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MARCIE NATAN: Welcome to Hadassah's Defining Zionism in the 21st Century, an online speaker series. I'm Marcie Natan, National President of Hadassah, the women's Zionist organization of America, and the proud convener of this monthly series.

We invite all of you, those here with us at 40 Wall Street in our new offices, and those of you participating online from your local communities, to join us in creating a safe space as we explore Zionism from various perspectives. We certainly may not all agree on any one definition of Zionism, but we must agree to be respectful of one another and to frame our questions in the spirit of respecting each other's opinions.

For those of you who are physically in the room with us, please turn off your cell phones. We've done that up here. And ask that you write your questions on the index cards that were provided. Please write legibly and in large print, and raise your cards and they will be collected. For those of you viewing online, if you haven't already done so, please register with Livestream to enable you to type your questions into the chat box on the side of your screen so that you can be recorded and we can present your questions as well.

During today's session we may not be able to get to all of the questions that are asked, but we'll do our best to accommodate as many of you as possible. We're honored to have with us this afternoon Gil Hoffman, Chief Political Correspondent and analyst for the Jerusalem Post. We are especially thrilled that as part of his travels from Israel to the United States we are able to host him here today as our Defining Zionism presenter.

Today's topic is do Zionism and democracy go hand in hand? Additionally, we are honored to have with us for the first time on our Defining Zionism series a professional moderator, Gary Rosenblatt, editor and publisher of the Jewish Week. Gentlemen, the mic is yours.

GARY ROSENBLATT: Thanks very much, Marcie. Welcome everyone here and wherever you may be. Gil, I thought it might be appropriate to share a story about a famous Israeli philosopher who came to the U.S. and was interviewed his first day. And he was asked in a word, how are things in Israel? And he said, "Good." And the interviewer said in two words? And he said, "No good." So I think we're all aware of the complexities of life. American Jewish life, Israeli life as well. And much that we can talk about that's good and no good. But I thought we might start -- since part of your bio says you're the most optimistic journalist in Israel, we might start with a little bit about what you actually do day to day in terms of your coverage of the scene in Israel.

GIL HOFFMAN: Thank you so much, Gary. Thank you for Marcie and thank you to Hadassah. And thank you for everyone who is watching this both here in the room and across America, especially my mother who is watching in Lincolnwood, Illinois.

I cover politics for the Jerusalem Post and I host a daily radio show on VoiceOfIsrael.com that both aim to tell people who care about Israel around the world what's going on behind the

scenes in the country. I follow around the Prime Minister and all the other politicians, and report about what they are doing to stay in power, and a little bit about what they're doing to serve the people as well.

GARY ROSENBLATT: So as many of us know, the Jerusalem Post sponsored a major conference here in New York yesterday. It was attended by more than 1500 people. And you were there covering it. My understanding is that a number of the speakers, particularly Democrats, were heckled by the crowd. And there was an editorial in the Jerusalem Post today defending David Lew -- I'm sorry, go ahead -- in terms of his being a friend of Israel although he was heckled. And I wondered if we could sort of -- in keeping with the subject about democracy and Zionism, I was at a major event here in New York last week where some of the republican candidates and potential candidates spoke to a very large Jewish crowd of about a thousand people at an event sponsored by Rabbi Shmuley Boteach and his organization. And as I wrote, it did not seem to be that there was a democrat in the room in terms of the response. I wondered if you could talk a little bit about that kind of reaction that you're hearing from American Jewish audiences.

GIL HOFFMAN: Sure. Look, I was there at the Jerusalem Post conference yesterday. We knew in advance that the crowd was going to be unruly. I myself emceed a panel at the Jerusalem Post conference two years ago in which Carolyn Glick, a columnist for the Jerusalem Post and Alan Dershowitz attacked each other back and forth. And I don't think Alan is coming back to the Jerusalem Post conferences because it was a very right-wing audience that really took the side of Carolyn Glick. This is what happens at these conferences. I think that the American administration knew well in advance what they were getting into by sending such a top official to this event. There are those at the conference who even said that they purposely sent him to get heckled. Knowing that he would be heckled, that it would actually help them out politically in terms of their own efforts to advance the Iran nuclear deal, to paint American Jews as right wing extremists, and as putting Israel before America, I can see how that might have helped the Obama administration's agenda. And perhaps if that would have been told in the crowd in advance maybe they would have behaved differently. I don't know. But there are different points of view about these conferences that the Jerusalem Post puts on every year. I hear people say oh, this is exporting the negativity and how intense Israeli democracy is and we shouldn't be airing our dirty laundry abroad. And then I hear the opposite which is we are showcasing Israeli democracy which is thriving. And if there's anything American Jews can relate to about Israel it's our democracy. If think anything that helps our American diplomacy not just with American Jews, but with Americans in general and with people in the west, it's to show that in Israel we've got differences of opinion. We're not afraid to air them out. We're a country that is still deciding its future, and it's very exciting to be a part of it. And so letting the American Jews feel like they're part of the show I think is important. And in the end, I think the positives outweigh the negatives.

