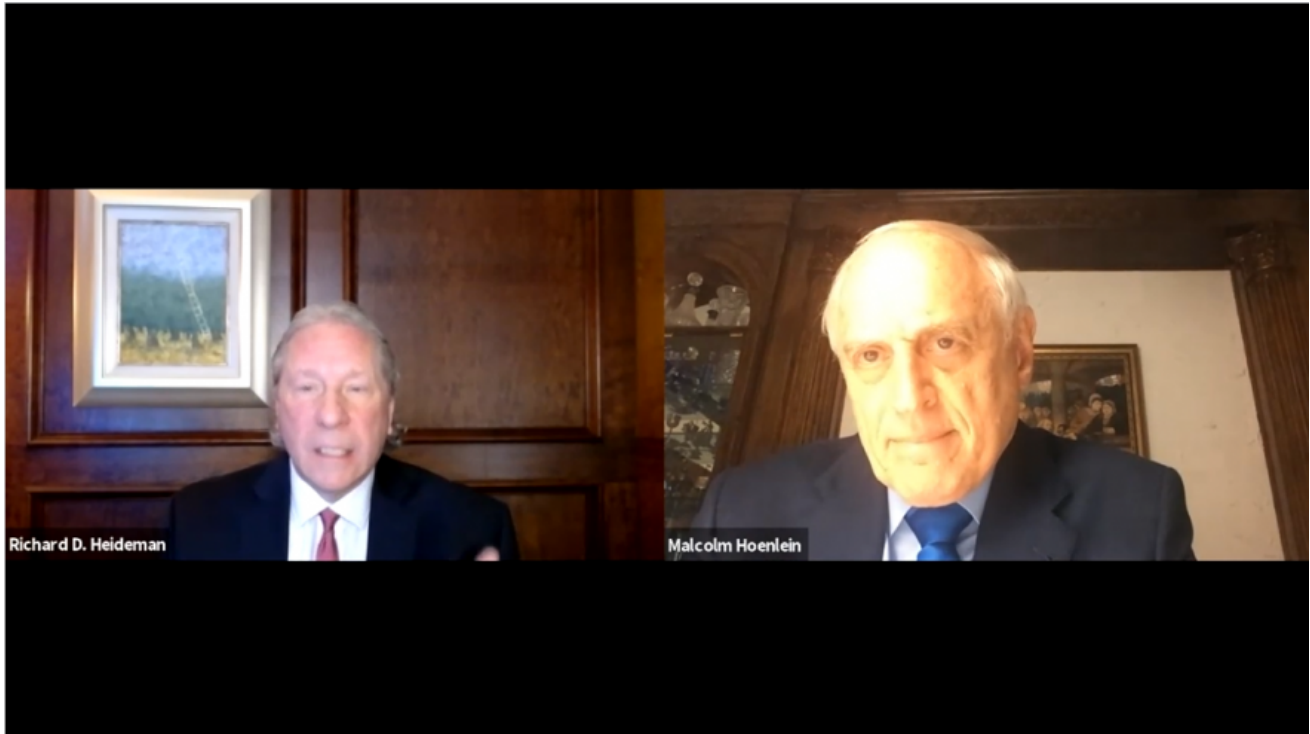


American Zionist Movement points to Muslim world as bright spot for Jews in dark year

“We look at anti-Semitism around the world today, the rise in Europe—double-digit increases. But one place, it’s different. In one sector of the world,” said Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations executive vice chairman Malcolm Hoenlein.

BY **DMITRIY SHAPIRO**



Richard Heideman, president of the American Zionist Movement, and Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. Source: Screenshot.

(May 6, 2021 / JNS) A lengthy interview with Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations executive vice chairman Malcolm Hoenlein wrapped up the three-hour long virtual national conference of the American Zionist Movement on Monday, during which Hoenlein stressed the importance of Jewish unity and learning lessons from history to continue moving Zionism forward.

During the conference, Hoenlein was interviewed by AZM president Richard Heideman in the convention’s third keynote slot. The conference featured videos spliced together from a long list of “who’s who” in the pro-Israel world, including leaders of major organizations, Israeli politicians, rabbis, academics and a bipartisan slate of members of Congress.

Besides being affected by the global coronavirus pandemic, the conference is being held in the backdrop of increasing cases of anti-Semitism worldwide, but also in the aftermath of a new dynamic in the Middle East brought about by the Abraham Accords.

The conference highlighted a range of perspectives that joined in support of Zionism—from Republicans and Democrats to rabbis from various denominations and organizations with wide-ranging goals.

Hoenlein expounded on the idea during his conversation with Heideman, where he called for unity among the diverse perspectives in the Jewish community on Zionism for the survival of the Jewish state.

“I think the perspective of the past is really essential as we look to shape a better future in an era of cancel culture, which wants to wipe out history. For Jews, history is essential—not because we get lost in it, but because it’s a guide for us in the future. We look back in order to look forward,” said Hoenlein. “... When we were divided, every challenge was too great. And it was true in the story of Hanukkah and in the story of Purim—of every great miracle that happened to the Jewish people throughout our history—that we needed unity.”

