

 הכנס לעתיד העם היהודי  
The Conference on the Future  
of the Jewish People **2017**  
28.2-1.3

---

**SHIFTING TRENDS IN THE WEST AND  
THEIR IMPACT ON ISRAEL AND  
THE JEWISH PEOPLE**

---

JPPI's 2017 Conference on the Future of the Jewish People will explore the social, political, economic, and ideological shifts taking place in the Western world that could influence the future of the Jewish people. The conference seeks to identify key trends and gauge their possible ramifications. A special emphasis will be placed on developing recommendations for policy measures that can help mitigate negative trends and leverage new opportunities.

To assist in framing conference discussions, JPPI prepared this preliminary background paper which defines and describes the nature of the changes taking place in the West, as well as potential ways they may influence the future of Israel and the Jewish people. (We should point out that the possible avenues of influence may sometimes be contradictory, and the question of their becoming a reality is surrounded by the same uncertainty that defines much of the world order today.) As developments taking place in Israel itself affect the Western world's approach to Israel and the Jewish people, we have included a section (Part 2) that points to a number of relevant trends in Israel.

## Part 1

### A. Upsetting the Existing Domestic Political Order in the West

Alongside the upheaval in the existing world order, we have also witnessed an erosion of the stability of the political order in the West in recent years, as the doubts surrounding the validity of the values at its foundation grow: the liberal-capitalist economic system based on free markets and globalization.

The continued effects of the 2008 economic crisis, combined with free-market capitalist forces and globalization trends, have funnelled many blue-collar jobs overseas, hurting mostly the working class, and leading to growing economic polarization. Migration, from Latin America to the United States, and from Africa and the Middle East to Europe, including illegals, has exacerbated frustrations as many fear these immigrants

will compete for scarce jobs. Beyond this, the immigration and resulting demographic trends have fed into a sense of cultural displacement among white Christians, who feel increasingly like a minority “in their own country.” As Muslim minorities expand demographically and become more assertive and more integrated into local politics, so does the fear and concern in Europe. The wave of refugees, the largest since the end of World War II, is seen in Europe as a demographic, cultural, and security threat. At the same time, the wave of terror rooted in radical Islam is striking at the heart of Europe and adding to a sense of fear and disorientation. The formation of ISIS, and the thousands of young Muslims from Europe who have gone off to join its ranks, signalled to many Europeans the failure of the open border, multi-cultural system, and the failure of current political structures to deal with the threat.

Social media based information sources and partisan news outlets do not allow adequate filtering, fact checking, or balanced reporting. In many cases, information reaching the public is biased or twisted to serve a specific agenda. This, combined with a general frustration and disappointment with the traditional ruling classes, seen as corrupt or out of touch, has fueled the rise of populist parties and politicians seeking to take on the ruling elites. One trend we are watching is the rise of ultra-nationalist right-wing political figures and parties espousing – with an Islamophobic soundtrack – populist economic, immigration, and security policies. In the United States, the phenomenon has manifested itself with the election of Donald Trump; in the UK with “Brexit” and the popularity of Nigel Farage; in France, with the rise of Marine Le Pen; in Germany, with Frauke Petry and the AfD (Alternative to Germany); in the Netherlands, with Geert Wilders; and in Austria, with the Freedom party – and more.

## **Potential Impacts on Israel and the Jewish People**

### **Israel**

- Israel’s strategic standing improves due to the rise of the new US administration, which publically proclaims its support of Israel and exhibits hostility to Israel’s enemies.
- An increased sense of political urgency in Israel to take advantage of the “window of opportunity” that may have opened with Trump’s election to dispel the doubt hovering over the legal status of Judea and Samaria: eradicating the two-state solution from the agenda and annexing the territory to Israel – in part or in its entirety.

- Rise in support for Israel given the strength of right-wing populist parties in Europe that mostly support Israel (not Le Pen's party, which supports banning, for example, external Jewish symbols such as the *kippa* from the public sphere).
- Increased support for Israel based on the growing fear of Islamic terror and immigration. Increasing openness to Israel's claims that there is no difference between terror aimed at Israel and terror aimed at the West.
- Increased legitimization of nationalist trends in Israel.
- Radicalization among the most liberal elements of the Democratic Party in the US (minorities, millennials) accompanied by a negative approach to Israel.
- Continued erosion of Israel's bi-partisan support in the US (based on the domestic polarization in the US on the one hand and the strengthening of the Israeli right on the other).