GARY ROSENBLATT: You mentioned that it was expected that it would be a right-wing crowd. And I can tell you from my seat as an editor of the Jewish Week in New York for almost 22 years, the mail we get in terms of letters, E-mails, calls in response to particularly to issues in Israel are decidedly from the right, consistently, depending -- doesn't depend on who is in power. Why do you think that is? Why is it sort of a natural that you're going to get a right-wing reaction?

GIL HOFFMAN: Maybe left-wing fringes in reading. I don't know. But it's the fringes that make their voices heard louder than the mainstream. Doesn't mean that they're the majority. Majority are mainstream people taking things in, making decisions based on things they read.

We at the Jerusalem Post just like you provide the information and then they can decide for themselves what their truth is. Right-wing people are people who care passionately about what they believe in, and want their voice to be heard. And I can understand their frustration. Democrats have been in power now for six years in the Presidency that makes them quite upset. And they have a lot to be upset about. So perhaps if Republicans would come to power then maybe the left would be upset and therefore writing in more letters. You never know.

GARY ROSENBLATT: Are you saying people on the left are not as passionate about their voice?

GIL HOFFMAN: I did not say that.

GARY ROSENBLATT: Just want to make sure. A couple of weeks ago the JPPI, Jewish Policy Planning Institute, a major think tank based in Israel, had a conference in New York with about 50 leading political figures and analysts, including Henry Kissinger, Martin Indict, Dennis Ross, a number of key people. One of the sessions which had about 25 people were in the room, about half were Israelis, half were Americans. The topic was on how we can support each other in terms of our views that are critical in Jewish life. And the American group was very concerned about Israel today in terms of the new government, in terms of issues of religious pluralism. Concerns about democracy in the new government. The response was they don't care about women of the wall, chief rabbinate. These were people who know the country well and yet there was a tremendous gap, a misunderstanding or miscommunication. I wonder if you think that is common or what your take is on this kind of gap.

GIL HOFFMAN: The gap between American Jews and Israeli Jews is serious. It's intensified over the last six years, during the Obama administration when differences have been highlighted on key issues. I don't think it's permanent. I think when there will be a Prime Minister of Israel and a President of the United States who get along better than the people won't have such stark differences between them. I really do see it as a temporary phenomenon based on the personal hostility between the two leaders. And I interviewed Dennis Ross on my show on VoiceofIsrael.com, and he was quite critical of the Obama administration from the left about how steps that had been taken by him that have prevented the peace process from moving forward. And from what I understand, from an Israeli participants in the JPPI, they shared those views. You hear it more and more in Israel, the left is upset with Obama, not the right. Whereas in America it's the right upset with Obama, not the left. That itself is a difference that I think is fascinating.

GARY ROSENBLATT: Michael Oren, the former Israeli Ambassador to the US has a book coming out in about two weeks that catalogs his experiences as Ambassador in Washington during the Obama administration. I think it's going to cause quite a stir in our community, American Jewish community because he is an historian and is considered a pretty centrist person. The examples he cites are quite specific. And I would categorize them as not any one incredibly dramatic problem with the Obama administration, but a series -- a cumulative series of sort of not a stab in the back but pin pricks in the back that added up to a lot of distrust and very bad feelings. Not only from the top two leaders. I wondered your thoughts when you say that it's sort of a temporary situation. Is this just about the personalities of Netanyahu and Obama or how much this carries down in both governments?

