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The information provided here is for educational purposes only and does not constitute an endorsement of any candidate or measure in an upcoming election.

In this blog, we look beyond the headlines to understand how political developments throughout the country affect our Israeli-American community and the issues we all hold dear. Our goal is to provide basic context and foster understanding that encourages greater civic engagement and informs decision-making by our community members.

A Warning Sign for Israel – Congressional Actions ahead of the Midterms

Right before heading home for the midterm elections, both Houses of Congress put on the table new legislation concerning Israel and Judea & Samaria.

In the Senate, Maryland Senator Chris Van Hollen introduced a resolution to formally request information from the Department of State on “Israel’s human rights practices”. The resolution had 25 cosponsors, including traditionally prominent pro-Israel Senators who hold committee positions key to the US-Israel relationship.

While criticism of violence by Israeli settlers toward Palestinian civilians in Judea & Samaria is not new, what stands out in this legislation is the explicit mention of practices by IDF soldiers, alongside those settlers. Support for this legislation therefore signals a lack of confidence in the Israeli military’s ability to ensure its soldiers carry out their missions in a lawful manner, its ability to hold them accountable for violations, and the intent of Israel’s leaders to take concrete action on this issue.

The resolution was considered “privileged”, and Van Hollen was able to compel a floor vote on it. The resolution received the support of all but one Democratic senator, and of a lone Republican senator. While it failed to pass, it has been demonstrated that the rhetoric surrounding it, and the terminology contained inside it, have become consensus among Senate Democrats, who’re expected to make gains this November, perhaps even winning a majority.

In the House, Representative Joaquin Castro of Texas introduced the “Stop the Settlements Act”, which imposes sanctions on any entity facilitating the construction of new Israeli settlements, the expansion of existing ones, or facilitate the transfer of Israeli civilians into any settlement. This could, for example, include any Israeli bank that provides a mortgage loan for Israelis who purchase a home in a settlement, let alone finances construction projects in one.

The legislation would also impose a ban on commercial imports of goods produced in Israeli settlements, mirroring the move we’ve seen recently by some European countries. It does, however, exclude goods imported by individuals for private use, through shipping or in private baggage, a clause perhaps included as a response to the recent scenes in Amsterdam’s Schiphol Airport.

Castro’s legislation refers specifically to settlements in the “West Bank and Gaza”, so the Golan Heights are excluded from it. It makes no mention of East Jerusalem, but the United States traditionally treats it as a separate territory from Judea & Samaria. The bill also includes a “sunset” clause, which would make its provisions expire 10 years after passage.

The bill is currently cosponsored by 42 Democratic lawmakers, roughly 1/5 of the caucus. That list includes Rep. Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut, the top Democratic lawmaker on the powerful House Appropriations Committee – which oversees national budgetary moves including with relation to US support for Israel. DeLauro wrote on X (formerly Twitter) in support of the legislation, stating that “the settlements must end”.

While neither of these bills would have a fighting chance of passing in this Congress, or being signed into law by President Trump, they signal a troubling shift in stance towards Israel. Anti-Israel sentiment, whether in the form of criticism of the country’s actions or of outright anti-Zionism, is being translated into concrete policies. Bills such as these can serve as a framework for future policies by an American government less sympathetic towards Israel.

Advocates for Israel should see this as a warning. Future political developments may bring an improvement, but the current trajectory is negative.

Elections Bonanza – Five Weeks, Four Election Cycles

I've already written in this blog about the upcoming elections in Israel and in the United States, on October 27th and November 3rd respectively, but this past week two additional key dates were added to the global political calendar. Thus, creating a five-week period that includes four elections on four continents:

October 25th – Presidential runoff election in Brazil. Incumbent Lula da Silva received 45% in his re-election bid, losing to challenger Flavio Bolsonaro's 47%, in the first round on October 4th. Since neither passed the 50% threshold, a 2nd round will be taking place on the last Sunday of this month. Lula, who's 80 years old, is seeking a fourth nonconsecutive term after having also served as president between 2003-2011. His challenger is the son of Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil's last president who served between 2019-2023. After a contested race four years ago that saw the elder Bolsonaro face insurrection charges and an ongoing house arrest, his son has a good chance of winning this year.

November 29th – Spanish general election. This election was surprisingly set just earlier this week and pushed up from next summer. Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has decided to dissolve parliament due to a lack of confidence in his government that has left him blocked from passing legislation. Sanchez faces tough criticism for his government's policy on immigration, particularly following the invasion of the Spanish enclave of Ceuta by thousands of Moroccan youths who stormed the international border. In the global arena, Spain's government has been constantly at odds with the Trump Administration and blocked American use of Spanish territory to facilitate strikes on Iran. It has also been extremely critical of Israel, and perhaps most vocally in all of continental Europe. This election may usher in a government that will act differently on all of these issues.

In between these two, of course, are the Israeli election (October 27th) and the US midterm election (November 3rd). As voter registration deadlines and early voting periods for the latter are fast approaching in many states, please make sure you're able to fully exercise your right to make a difference.