## **Diaspora Jewry**

- Societies that shy away from liberal and cosmopolitan values and tilt toward nationalism and the development of their internal identity, could evince hostility to minorities including the Jewish community.
- Economic pressures on the middle class (in the US and Europe) could strengthen anti-Semitic outbursts and turn the Jews, who are relatively successful economically, into scapegoats.
- The preferential treatment Jews have received in Europe since the Holocaust (additional rights, direct access to political leaders, increased economic support) could be under threat.
- A decline in the political power of American Jews, given their lack of unity and the internal Jewish polarization with respect to Israel.
- The continued undermining of Israel's bi-partisan support, and the growing gap between Democrats and Republicans regarding Israel could further erode the influence of American pro-Israel organizations (despite that support for Israel continues to remain one of the few bi-partisan issues).
- A potential decrease in the power of Jewish organizations on both the local and national levels, given the general disappointment with the current leadership and systems. Alternatives posed by social media help propel this trend and create space for virtual dialogue communities, which tend to self-isolate.

- Given the general increased political and social polarization, the potential exists for a similar polarization within the US Jewish community.
- A widening divide between parts of the American Jewish community and the organizational Jewish leadership that has to cooperate with the Trump administration
- Most of American Jewry (about 70 percent) has historically been affiliated with the liberal-democratic base and the values of human rights, equality, and opposition to racism and discrimination. This means that the majority of American Jews are firmly on the losing side of the elections. This creates a double dilemma for some Jewish leaders: the first – how to oppose Trump and his ideas but maintain the identity of a loyal minority; the second – how to oppose Trump and his ideas without harming the interests of the State of Israel, which sees him as a close friend.
- Deepening the divide between parts of the liberal Jewish community in the United States and Israel, which is becoming more right-wing, nationalistic, and religious.

## B. Upsetting the Existing International Order

It is clear that in recent years there has been a weakening of the cornerstones at the base of the world order as we have known it since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. This order was based on American dominance (even while the international system tilted toward multi-polarity), institutions of “global governance” (such as the UN, World Bank, IMF, IAEA and others), trans-Atlantic cooperation between the United States and Europe, expanding globalization and international trade and free markets based on liberal values.

In the framework of this world order, the United States was the dominant external actor in the Middle East, and Israel benefited from its close relationship with America. A number of elements led to the destabilizing of these cornerstones: American “exhaustion” from being the global policeman (including investing in expensive wars in the Middle East); the Obama Doctrine which limited the intervention of American forces while prioritizing dialogue and acting within multi-lateral frameworks; “the Putin Doctrine” which took advantage of the diminished US role (seen as a show of American weakness) and strengthened Russia’s global position; China’s rising power;

Europe's weakening and the growing doubts over its collective identity and future; the upsetting of the domestic-political order (see above).

The Middle East provided an important contribution to this trend as the old order collapsed, turning Syria in to a bloody arena, sending waves of terror and refugees to Europe, testing both the Obama and Putin Doctrines. This upset of the world order has created dangers for Israel and troubling fissures in its relationship with the United States on the one hand, while on the other hand Israel has managed to maintain working relations with Russia and China and to develop regional alliances.

In the emerging international reality, we are witnessing rising nationalism and populism and a growing critique of globalization; the aggressive moves of Moscow in Eastern Europe and the Middle East; strategic Chinese assertiveness (South China Sea, penetrating deep into Africa, and its economic infrastructure initiative in the framework of its "One Belt One Road" policy" (a modern Silk Road)); cracks in the EU (Brexit) which is also under the heavy strain of terror and refugees; the strengthening of right-wing nationalist parties in Europe; the rise of alternative regional institutions (The Chinese Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Shanghai Europe Asia Alliance); and the rise of Turkey and Iran's weight as regional powers.