GIL HOFFMAN: Gary, before I get into the answer to this question I think I did a disservice in

our previous question. Israelis need to do more to understand the American Jewish community. The American Jewish community has serious concerns about what's going on in Israel. It's not just women of the wall. You have much more mainstream issues, ensuring that people feel comfortable praying at the Western Wall no matter where they are on the map religiously. I know when I interviewed Netanyahu during the campaign, since the post reaches out to its audience, its readership who are by and large Diaspora Jews, received a commitment from him that despite the ultraorthodox joining the government, the funding for Rabbis that just started happening in the previous Knesset would continue. We'll hold him to that. Michael -- this leads into the question you just asked, Michael Oren is the representative of American Jewry in the Knesset, the same way that Dov Lipman was in the previous Knesset. Not having one that was born in the United States or any English speaking country for 30 years, then we have these people who wonderful public servants are representing not only the people of Israel and those who made Aliyah from America. But also taking into account the views of Diaspora Jews. Michael will be there doing that in addition to promoting his book. I spoke to Michael a few weeks ago. He was very frustrated, a narrow majority of one -- no member is allowed to go abroad so he can't really promote his book, other than I think he'll be doing a book tour in America on Skype. Or he'll get in trouble for coming. He can bring down Netanyahu's government by coming. Michael saw firsthand, far be it from me as someone who has been close to Netanyahu's people over the years and seeing what they went through, and saying there were problems that went back and forth that were personality differences as well as very strong policy differences. From the very, very beginning. From the very first meeting between Netanyahu and Obama in the White House where Netanyahu said Mr. President, if you proceed in Iran, the extremists in the region are defeated, and then Obama said no, I see it the other way. When I make peace between Israel and the Palestinians that will bring if Arab Muslim world on board. That major policy difference, the sequence between them has never gone away.

GARY ROSENBLATT: Just to come back to the religious pluralism issue, and it's good to hear that the Prime Minister was on record in supporting I guess the accomplishments of the previous government, is the best that liberal American Jews can hope for is that there's a status quo? Or there's a lot of concern that things will be undone in this government. I guess more generally we are well aware this is a coalition as you mentioned very narrow one of 61. What kind of longevity is predicted for it? And given that it has the ultraorthodox parties as well as certainly it looks rightward, what kind of legislation can we expect from this government?

GIL HOFFMAN: That's a couple of questions in one. First I'll talk -- I need to introduce it by giving a little political primer. Here we have our 120 members of the Knesset smiling at you. These are the people who think they're running the country. We're up to 29 women, soon to be 30. We're very proud. A lot of minorities represented here. The Arab party is the third largest party now. Bedouins, Christians, Muslims, Jews, the Bedouin member has more than one wife. We have an Ethiopian member who is now head of the immigrant absorption committee. Now having said that, no one party has ever won a 61 vote majority out of 120 members of Parliament. Because of that they have to form coalitions to run the country together.

When you have a narrow coalition that anyone can bring down at any point, it means one can accomplish only what there's a consensus on. Bridge the gap between the rich and poor, lower the cost of living. It can focus on Israeli security. Also important. It can make small changes in the electoral system which is inherently messed up. Not large ones. It can theoretically move the peace process forward because such things are handled discretely. On

matters of religion and state that is the major fault line in this government. Where you have secular people, you have modern orthodox, religious Zionist people, and then the ultraorthodox who have been extremely weakened in this Knesset. The death of the great Rabbi of the Sephardim resulted in going from 11 seats to 7. And so they are limited in what they can do, even though by nature they have more power than they did in the previous Knesset where they were not part of the government and now they are part of the government. They've made demands to help the ultraorthodox, especially the ones who are poor. This doesn't necessarily affect Diaspora Jews. Thinking-- any kind of major step they'd want to take would affect Diaspora Jews they can't do because there's not enough of a consensus to bring it about. You also asked, and I didn't forget, that ties into the 61. On the one hand, any member of Knesset could just bring it down immediately. But it's not going to happen. No one wants to be the guy who forced us into another election. Israelis, we're sick and tired of elections, not just political correspondents. Israelis in general say they wouldn't mind having them every four years like you're blessed with in the United States. Sometimes coalitions of 61 are stronger than coalitions of 62, 3, 4, 5, because in those coalitions then people can afford to flex their muscles. Here they can't. Everyone is counted on. Historically those governments have lasted longer than anyone expected them to and they've generally been more cohesive as well. This coalition is cohesive on certain issues. Matters of religion and state is not one of them.

