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# Israel's Critics Sidestep Bigger Threats Elsewhere

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu this week signaled a partial reversal of his coalition's plan that would threaten the nation's democratic character by letting the Knesset override judicial decisions, calling the effort a "mistake." The signal was a heartening one to the plan's opponents at home, and to nervous audiences abroad who fear Netanyahu and his coalition are prepared to fundamentally alter the character of the Jewish state.

To be sure, though, Netanyahu's statement doesn't mean judicial reform will no longer be a contentious issue in Jerusalem. To the contrary, a top coalition member dismissed the prime minister's comments and said he thinks the plan remains a "good" idea — in fact, that it's "the beginning of the reform" and "not everything." And, as Times of Israel editor David Horovitz recently catalogued, Netanyahu has said different things to different audiences about judicial reform.

Nevertheless, Netanyahu's public U-turn shows that Israel's democracy, which critics feared would die along with an independent judiciary, is not just alive but thriving. Netanyahu bowed to mass protests and now says he wants to find consensus with his Knesset opposition or, if he can't, the public.

What happens in Israel always gets outsized global attention, and the coalition's effort to undermine the judiciary's independence was no exception. In the United States, it attracted harsh criticism from a wide swath of Jewish leaders, influential opinion shapers, and President Biden.

Now, the question is whether those who have been most vocal about this threat to Israel's democracy will acknowledge Netanyahu's U-turn and focus their attention on far more urgent threats to democracy both in Israel and beyond.

Consider this week's spectacle in New York. While Netanyahu attends United Nations meetings and chats with individual leaders, Israeli activists who remain outraged by judicial reform are joining with U.S. Jewish organizations to mount protests outside his New York hotel and around the city.

Meanwhile, influential figures like New York Times columnist Tom Friedman continue to pound away at Netanyahu over judicial reform and his coalition's expansionist designs on the West Bank, expressing outrage that Washington would help advance "normalization" between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Biden remains unhappy with Netanyahu and his coalition's reform effort, which explains why Biden met with him in New York but — in a clear public rebuke — had long stalled in granting him a White House meeting (he now has).

If you're watching from Washington or New York — or from London, Berlin, New Delhi, or Tokyo — you might think the biggest threat to Israel's democracy comes from within the Jewish state. And that's a disservice not just to Israel but to those fighting for freedom in places where efforts to sway government policy are not tolerated.

If those focused on Israel would open their eyes, they'd see a far larger threat — to Israeli democracy and democracy writ large — on prominent display in New York. It comes in the form of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, a human rights abuser of unusual accomplishment, who presides over a regime that seeks Israel's destruction and works closely with the world's leading autocrats.

Raisi, Tehran's deputy prosecutor general in the late 1980s, served on the four-member "Death Commission" that in 1988 engineered the slaughter (by hanging, firing squad, and other grisly methods) of thousands of political prisoners, including women and "children as young as 13," who were later buried in unmarked graves. He later called it "one of the proud achievements of the system."

As deputy chief justice, attorney general, and chief justice over the last two decades, he was a central player in the regime's prosecution, jailing, torture, and killing of countless detainees, including many who participated in the "Green Revolution" protests of 2009 after that year's fraudulent presidential election.

As president, he now spearheads a regime that's cracking down in increasingly brutal fashion on protests across the Islamic Republic (over women's rights, worker rights, and deteriorating economic conditions), with arrests, interrogations, prosecutions, trials, jail sentences, and executions.

Meanwhile, Tehran just expelled a third of the top inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency working in Iran, jeopardizing agency

