

I am Jewish and I Stand with Schumer

By Amy Neustein, Ph.D.

On Thursday morning, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer delivered an historic address on the Senate floor urging for Israel to hold new elections at once: [Sen. Schumer to call for new elections in Israel in speech on Netanyahu - The Washington Post](#). In his unvarnished and painstakingly candid speech, Schumer pointed to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's dangerous alliance with far-right cabinet members Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, both of whom had publicly called for the expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza at the mid-winter Settler conference held at the Jerusalem International Congress Center [The 'Make Israel Great Again' movement will likely do the opposite | The Hill](#); [Returning to Gaza is a big mistake, calls are disturbing - editorial - The Jerusalem Post \(jpost.com\)](#)

Schumer declared that Netanyahu, under the toxic influence of Israel's far-right extremist cabinet members, has "lost his way" [U.S. Senate Majority Leader Says Netanyahu Has 'Lost His Way,' Calls for New Elections - U.S. News - Haaretz.com](#). He explained that the prime minister has deeply compromised his ethics and that placing himself in the hands of far-right extremists has pushed "support for Israel to worldwide historic lows." [Top Democrat Schumer calls for new elections in Israel, saying Netanyahu is an obstacle to peace - ABC News \(go.com\)](#) He summed up: "Israel cannot survive if it becomes a pariah."

I am an Orthodox Jewish woman, originally from Brooklyn and just a few years younger than Schumer. As a contemporary of his, I've witnessed his stellar achievements. I've heard him speak at local events and kept pace with his meteoric rise in politics. It was just a few months ago that I was entranced by his opening remarks on the chamber floor in late November when he decried the alarming rise of antisemitism in the United States: [U.S. Senate: Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer on Antisemitism | C-SPAN.org](#). I understand the pain of antisemitism all too well, as there is no Jew that has escaped the perils and prejudices of antisemitism. For Holocaust survivors and their descendants it is even worse, because any incident of Jew hatred brings a cold sweat of angst – no doubt a classical PTSD reaction of fear, fright, depression and gloom.

It is against this backdrop of historical persecution, along with endless cycles of terrorism and blockades, that far-right extremists feel compelled to fortify their security for fear of relapse into the draconian world of Jew hatred and consequent annihilation. The threat is real; it is not imagined. Many geopolitical strategists opine a "two-state solution" as the answer; others are more ominous, as they fear a cataclysmic ending if there were a separate Palestinian state given the rancor of the present geopolitical climate.

One thing I want to set straight. Israel and the Jewish Diaspora do not have to justify their sovereignty. All too often I hear my fellow Jews explaining that a homeland is needed as a sanctuary for quarry – a hapless category afforded to Jews as a result of their history of endless persecution. However, I fear that such defensive thinking

leads to irrational military decisions and public statements that engender disapprobation from the non Jewish world. Yet, sometimes ripping open the miasmic nets of Jew hatred twisted around the necks of Jews throughout the world and throughout history can prove inexorable. In this charged climate, I have seen as a sociologist what I call "Holocaust Reactionism" – a severely "all bets are off" mindset evinced by Netanyahu's far-right coalition members who in their zeal to prevent another Holocaust have paradoxically roused dangerous Jew hatred in the US and around the world.

In my recent discussion with Maryland author Michelle Etlin, (*The Hostage Child*, Indiana University Press [The Hostage Child \(iupress.org\)](https://iupress.org/)), she illuminated for me some things about invidious behavior and the enmity that spreads throughout the world. She referred to this era as "suffused, saturated, and surfeited with unbridled hatred." She pointed to the victims she was helping in the Orthodox community. She explained these are divorced mothers who have lost custody of their children to sexually abusive ex-husbands notwithstanding compelling physical, medical, and psychological evidence of sexual abuse. Some of the children have landed in the hospital suffering severe emaciation and dehydration.

Sadly, Etlin's research findings identify a pattern of Orthodox children in the US showing signs of being "sex-trafficked for monetary gain." And the "gain," according to Etlin's research is terrifyingly scandalous. She has shown that the children of divorced Orthodox parents are being used to raise money for building up Settlements in the West Bank so as to fortify Israel's borders.

The *Washington Jewish Week* in fall 2022 published Etlin's Letter to the Editor under the heading, "Call for a DOJ Investigation." She wrote, "This crisis cries out for the full force of the Department of Justice to investigate the various agencies involved and the financial incentives built into the system as courts supply these relatively unregulated agencies with clients, sadly and reprehensibly at the expense of the wellbeing of mothers and children..." [Letters to the Editor | September 8, 2022 - Washington Jewish Week](#)

If Etlin is correct, Israel's far-right presents an even-greater danger than one can imagine. Schumer spoke yesterday from the heart. He's a clear-thinking, highly intelligent man. In his speech to the Senate floor he may have, in fact, foreshadowed some of the most dangerous consequences of far-right thinking. At the minimum, his warnings must be given considerable weight, rather than dismissed as political posturing.

Amy Neustein, Ph.D., editor of *Tempest in the Temple: Jewish Communities and Child-Sex Scandals* (Brandeis University Press, 2009). She is currently working on a sequel, "Moral Schisms: When Institutions Defy Jewish Law" to be published by Oxford University Press. She is also working on an updated edition of "From Madness to Mutiny: Why Mothers Are Running from the Family Courts --- and What Can be Done about It," to be published by Oxford University Press. She resides in Fort Lee, NJ.

917-817-2184