The ascendance of the Trump administration is the most obvious expression of the manner in which the domestic-political order is being upset and how it can dramatically influence the current world order. It's not yet clear how the United States will navigate between an isolationist trend and possible impulses for international aggression. It's possible that Trump will try to reach a grand bargain with Putin in order to enact a new world order. This will not be a simple task given the many areas of contention between the two powers. The range of possibilities as to the future of Washington-Moscow relations is wide: tight cooperation on one end and a new Cold War on the other. As for the US and China, there is the possibility of an escalation into a trade war. The Trump administration could also weaken the UN, NATO, and other American alliances. (That is, in the framework of a general American trend of moving away from a sense of American exceptionalism and responsibility for world peace and to maintaining it, which has characterized American foreign policy in the past.)

## Possible Implications for Israel and the Jewish People

### Israel

The upsetting of the world order and the possibility that a new order will coalesce holds challenges but also opportunities for Israel:

- In a world in which nationalist and isolationist tendencies seem to be on the rise, the impulse to intervene in Israel could fade. On the other hand, this might also erode the inclination to come to Israel's aid in times of need.
- The growing legitimacy of nationalism over cosmopolitanism could lead to greater acceptance in the West for Israel's position: a state seeking to maintain and assert its Jewish national identity.
- It is reasonable to assume that the relationship with the American administration will strengthen and maybe even become a force multiplier for improving relations between Israel and key countries in the Middle East.
- If the United States begins to favor a realpolitik foreign policy of "American interests" over the current American commitment to a clear moral vision of the world, it could decide not to support Israel on issues that it deems to be in contradiction with its material interests.
- The US focus on domestic issues while neglecting its role as global leader, especially in the Middle East (continuing the Obama Doctrine) would harm Israel and even erode its deterrent force.
- American-Russian understandings could limit Israel's maneuvering room. At the same time, an American-Russian or American-Chinese conflict could create risks and dilemmas for Israel.
- Presently, it is difficult to assess how the emerging international reality will influence the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Will the US continue to take a leading role in achieving a settlement or will it leave the issue to other actors?
- In a world that increasingly relies on scientific and technological innovation, Israel has the potential for significant achievements. In addition to the economic benefits, meeting this potential will strengthen Israel's "soft power" in the West (and in the world generally) and strengthen Israel's image as the "Start-up Nation."

- Advanced technologies could help close the qualitative gap between Israel and its enemies, who could equip themselves with advanced arms that do not require a special infrastructure of quality education and training (which is required today to operate an advanced military force).

## **World Jewry**

- Innovative technologies benefit social atomization and could thus endanger Jewish solidarity (“the end of the community campfire”). Alongside the erosion of the role of veteran organizations, closed virtual dialogue groups are developing that isolate themselves from society at large.
- New technologies – those that make intercontinental travel more efficient and affordable as well as social networks – allow a strengthening of connections between Diaspora and Israeli Jews. Virtual Jewish dialogue communities are expanding. At the same time, individuals have greater exposure to alternative identities. The deepening of “leisure culture” reinforces the potential for such developments.
- A dynamic world characterized by scientific and technological innovation tends to reward excellence. This opens new horizons for the Jewish people, which has a long record of achievement and excellence in these areas.



# Part 2

## Shifts in Israel that Could Influence the West's Approach to Israel and the Jewish People

### A. The Rise of the Religious Nationalist Right in Israel

In recent years, we have seen the rise of right-wing religious nationalism in Israel. This trend is growing due to a number of factors: demographic trends in Israel; the crisis of the Israeli left; growing doubts over the legitimacy of ruling elites; the collapse of the Oslo peace process; the increasing solidification of the notion among Israelis that “there is no Palestinian partner for peace”; a crisis in Israeli secularism; and the general violence raging throughout the Middle East seen by many as reaffirming the right's worldview.