GARY ROSENBLATT: As we're reminded by Israeli politicians we American Jews don't have a vote. So we are not exactly a prominent constituency. We're told bring a million people like you to Israel, and then we'll talk. Let's talk a little bit about the state of the peace negotiations, which came to an end last year. There's a sense that -- I welcome your comments on this. There's a sense that perhaps Prime Minister Netanyahu is looking for a way to climb down from the tree in terms of his statements just before the election that have been interpreted at least by President Obama as not wanting to or not willing to have a two state solution. Is there a way to break this impasse with a narrow right-wing government and an American President who seems like he's had it with the Israeli Prime Minister? Where do we go from here?

GIL HOFFMAN: I'm glad you phrased the question in a very sensitive way because I'm on a two-week speaking tour around America right now. The amount of disinformation that there is in the American media that people have just accepted as fact really troubles me. People assume that Netanyahu came out in the last days of the campaign against the Palestinian state. Not true. He was wrongly interpreted by the New York Times as such through sloppy reporting. He was interviewed by an RG, a right-wing website owned by Edelson by an interviewer who wanted him to come out against a Palestinian state, and left the room disappointed that he had not succeeded. He spoke about the challenges going on in the region, about ISIS, Iran, Syria, all the death and destruction around us. The interviewer said because of that you don't see a Palestinian state being created in the next term with this situation. Netanyahu said indeed. That doesn't mean he's against the Palestinian state. He lamented the current reality does not permit creating it. So he did that within the context of what's going on in the region because he was speaking in the limited way that he can. Perhaps if he'd been speaking in a more open kind of way, and he does limit himself less than other leaders do, and maybe not enough as he should, he would say it's the American administration that prevents the peace process moving forward, not the Israeli administration. Certainly there the Palestinians are making their steps also has made it harder when you have the Palestine and leaving the negotiation table, making a deal with Hamas and trying to put Israel on trial around the world. But right-wing governments in Israel have advanced peace processes. The last Prime Minister to withdraw from a peace deal was named Netanyahu and would again in the right circumstances in the region, he says, and I would add in America. If

you look back historically, whenever Israel has withdrawn from anything, there has been one of three things. There's been either an American leader who Israelis revere, an Arab leader who Israelis trust, or a desire to withdraw unilaterally. We don't have any of those three things now. We're not going to have a desire on the Israeli part to withdraw unilaterally any time soon. With Abbas currently in the 11th year of a term, he rejected a plan, taking in thousands of refugees, dividing Jerusalem, five countries, three Arab, he's not going to be the Arab leader who Israelis trust and there's not one on the horizon. And an American leader who Israelis revere, that is possible, Gary. That is possible in another 600 days. There's going to be a different President. Doesn't matter who she or he may be. That President can be a President who Israelis revere.

GARY ROSENBLATT: So how much of what you just have been describing is a problem of Israeli Hasbarah? Because American Jews are very quick to describe the lack of PR, Hasbarah, as a major contributing factor. So you have an American Jewish community, many of whom today would say that Israel is the party at fault for not advancing the peace talks. As you've described just now in your view, it's a very different picture that we're not seeing or not appreciating. So is that just sort of the fall guy is Hasbarah or is it about policy itself?

GIL HOFFMAN: Perhaps too many people get their news from the New York Times. And not enough people get their news from the Jerusalem Post. Perhaps they'd have a more accurate presentation of what's going on if they did. But Israel has gotten better at public diplomacy. When I moved to Israel in 1999 there was not a speaks person appointed because they didn't think it was important. Then gradually they did a great job. The spokes people for the Army, Peter Lerner now. But we have a long way to go. We've gotten better in Israel at bypassing the media, by getting messages out through social media. They've been very successful at that in my opinion. But I at the Jerusalem Post can only do my part. I get interviewed a lot by Al-Jazeera and CNN and other media outlets by telling people the truth. The truth is this Knesset could have been a lot more right-wing. After a war where rockets are fired at Tel Aviv and the airport is shut down by some geographically confused people in the FAA in Washington, you would expect people to move solidly to the right. And they didn't so much. Shy's right-wing party was the only one that would not join any government that would negotiate a Palestinian state. He didn't get the minimum number of votes need to pass the threshold and get into the Knesset. The one party whose leader opposes a Palestinian state that got into the Knesset out of ten went down from 12 seats to 8. Victor Lieberman decided not to join the government because it's not right-wing enough. And Netanyahu's -- they brought in ideologically undefined people and people who supported a Palestinian state.

