yakov Rabkin

Thank you for inviting me.