In this sense, developments in the National-Religious sector are especially interesting. This sector's leadership has in recent years focused on openly and aggressively seeking to provide moral and political leadership for the state and for Israeli society. The National-Religious sector adheres to a nationalistic version of Zionism with some prominent characteristics: it sees the return to Zion and the establishment of a Jewish state not necessarily in Herzilian terms (as an answer to the Jewish problem) as its goal, rather as the necessary fulfillment of National-Religious ideals. It believes that the State of Israel should reflect Jewish interests. The National-Religious sector seeks to reshape the normative intellectual and moral basis of authority on which the Israeli legal system rests. In this framework, they imbue a greater authority to values that draw from the religious world and Jewish legacy, rather than from the secular-liberal-cosmopolitan world.

The National-Religious sector seeks to implement this goal – its push for the moral and political leadership of the country – through the Jewish Home Party, prominent religious figures in the Likud Party, and through its attempt to garner influence in the ranks of the civil service, the press, and the military leadership where National-Religious officers are increasingly prominent.

The National-Religious worldview is expressed, first and foremost, in trying to settle and annex West Bank territories. With its current control of the justice and education ministries, it is advancing policies and legislation that emphasize Jewish identity and the interests of the state as the nation-state of the Jewish people. There are those who see these initiatives as anti-liberal and a threat to the principles of equality and civil rights. In the educational sphere, they are advancing curricula that emphasize Jewish identity and nationalism, and weaken the commitment to liberal and universal values. Although only a fifth of the entire population considers itself as “belonging” to the National-Religious camp, broad segments of the population identify wholly or in part with National-Religious policies on issues of politics, security, and education. What distinguishes religious Zionism is that it provides a complete ideological vision and intellectual anchor that posits a coherent alternative to the ideology of secular Zionism that has ruled the country since its founding.

### **Possible Implications for how the West Relates to Israel**

- As the West itself is highly polarized, the dynamics in Israel could lead to contradictory results. For liberal segments in the West, Israel could be seen as moving away from the shared values it was once thought to have. However, this is not necessarily the case with conservative elements in the West, who stress nationalism over cosmopolitanism and are averse to the existing order.
- We can expect increasing criticism from liberal voices in the West over Israel's perceived lack of commitment to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of a two-state solution; its attempts to push legislation seen as illiberal, and over increasing demands to include religious content in the education system (there is a greater sympathy for such efforts among Republicans in the United States and right-wing elements in Europe).
- Among liberal groups in the United States, there may be growing doubt over the validity of the Judeo-Christian values common to Israel and America, and the principles that form the foundation of the special relationship (equality before the law, personal freedoms, justice, ethics, democracy, religious pluralism, human rights, and the fair treatment of minorities).

## B. Strengthening Israel's Jewish Characteristics

Demographic, social, and cultural trends in recent years have led to a deepening of a range of phenomena and world-views that stand under a unified umbrella: the strengthening of Israel's Jewish character. These are long-term structural trends; signs of them can be found in public opinion polls, and in data relating to behavior and life style. These trends take on different forms in different populations – usually according to religiosity level – and are not distinct to any single group. The easiest to explain are those coming from the demographic increase of the “religious” and “Haredi” sectors in Israel. In recent decades, the number of Israeli Jews we can identify as having a strong connection to Jewish culture/religion, in the cognitive and the practical sense, has grown. The percentage of Haredim within Israel's Jewish population has increased from three percent in 1990 to ten percent today.

High birth rates among the Haredi and religious sectors continue to increase their proportion in the overall population. This necessarily leads to a strengthening of the political power of these groups and their ability to influence and shape the Israeli agenda and its societal characteristics.

A more complicated trend relates to a growing realization, especially among traditional elites and secular Israelis, of the need to “take ownership” over Israel's Jewish character – after years in which this was neglected and left to Orthodox religious groups. A clear majority of Israeli Jews (90 percent according to the latest Pew survey) say that being Jewish is “very important” (54 percent) or “somewhat important” (36 percent). Thus, it is not surprising that in recent years there has been a noticeable expansion and deepening of the “Jewish renewal” discourse. This discourse connects various sub-groups: secular and Reform, liberal Orthodox, the formerly religious, participants in various pre-military courses, and those exposed to programs such as Taglit Birthright during their military service. All these are active to some degree in an expanding effort to shape Judaism in a manner that is not specifically religious and is more suitable for Israel in the 21st century. These groups take a sympathetic approach to aspects of religion and tradition in the public sphere, yet are wary of religious coercion and claim the freedom to decide personally on religious matters. Accordingly, the number of Israelis seeking new approaches to the Jewish holidays and the number of pre-military seminaries merging Jewish studies with a pluralistic approach is growing.