GARY ROSENBLATT: Here is a question I love to ask because you cover the Prime Minister, you've interviewed him. What does Bibi want and who knows perhaps besides Bibi?

GIL HOFFMAN: Sara. (Laughter.) People ask me who is the second most powerful person in Israel? Is it the defense Minister? Is it the foreign Minister? No, it's Sara Netanyahu. Every leader I'm sure speaks to their spouse all the time about their day. And so they have the Prime Minister's ear. The Prime Minister has had a lot of staff come and go. So is there anyone super close to him? Ron Dermer is super close to him. He very much has his ear. Other than that everyone else has come and gone over the last few years. So what does Netanyahu want? It's no secret, Gary? He wants to prevent the nuclearization of Iran. He has a Messiah complex. He thinks that he and only he can prevent the world from being destroyed, no less. If he thought the election would result in the destruction, no more Israel. He really thought that. Does he want to make peace in the Middle East were it possible? He would. The current situation he does not believe facilitates that. Would he withdraw from

large swaths of land and create a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital? The answer is yes, he would do it under the right circumstances. But I believe I've heard even American officials, even the President hinting that that's not possible right now. So even Obama and Netanyahu said basically the same thing and yet still managed to sound hostile to one another.

GARY ROSENBLATT: Let's talk a little about Iran. I think we're all aware of the seriousness of the situation, and of the clock that's ticking down toward June 30th. There seems to be a clear sense that President Obama really wants this deal to happen. He's ignored many of Iran's efforts to make more problems in the world and in the Middle East in terms of Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran is still the terrorist capital of the world. Yet this deal doesn't deal with any of those things other than the nuclear piece. So some say in Washington that this would be a time for Netanyahu to cut a deal in recognizing that the President is going to get this agreement done. If Netanyahu says either directly or indirectly that he's okay with that, that Israel can get all kinds of military, financial perks. But the window is closing. He only has until the end of June. Others say that Netanyahu is not going to do that. He's going to double down on the bet he has so far and has figured that he's never going to have a relationship with Obama that's going to be a positive one so he's looking to 2017. Sounds like you think the latter is what's going to happen.

GIL HOFFMAN: I think you explained what Netanyahu is doing very well. He's burning bridges. There's no way coming back with the current President. Their points of view on the Iran deal are diametrically opposed. As an Israeli hearing Jack Lou the treasurer yesterday speak about the positives of this deal, he hope and pray that he is right and the 85 percent of Israelis who oppose this deal are wrong. Because I want to survive. But it was nice to hear a defense of it, and it's up to America to hold Iran to that. But we in Israel are subject to Netanyahu saying over and over again as well as his political opponents how bad the deal is. In my heart I know all 12 reasons why this deal is so horrible and I'm not going to bore the people who probably also know them by heart. So Netanyahu knows that despite his speech in Congress, what passed in Congress does not have enough teeth to stop the deal. Netanyahu is politically savvy in American politics. And so June will come, and then July. If a deal is reached in June then Congress will put on a show in July, make it look like they can flex their muscles and stop it or make it better or whatever. They can't. There's no two thirds veto to override what the President wants to do. And so after that, there's a review process that the Congress is going to continue to be involved in regularly. And then perhaps when there's another President who it's not their baby, can undo some damage. Again, doesn't matter who she or he may be. Who can stop the Iranian nuclear deal right now? One man. The Ayatollah. And I do not put my faith in him.

GARY ROSENBLATT: I don't know if we put our faith in him. But that is a scenario that has possibilities. We have some questions that have come either from here or from elsewhere. I'm going to come back to the Iran piece if we have time. But I do want to honor these. This questioner says the two bus systems extend Zionism and democracy or was it Apartheid? It was not a military objective but a settler request. You can explain the issue about having Arabs on separate buses, and what that status is.

