

In its 62nd year, Israel is in a diplomatic, security and moral limbo

The joy attendant on Israel's Independence Day traditionally focused on emphasizing the growing list of the young state's achievements and the sense that the country was progressing toward a better future - one of peace, enhanced physical and existential security, integration into the family of nations and the region, and a normalized existence. But the country's lifespan, which was considered a great virtue in and of itself during the first few decades, has become secondary to a far more important question: Within what dynamic is Israel operating? Is time on Israel's side? Is it setting goals for itself and working toward their realization? Has it blossomed into maturity? Are its citizens more secure and happier? Does it greet the future with hope?

Unfortunately, Israel's 62nd Independence Day finds it in a kind of diplomatic, security and moral limbo that is certainly no cause for celebration. It is isolated globally and embroiled in a conflict with the superpower whose friendship and support are vital to its very existence. It is devoid of any diplomatic plan aside from holding onto the territories and afraid of any movement. It wallows in a sense of existential threat that has only grown with time. It seizes on every instance of anti-Semitism, whether real or imagined, as a pretext for continued apathy and passivity. In many respects, it seems that Israel has lost the dynamism and hope of its early decades, and is once again mired in the ghetto mentality against which its founders rebelled.

Granted, Israel is not the sole custodian of its fate. Yet the shortcomings that have cast a pall over the country since its founding - the ethnocentrism, the dominance of the army and religious functionaries, the socioeconomic gaps, the subservience to the settlers, the mystical mode of thinking and the adherence to false beliefs - have, instead of disappearing over time, only gathered steam. The optimistic, pragmatic, peace-seeking spirit that once filled the Israeli people, in tune with the Zionist revolution, which sought to alter Jewish fate, has weakened. And it is not clear whether the current government is deepening the reactionary counterrevolution or merely giving it faithful expression.

On the eve of Independence Day last year, we wrote in this space: "Stagnation has taken the place of change. Not only does this government, which was formed not long ago, not bode well for hope and change. It champions a policy of regression in a number of areas: the diplomatic front; the Palestinian question; the state's attitude toward the settlers; issues of state and religion; its handling of Israeli Arabs; and its general behavior toward our Arab neighbors and the world. Whoever clings to the vision of 'managing the conflict' and despairs of reaching a solution to the conflict will find himself treading water. Instead of growing and reinventing ourselves, we will be the ones managed by crises."

It is saddening to discover that all these fears came true this year, to an even greater degree than we expected. When the prime minister's main message to the country is that we are once again on the verge of a holocaust, and his vision consists primarily of delving into the Bible, nurturing nationalist symbols and clinging to "national heritage sites," it seems that Hebrew independence has become a caricature of itself. One can only hope that forces within the nation will soon arise to reshape the state and the leadership in a way worthy of us all.