That is not to say that differences should be ignored, he said, including over policies that Israel pursues; however, they should not give in to those who want to disassociate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism.

“The difference from the 1930s is not that the world has changed. It’s not a more caring place. There isn’t less hatred; we see it manifest in so many ways,” said Hoenlein. “The difference is that we have a Jewish state and a Jewish Army and a Jewish Air Force and Jewish communities that are in danger could be saved.”

During his introduction, Heideman said that the theme of this year’s conference was “Zionism Forward,” and much of the conversation revolved around combating the stigma attached to Zionism by its enemies and how to instill pride in Zionism among Jewish youth in the face of anti-Zionist attacks online and on college campuses.

“They are told that Israel is an apartheid, racist, criminal state,” said Heideman.

“You know that’s not the case, I know that’s not the case, Israel knows that’s not the case. But in the war of public opinion against Israel, it’s all too easy for the haters and the deniers to castigate Israel, single her out and accuse Israel of dastardly things,” he said.

“Let us together, as Zionists—from around the world, from around the United States, from around our various synagogues and organizations—let us come together in the spirit of moving Zionism forward,” he continued. “And let us do it in the spirit of Theodor Herzl, recognizing his leadership, honoring his vision, respecting and appreciating the reality that we have accomplished together in our time.”



Natan Sharansky. Source: Screenshot.

‘Rise of a new, sophisticated and virulent anti-Semitism’

A bipartisan group of members of the U.S. House of Representatives presented video messages earlier in the conference speaking on the unbreakable bond between the United States and Israel. They included Reps.

Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-Fla.), Lee Zeldin (R-N.Y.), Kathy Manning (D-N.C.), Robert Aderholt (R-Ala.), Brad Schneider (D-Ill.), Elaine Luria (D-Va.), Jamie Raskin (D-Md.) and Virginia Foxx (R-N.C.).

“In a time when Israel’s detractors are seeking to delegitimize the Jewish state at every opportunity, the pro-Israel community must continue to provide strong support for Israel,” said Luria. “I’m optimistic that the Abraham Accords are beginning of normalizing Israel’s relationship with Gulf Cooperation Council countries in the Middle East, and I hope that more nations will follow the [United Arab Emirates] and Bahrain. Continued U.S. leadership in the Middle East is critical to fighting Iran’s malign activities in the region, including the pursuit of a nuclear weapon, which poses an existential threat to Israel.”

Republicans like Zeldin and Democrats like Luria and Schneider spoke positively of the accords reached during the administration of former President Donald Trump. Hoenlein remarked on the significance of the development, contrasting it with Jew-hatred on the rise throughout the world.

“We look at the anti-Semitism around the world today, the rise in Europe—double-digit increases. Even in New York City, everywhere,” he said. “But one place, it’s different. In one sector of the world. And that’s in the Muslim world, where we see for the first time a decrease in anti-Semitism. Where governments are speaking out against it.”

Also given a keynote speaking slot at the conference was Irwin Cotler, Canada’s **special envoy on anti-Semitism** and founder of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights.

Speaking from Jerusalem, he addressed the convention on combatting anti-Semitism, saying that the Jewish people were an indigenous, anti-colonialist people who struggled throughout history against colonial attempts at dispossession, displacement and destruction in the land of Israel.

“Which makes the indictment of Israel as a colonial state and Zionism as a colonial movement one of turning both facts, law and history, on its head,” said Cotler, who added that the world is witnessing the rise of a new, sophisticated and virulent anti-Semitism for which there will be a need for a new vocabulary to describe.

“Simply put, traditional or classical anti-Semitism is a discrimination against, denial of, assault upon, the rights of Jews to live as equal members in whatever society they inhabit,” he said. “The new anti-Semitism is a discrimination against, denial of, assault upon the rights of Israel and the Jewish people to live as an equal member of the family of nations—of the right even to live.”

Cotler called the new anti-Semitism “genocidal anti-Semitism” that advocates crimes against the Jewish people such as incitement by the Iranian regime.

He listed various types of the new anti-Semitism, noting that the most dangerous kind was what he called the “laundering” or masking of anti-Semitism by delegitimizing the State of Israel and the Jewish people under universal public values, authority of the United Nations, international law, human rights and the struggle against racism.

“Let’s face it, the worst thing you can do in the world today is to call somebody a racist or to call a people and a state racist,” said Cotler. “The very label supplies the indictment. No further proof is required. And if any proof is required, then one continuously trots out the label of Israel as an apartheid state.”

By branding Israel an apartheid state, he said, Israel is branded as a crime against humanity, implying that it has no right to exist.

Cotler said that nobody is looking for Israel to be above international law and human-rights standards, but not to systematically deny it equality before the law. Human-rights standards, he concluded, should be applied to all countries, not just Israel.



Irwin Cotler, Canada’s special envoy on anti-Semitism and founder of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights. Source: Screenshot.