GIL HOFFMAN: I've got news for people. Arabs and Jews don't live together in the West Bank. They go to different places. So practically speaking it actually makes sense. It's not a racist statement. For them to want to go to different places. But Israel knows it's under a microscope and even a step that would be practical would be criticized as racist, and that's a legitimate point of view. It certainly looks racist even if it is practical. I can understand that

when you have a situation where Arabs -- Palestinians, they receive work permits to come into Israel. Those work permits have been taken advantage of to commit terrorist attacks in Israel. We've had kinds of auto motive terror, stabbings unfortunately that were committed by such people. So this was a step by the defense ministry to have better monitoring of the people. That backfired. They didn't take into account enough how bad it would look around the world. Yes the settlers wanted it because they don't want to die. A lot of people in Israel want it because they don't want to die. Is that racist? A little bit maybe but it's also part of life. People want security steps to be taken that are even extreme when you're living in such a situation day in and day out.

GARY ROSENBLATT: One of the major themes or issues in American Jewish life today is we disagree about a lot of things. But one of the things I think various elements of the American Jewish community worry about is the next generation. And whether their allegiance or feelings toward Israel will continue as their parents or grandparents have. Of course, on the one side you have the success of Birthright Israel which has brought hundreds of thousands of young people from around the world, not just America, between the ages of 18 and 26 to Israel. And the studies have shown that that's had a lasting and positive impact. On the other hand, you have various studies, the pew study -- pew used to be thought of as a Yiddish word. Now we think of it differently. Much of what it portrays about our American Jewish community is very worrisome with strong growth on the right of the orthodox community, a growing group of nones. N-O-N-E-S. Their habit is nonpractice. They're not affiliated with synagogues, organizations, they're not interested in any kind of organized Jewish life. That has tripled from 7 percent to 21 percent. That seems consistent with other religions in America as well, a move away from religion. And the middle, which I guess would be largely the conservative reform movements, is aging and having fewer children. So with that, the studies also show that for younger people there's just less affinity in their kishkas with Israel. Part of that might be because about half of them of millennials have one non-Jewish parent. Many say that Israel should recognize American Jewry as a strategic asset of what American Jews can do as a community politically and in other ways. And you talk about sort of acknowledging certain racist policies. That doesn't play well here. How do you square the circle? How do you deal with the trends that you see?

GIL HOFFMAN: Wow. I'm glad I'm not the leader of Hadassah or a major American Jewish federation who has to come up with the solution to that huge problem that you just outlined, Gary. Obviously a lot of people are being paid a lot of money to work on all these issues. And many of them are having a lot of success. I mean, Hadassah -- I can say I live next door to Young Judea. They sure look like they're having fun. I've seen -- I've spoken to hundreds and hundreds of Birthright groups. Some of them -- the most interesting groups, Gary, are the ones not in college, the older groups. Especially the ones who come from California and other places that have reputations for being more moderate or whatever in their views. Sometimes they ask questions for more than two hours. And I'm not going to go until the last question gets answered because it's so important. I've seen how the people come back from the Birthright trips, and the Birthright follow up trips that are so successful. I see how this has an impact changing their life. And I've seen the talks that I do in America who they get organized by, and it's very often been the people who before going on Birthright didn't have anything. I've seen how a generation that there was in between the people who remembered the 6 day war and when Birthright began, people now between 37 and 57 are lost. Those are people that should have been in a leadership role right now, and have gotten passed over all around America by the Birthright generation going straight from the 6 day war generation to the Birthright generation in the leadership. That gives me optimism in the future. I speak at reform and conservative synagogues that are doing great outreach to their young people. There are

wonderful models out there who we can all learn a lot from. They need to be doing more to keep their young people committed after they finish their bar or bat mitzvah training, make the Hebrew school less annoying and more inspiring.

GARY ROSENBLATT: Last year there was a major initiative talked about I think through Bennett's ministry in terms of significant funding for American Jewish outreach in terms of, again, I think recognizing the importance of the American Jewish community not only in terms of dollars or lobbying in Washington, but just staying supportive of Israel and being that next generation. I imagine that stopped when the government dissolved. Because we haven't heard much about it since then. But please –

GIL HOFFMAN: We don't have a lot of continuity in Israeli politics. When you have one Minister come and go, it's hard to get things done. I'm very thankful that we've had the same transportation Minister for the last six years. Because of that a lot of roads and trains are being built. We finally have continuity on a crucial topic for those of us who commute. One of the ministries that there is continuity from the previous government to the new one is the Diaspora affairs committee where Bennett is going to be continuing. He has initiatives that he worked on together with leading American Jewish organizations in order to have the Israeli government more involved in reaching out to American Jews. So there's a lot of funding behind it. There's a lot of thinking behind it. And I hope and pray that it succeeds.

