

The MIGA/MAGA syndrome

The International Court of Justice issued an interim ruling last Friday, insisting that Israel must do everything in its power to prevent genocide, increase humanitarian aid to Gaza, and perhaps most significantly, punish any verbal incitement to genocide.

Yet just 48 hours later, on Sunday evening, a major conference took place in Jerusalem that may place Israel's posture before the world court in serious jeopardy.

As reported in the Times of Israel and Ha'aretz, 12 cabinet ministers and 15 Knesset members, along with rabbis, settlement activists, and others, joined 3,000 Israelis who packed the auditorium at the Jerusalem International Congress Center, the largest convention hall in the Middle East. At the "Conference for the Victory of Israel - Settlement Brings Security: Returning to the Gaza Strip and Northern Samaria," the far-right ideologues were found slinging what could be construed as MIGA (Make Israel Great Again) mantras in complete disregard of the ICJ's provisional ruling in their ongoing inquest into the alleged genocidal conduct of Israel's counteroffensive to the October 7 massacre in southern Israel.

Rabbi Uzi Sharbag, a former leader of the terrorist Jewish Underground movement of the 1980s, gave the opening statement. Far-right ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich (who reportedly mocked the ICJ's ruling by tweeting on X, formerly Twitter, "Hague - Schmage") were the keynote speakers. Ha'aretz reported that conference attendees were presented



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with maps of future Jewish settlements, the stages of preparation in the construction, building, and renaming of towns in Gaza, and other materials debuted at this major exposition. The speakers called upon decision-makers to "acknowledge that a war victory can only be claimed through the Jewish resettling of the Gaza Strip."

Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich – a native of a settlement community – declared that the children whose families had been forced out of Gaza during the disengagement of the settlements in 2005 are compelled to return as settlers. "We are rising, we have a nation of lions [and many children] are returning there as combat fighters," he said. "We must make sure they return there as settlers to protect the people of Israel." National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir echoed these sentiments, adding that "we need to find a legal way to voluntarily emigrate Palestinians."

On that same day, juxtaposed to the glitz and grandeur of the far-right's meeting, taking place at the largest colosseum in the Middle East, the first United States servicemen would lose their lives at the U.S. military base in Jordan as the overt signs of a broader escalation would become increasingly difficult to ignore. On that same day, the rain would come down heavily in Gaza, plunging temperatures to near freezing, while fuel, food, water and medicine remained scarce. Yet the news trickling back to the refugees, huddling in tents, not knowing where they would find their next morsel of food, was that they would soon be expelled from Gaza, their lives, culture, and history forever extinguished.

Speaking to Ha'aretz, Israeli opposition head Yair Lapid denounced the "Settlement Brings Security" conference, declaring that the government of Israel "reaches a new low tonight."

Let's think for a moment: what does that mean for us as Jews? When we use language to incite violence, or to threaten and intimidate, are we not achieving the opposite of "greatness"? In the United States, we saw a country divided by MAGA rhetoric. We sat through a lengthy congressional hearing that replayed the shameful events of January 6, when a riot broke out at the nation's capital because a former president refused to yield to the newly elected leader. Injury and death ensued for police officers trying to maintain the unruly demonstrators that day. But for Israel, I'm afraid, MIGA will have worse consequences than MAGA has in the United States.

This is because as Jews we are the People of the Book. Our biblical and talmudic teachings are premised on the sanctity of language, for it conveys our intentions, motives, and plans. We are taught to guard our tongues against evil, because words can harm as much as a bullet. In fact, Aharon Barak, Israel's ad hoc judge before the International Court of Justice, knew the importance of holding his tongue when he voted last Friday against the State of Israel in two provisional measures aimed at preventing the incitement of violence.

"I have voted in favor [of the provisional measures to punish incitement to genocide] in the hope that the measures will help decrease tensions and discourage damaging rhetoric," Barak said. What we see from his vote is that guarding one's language certainly takes precedence over anything else. This is so, because language is enduring, while actions are transient.

We've all seen how MAGA rhetoric has seeded discord in American life. Antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism, misogyny, and homophobia are on the rise. We have widespread misanthropy where there should be love of our neighbor. Should the far-right in Israel, egged on by the Jewish extremists in the diaspora, risk MIGA rhetoric that will turn us into a society of hateful, ignominious citizens that must be monitored by a world court?

Gershkovich

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language that we both understand. I hope that we will find a solution."

If convicted of espionage, Gershkovich could face up to 20 years in a penal colony. No trial date has been set.

His detainment has mobilized the global Jewish community over the past year, drawing interest and support from Jews and Jewish organizations. That support has occasionally echoed tactics used to draw attention to the plight of Soviet Jews decades ago, such as leaving an empty seat at the Passover seder table. Before Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish Federations of North America organized a letter-writing campaign to Gershkovich to mark the Jewish new year.

The U.S. ambassador to Russia, Lynne Tracy, visited Gershkovich two weeks ago in what has now become a monthly meeting.

"Evan remains resilient and is grateful for the support of friends, family and supporters," the U.S. Embassy to Russia wrote on its Telegram account on Jan. 18. "We continue to call for Evan's immediate release."

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Stillbirth

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"We decided that, not entirely for selfish purposes, but we needed to hear from other couples about how they had gone through it, because there was so little material out there for us from a Jewish perspective," Ilan Glazer said. "Obviously, everybody's story is a little bit different, but how do you go forward? How do you talk about the death of one child to another child? How do you mark the anniversary of a death? There are things that only those who have faced this have to think about, and it's been very meaningful to have that place."

In addition to the Facebook group and their synagogue community, the Glazers hope to have plenty of opportunity to discuss what family looks like after loss. Sherri is pregnant again, due in March. (The couple chose embryo donation after learning that Ilan has a mild version of the same syndrome that caused Shemaryah's brain condition and could pass it on to another child.)

"It's even harder to plan for a new baby after having a loss like we had. Until this baby is actually here

in our arms, it's really hard to really even envision them being here," Sherri said. "It is clear to both of us that we want them to know about Shemaryah, that Shemaryah will always be their big brother."

Much like with their rounds of IVF and as with Shemaryah, music and Jewish ritual played a big role in this pregnancy.

Sherri and Ilan went to the mikvah before the embryo transfer, and for Jewish inspiration they consulted a fertility guide from Mayyim Hayyim, a Boston-based mikvah and spirituality center. It was there that Sherri found a verse in English that she wanted as their next song.

While the song won't be on the 13-track album, Ilan performed it at the close of the album release show two weeks ago at Beth Am Baltimore, the Conservative synagogue where he and Sherri are members.

"I want this to be a healing experience," Ilan, who is also an addiction recovery coach, said. "Every time I share these melodies with others, people tell me that it allows them to process grief that they've been carrying, in some cases, for many years. And I'm truly honored by that."

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