## Possible Implications for how the West Relates to Israel

The inclination of many Israelis to create a fusion of Jewish and Israeli culture could have contradictory outcomes:

- The formation of a unique Jewish-Israeli culture could widen the gap with Diaspora Jewish culture. As this trend unfolds, it will weaken the connection between Israeli and Diaspora Jewish identity in the eyes of the West (and thus also the power attributed to the Jewish people generally).
- It may reinforce Israel's image as pluralistic, able to include under an updated Jewish cultural umbrella various Jewish streams in a non-coercive manner. This process could strengthen the connection between the mostly liberal Diaspora and Israel.

## C. Shifts in Israel's Strategic Position and Power

From an historical perspective, Israel is almost a strategic miracle. At its founding, 650,000 Jews lived in Israel; today there are ten times that number. Israel is ranked 11th on the World Happiness Index, its birth rate is the highest among developed countries, and life expectancy is the fifth highest in the world for men and ninth for women. Israel's GDP (\$37,000 a year) is higher than those of Italy and Spain. Israeli hi-tech is world class and several multinational corporations maintain R&D centers in Israel. The natural gas fields discovered off Israel's shores promise energy security for years to come and have turned Israel into an energy exporter. Exports to Asia have grown significantly. Moreover, the peace treaties with Jordan and Egypt are stable despite the regional turmoil. As a result of Iran's regional subversion, jihadi terror, and the rise of ISIS, the mutual interests between Israel and the moderate Sunni countries in the region have grown and security cooperation with Egypt is better than ever. Given the collapse of Syria and Iraq, there is no longer a conventional military threat to Israel. Syria no longer possesses chemical weapons, and, at least for the near future, Iran's attempts to produce a nuclear weapon have been pushed back.

Despite such encouraging statistics, it is possible to draw contradictory assessments when examining Israel's strategic power. This is due to the strategic uncertainty that characterizes the world and the region. The Middle East remains turbulent. The cornerstones of the old regional order are crumbling, and there has yet to emerge a new reality that can promise stability of any sort. The international arena relevant to

the Middle East and to Israel's strategic resilience is undergoing significant shocks as well and is far from radiating stability.

Meanwhile, Israel faces significant strategic challenges: the nuclear agreement achieved between Iran and the international community, described by Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu as a "mistake of historic proportions"; the danger of a security escalation in the north (Hezbollah, ISIS or other radical Islamist actors in Syria) and in the south ( Hamas or terror groups in Sinai); the danger the "Lone Wolf Intifada" continues to impose; the uncertainty regarding continued US willingness to maintain a presence and leadership role in the Middle East; the impulse to transform the model for solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (from direct negotiations under American leadership to a coercive solution pushed on Israel by the UN and led by a multi-national coalition); the attempt to harm Israel through boycotts and de-legitimization efforts.

Alongside these various challenges, which hold considerable risk, there are also considerable opportunities for Israel: opening a "new page" in relations with the United States following the election of President Trump; deepening relationships with the Sunni moderates who are showing increased openness to Israel given the Iranian threat and radical terrorist groups: implementing a diplomatic plan that would stymie the threat of losing Israel's Jewish character as Israel may head toward a bi-national reality.

### **Implications for how the West Relates to Israel and the Jewish People**

- So long as Israel's strategic stature is seen in the West as strong and it is a close ally of the US, it diminishes the West's appetite for forcing diplomatic solutions on Israel that it opposes (an agreement with the Palestinians and other strategic issues).
- Moving away from a two-state solution could drag Israel into a diplomatic and violent escalation with the Palestinians and negatively influence Israel's international standing as well as its relationships with Arab states.

## **D. Demographic Shifts**

The population of Israel has grown steadily. Recently, it has overtaken the United States as the largest Jewish population in the world. By the middle of the 21st century, most of the world's Jews, more than half, will live in Israel. At the same time, the composition of Israeli Jewish society is changing as well. Most Jews in Israel today are native-born. The

significance of this is that they are raised in a common environment, learn in the Israeli education system, have compulsory military service (for the most part), and are exposed throughout their lives to the cultural, social, and political advantages of the state.