GARY ROSENBLATT: There are a lot of secret Israeli policies that get more attention in the media than that one which apparently is still going on. I look forward to hearing more about it. One of the questions submitted here. Is there anything that can be done to bring the Palestinians to the negotiating table? And I guess I would add to it, is there internal impetus in the government, or is it being imposed on them from the US and other nations?

GIL HOFFMAN: There can be pressure on the Palestinians to come back to the negotiating table. It's the international community that has failed the Palestinian people time and time again by letting their leadership harm them. Had the international community condemned Abbas for leaving the negotiating table and making a deal with Hamas, then perhaps they would have been forced to come back to the table. Had the American administration done more to persuade the Palestinians that they had to stay at the table and not try to seek some kind of internationally imposed solution that has no chance of happening, perhaps the Palestinians would have better lives right now. I think the leaders of the international community who profess to care so much about the Palestinian people have done them a great disservice. Who has helped them? Israel has helped them. Netanyahu, when he took over, the first thing he did in 2009 was remove two thirds of the security check points in the West Bank. The economy doesn't make a lot of news in the West Bank but it's doing very well. That's why when you had an Arab spring it didn't happen in the West Bank. That's now why the cooperation is better than it's ever been, they say quietly. We don't want to open our mouth to the devil, we say in Hebrew.

GARY ROSENBLATT: Here is a question relating to yesterday's conference. There was a great deal of discussion about renewed anti-Semitism, and individuals making Aliyah. What do you see as the consequences for Israel? I guess I'd ask in terms of France in particular where Aliyah was very strong for -- I was going to say for regrettable reasons but obviously Aliyah is very important to Israel. Do you think we are reaching a time when communities will come to Israel not out of desperation or because they're feeling forced away but are being positively attracted to Israel and what is Israel doing to make that more appealing?

GIL HOFFMAN: Gary, great question. Yesterday at the Jerusalem Post conference said 2014 was the first Aliyah by choice than under duress. Passionately argues why he considers it Aliyah by choice. The people of France are making a decision to have a better life in Israel where they won't be as much assimilation and where you can have a better quality of life as a Jew. We are welcoming the French with open arms. Natan said there are 10,000 coming this year. Apparently they're going to all live in my neighborhood because the property values have gone up so much. I can tell you in the class of my children, French is becoming heard more and more almost as much as English. They go to school where there's a lot of English among the children. We still hear a little Hebrew. They all come together in the end and speak Hebrew together which is a beautiful thing. So yes, there was a panel of anti-Semitism where Irwin Cutler talked about how it didn't die in Auschwitz. It was quite frightening listening to what's going on in Paris and Copenhagen, Argentina, Turkey. I wouldn't want to raise my children under such a situation. I'm very happy raising my children in a Jewish state. Even American Jews, look, we saw people open fire in Kansas City, in Seattle. You're not safe anywhere.

GARY ROSENBLATT: That sounds like a very Jewish positive statement. We're not safe anywhere. We all know the Jewish telegram which is start worrying, details to follow. Those of us who remember telegrams anyway! Yeah. I think to go back to Iran for a moment, what can or is being done between now and the deadline of the end of June from Israel in trying to stop this agreement from coming down as it is?

GIL HOFFMAN: That's a good thing Netanyahu appointed five Ministers that have responsibility for Iran because they've all been going around and talking. Yuval Stein claims he has made the deal less bad. I hope and pray he's telling the truth. Only he knows it. He's the one who has been speaking to Wendy Sherman on the American side, has been speaking to the French and the Germans and British in order to try to make the deal less bad. No one is under the illusion that they can stop the deal. Actually Carolyn yesterday at the conference believes it can be stopped but other than Carolyn I think no one is under the illusion the deal can be stopped so they're trying to make the deal less bad. We just hope that the Americans would negotiate better. We saw the Americans come into the negotiation saying that the sunset clause will last 30 years. Instead it lasts 10 to 15 which is what the Iranians were asking for. We wanted it to be 30 years when Chelsea will be the President of the United States.

