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Jewish Resolve: Drawing Strength from Yom Kippur

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As on Yom Kippur of 1973, Jewish communities around the world -- and Israel in particular, are facing an external threat of historic proportion.

It was 38 years ago that a consortium of Arab states launched a surprise attack on Israel on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), the holiest and most solemn day of the year for the Jewish people. It was a sadistic attack, timed to happen when Jews in Israel would have their guard down -- in synagogue, with all communications closed (no electricity or fire is permissible) and likely weak and tired from fasting.

But Jewish resolve and the need for survival was greater than the hatred unleashed on the tiny state by Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq with troops and aid from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Pakistan, Sudan, Morocco, Cuba and Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization. Many nations further participated in attempting to destroy Israel by funding and supplying this war effort -- including the former Soviet Union through its alliance with Egypt and Arab states.

Israel was victorious and for many Jews today, Yom Kippur is more than just a day of private reflection and atonement. It is a day of Jewish pride and strength, and an expression of our resolve and effort to survive in our ancestral homeland despite the incredible suffering our people have endured throughout the ages.

And because Yom Kippur is a holiday that brings Jews together and fills synagogues around the world to the rafters, it is a holiday that unifies us and recommits us and strengthens us for the coming year. This re-strengthening of our commitment to Israel

and our culture and religion was indeed the secret weapon the Arabs missed in 1973 when they launched their attack.

The enemies of Israel and the Jewish people should know that our resolve today is greater than it was even on Yom Kippur in 1973. When we say that never again will there be a Holocaust and the gathering of millions of Jews into concentration camps where they will be gassed -- or annihilated by Gazan bombs or a nuclear Iran, we are serious. Israel does not stand alone -- not among Diaspora Jews and not among Western nations like Canada who rightly understand that Israel is the defender of freedom and democracy in the Middle East.

For today, we bear witness to a 'gang up on Israel and the Jewish people' mentality heretofore unseen in history -- for there has never before been such a convergence of technology and communication combined with such a seething hatred for the Jewish people under the guise of anti-Zionism. It is unconscionable and immoral that any religious minority on this planet -- and there are only 13 million of us -- is continuously attacked by a consortium of 52 Islamic Conference states at the United Nations. The Iranian president regularly and publicly calls for Israel's destruction; Hamas continues to shoot rockets at Israel even as the Palestinians demand a state -- but not peace, while the wanna-be leader of a new Islamic caliphate -- Turkey, is complicit in sending a flotilla to break the Gaza blockade (and subsequently demanding an apology from Israel for daring to defend itself).

Like Yom Kippur of 1973, we are in an emergency situation -- one that we must not leave again to chance and illusion. While Israel's enemies continue to plan war against the state or fund terrorism from a distance, others are warring against Israel from across continents. In Canada, for example, money was raised to fund a flotilla to Gaza this summer; at the end of August, an Arab group commemorating 'al-Quds Day' at Queens Park (Ontario's legislature) turned the celebration into a venom-laced protest by referring to Israel as a "cancer," and asserting that all troubles in the world are the fault of Jews. A woman presented by protest organizers as a representative of the United Church of Canada was there in support of this monstrous hate speech.

You may wonder how this could be allowed to happen -- not in Palestinian town of Ramallah, but in Toronto. The truth is that anti-Semitism (disguised as anti-Israelism) has become permissible on our university campuses, at gay pride weeks and in large unions like the Canadian Union of Public Employees -- Ontario and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. When the world's oldest mental illness (anti-Semitism) entrenches itself in institutions, it becomes acceptable in the public sphere as well.

The examples of Israel and Jewish hatred are numerous and slowly seeping into mainstream narrative. Statements questioning Israel's right to exist are routinely given a pass -- most recently in a CBC Radio interview when a Palestinian representative was permitted to state -- unchallenged, that Israel has been occupying Palestinian land since 1948. Anti-Israel activists like George Galloway, who speaks of Hezbollah terrorist Hassan Nasrallah (whose hatred of Jews could rival Hitler's) in glowing terms, is given a

hero's welcome on university campuses across the country, while the Boycott Israel movement has filtered down to your local public library: Vancouver just hosted a meeting at one such publicly funded facility designed to encourage literacy, not hate. And just this past weekend, a group called for a boycott of the Jerusalem String Quartet's performance in Vancouver.

The Ottawa Protocol against Anti-Semitism just signed last month is evidence enough of how serious and concerning this issue is in Canada and around the world. Why else would a government and individual parliamentarians (who volunteered their time) spend more than two years studying and reporting on the assault on Canadian Jews? Canadians should be thankful to each and every parliamentarian involved from the three leading parties for recognizing this growing menace, acting upon it and providing a precedent for other nations to follow.

Yet despite these challenges, Israel will continue to grow and blossom as a Jewish state. We have learned to stand up to those who wish we would disappear and to those who would do their utmost to make that happen. We are a people that has stood the test of time. Having just marked the year 5772 calendar year on Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year), we are one of the oldest living religions known to humanity. And once again, this Saturday we will be renewing our commitment, our pride and our strength to our legacy.