At the same time, the composition of Israeli society is also shifting according to religiosity. The Haredi and National-Religious sectors are growing while the traditional center and, to a lesser extent, the secular are weakening. To compare: The Diaspora is characterized to a large extent by demographic stability with a slight negative tendency due to low birth rates and an aging population. In the United States, as in Israel, the proportion of Haredim in the Jewish population is also growing. Diaspora Jewry is also characterized by high rates of inter-marriage. This distances Jews from a connection with Jewish institutions and from Jewish expressions in the personal and familial spheres. On the other hand, mixed marriages expand the circle of non-Jews who have some familiarity with someone Jewish, and through them familiarity with Judaism and Israel.

### **Implications for how the West Relates to Israel and the Jewish People**

- The West takes interest in issues related to the demographics of Jews and non-Jews in the area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. That is, regarding the significance of continued Israeli control over the West Bank, and potential future Israeli decisions to annex territories or parts of such, and its impact on Israel's Jewish and democratic nature.
- There is some interest in the shifts of the relative weight between various groups in Israeli society as well. Especially, there is much attention given to the growth of the religious and Haredi sectors of society given the tendency of these groups to hold right-wing political positions. Moreover, given the lack of separation between religion and state in Israel, these sectors' desire to strengthen the religious nature of the public sphere in Israel, could be perceived negatively by considerable segments of the liberal West.
- Another demographic focal point that draws attention in the West has to do with the influence of immigrants from the former Soviet Union on Israeli politics and society. On the one hand, this large wave of immigration had a moderating effect on processes that threatened to erode Israel's Jewish majority. On the other hand, these immigrants are largely right-wing in their political positions. Moreover, as a Russian diaspora, they influence and can help improve Israel's diplomatic relationship with Russia.

## Schematic Diagram to Assist in Formulating Discussions

### Shifts in the West that could influence the future of Israel and the Jewish people

Category	Possible implications for Israel and the Jewish people	Policy recommendations
	Upsetting the existing domestic-political order in the West	
	Upsetting the existing international order	

### Shifts in Israel that could influence the West's approach to Israel and the Jewish people

Category	Possible implications for how the West relates to Israel and the Jewish people	Policy recommendations
	Rise of the religious nationalist right in Israel	
	Strengthening of Israel's Jewish character	
	Shifts in Israel's strategic position and power	
	Demographic shifts	

## Additional Reading



**“Drivers” Affecting the Israel-U.S. Relationship.** 2015 JPPI Annual Assessment. [http://jppi.org.il/uploads/JPPI\\_2014-2015\\_Annual\\_Assessment\\_English-Drivers\\_Affecting\\_Israel-US\\_Relationship.pdf](http://jppi.org.il/uploads/JPPI_2014-2015_Annual_Assessment_English-Drivers_Affecting_Israel-US_Relationship.pdf)



**Political Turmoil in Europe and its Implications for the Jewish People.** Attitudes toward Jews, Judaism, and Israel among anti-system Parties in Europe, 2015 JPPI Annual Assessment. [http://jppi.org.il/uploads/JPPI\\_2014-2015\\_Annual\\_Assessment\\_Eng-Political\\_Turmoil\\_in\\_Europe-Implications\\_for\\_the\\_Jewish\\_People.pdf](http://jppi.org.il/uploads/JPPI_2014-2015_Annual_Assessment_Eng-Political_Turmoil_in_Europe-Implications_for_the_Jewish_People.pdf)



**Religious Zionism in Israel Today: Toward the Center.** The attempt by the Religious-Zionist public to exercise political and moral leadership in regard to the general Israel society. 2016 JPPI Annual Assessment. [http://jppi.org.il/uploads/Religious\\_Zionism\\_in\\_Israel\\_Today-Toward\\_the\\_Center.pdf](http://jppi.org.il/uploads/Religious_Zionism_in_Israel_Today-Toward_the_Center.pdf)