GARY ROSENBLATT: Just one thought about anti-Semitism in America which as you say no one knows, and there's always reason for being cautious and protecting ourselves. It struck me that one of the indications that anti-Semitism is not a serious problem today in most of America is looking at Sheldon Adelson as sort of the ADL's nightmare in terms of a very well-known Jewish billionaire from Las Vegas who is very outspoken in trying to influence American and Israeli policy. And as far as I know, although he's criticized for any number of things, I don't think the anti-Semitic factor is a big one. I think it's worth noting anyway. Let me just ask you, it's always a pleasure talking with you. I wondered if you had any suggestions for the American Jewish audience here in terms of people say how can I help Israel? What can I do other than reading the Jerusalem Post?

GIL HOFFMAN: And listening to voice of Israel.com. Thank you so much for asking that question. Those of you in the room and those of you who are watching, absolutely. You're a part of Israel's future. You do have a say. You don't have a vote. But you do have a say. And you are not taken into account as much as you should but you are. So when people ask me what can I do to help, I tell people helping Israel is easy. Stands for education, advocacy, solidarity, and your money. So I know Hadassah is involved in all of those things. You can be

very proud of yourselves in what you do. So I don't talk about the why. But education. Be as informed as you can. It happens to be the media outlets I work for are the best. But there are others as well I'm sure. And the more informed you are, the better it is for Israel because you are ambassadors for the people of Israel whether you like it or not. Especially in the age of Facebook and Twitter where everyone is a journalist. I'm Gil_Hoffman on Twitter by the way and I'm almost at 9,000 followers. If any of you are on Twitter I need to get to that soon. You can all in your social circles be they real social circles or what passes for it on computers nowadays, advance the truth about Israel. The more informed you are, every little bit helps. Advocacy, be involved wherever you are on the political map, we need all the help that we can get. S is for solidarity which you've shown by coming here on your lunch break, those watching on your break, those in California on their breakfast break, to find out what is happening behind the scenes in Israeli politics. I come on speaking tours a couple of times a year. I can be reached at Gil@Jpost.com. Thank you. (Applause).

GARY ROSENBLATT: Let me thank you, Gil. It's been a pleasure schmoozing with you and hearing your insights. I really appreciate it. It's very helpful I think for all of us. To close, I want to turn the mic back over to a very patient Marcie. Thank you very much for this opportunity, Marcie.

MARCIE NATAN: My thanks to both of you. A very patient and better informed Marcie thanks to this conversation. I do want before closing to say to our audience, both here and listening to us, and watching us from across the country that one of the very practical ways that we can make a difference is to encourage our children and grandchildren to participate in those Birthright trips. It's an amazing, free opportunity. My understanding from a recent meeting is not only those trips sponsored by Young Judea but others as well are decreasing in the number of participants. I see that as one way we can really make a practical difference and advocate on behalf of Israel. I want to remind everyone that this session as well as our past sessions has been recorded. You can watch alone, or in a group, or as the centerpiece of a unit in one of your chapters or groups, or create it as part of a community program. Also, please do share your feedback with us by completing our online survey, which will be E-mailed to you. Your input helps us to make each of these programs that much more interesting and meaningful for you. Continue this conversation on our website at www.Hadassah.org/definingZionism. That's www.hadassah.org/definingzionism, and on Twitter using the hashtag #DefiningZionism. Additionally if you haven't done so already, please register for the entire Defining Zionism series to receive updates. Whether we agree on any one definition of Zionism or not we can agree that the word conjures up in people a wide variety of emotions and responses. Gil, we appreciate your taking the time to be with us, to address such a timely and sensitive subject in such a straightforward manner. We really do appreciate it. Again, the topic for today was do Zionism and democracy go hand in hand.

GIL HOFFMAN: The answer is yes.

MARCIE NATAN: It's a resounding yes. Gary, you're a moderator extraordinaire. We really appreciate having you with us. It added to the afternoon. A special thank you to the volunteers and staff who have been involved in Defining Zionism without whom these presentations wouldn't be possible. And of course, our thanks to you, our audience here and across the country. You are really the key to the success of the program and the voices that make a difference in ensuring that Israel remains a priority for each and every one of us. Thank you. Have a wonderful rest of the day.

(Applause).