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The case for nationalism, by the Israeli credited with shaping Trump's foreign policy

Viktor Orban has hosted him, one of his books is de rigueur in the Trump White House. How Jerusalem-based Yoram Hazony, an archconservative theoretician, became the house intellectual of the world's nationalistic circles

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Yoram Hazony was in the middle of writing a book about God four years ago, when the British voted for Brexit and Donald Trump was elected president of the United States. Hazony, an-Orthodox Jew, got the message and switched to writing a different book – one about nationalism. In favor of it, that is. Since then, thank God, he's been reborn.

Not that Hazony was unknown in the field of political theory before that. On the contrary. But his 2018 book "The Virtue of Nationalism" (Basic Books) sent his stock soaring sky-high. It made him a darling of the American media and landed him on the popular talk shows of the right-wing commentator Ben Shapiro and the disillusioned liberal Dave Rubin, got him headlines in leading newspapers and also earned him the 2019 Conservative Book of the Year Award.

Leaders around the world are reading why Hazony thinks that the national state is the dam protecting us against despotic world rule. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban met with him for a lengthy conversation, and a former senior staffer in the Trump White House, Michael Anton, stated in an article in Foreign Policy that Hazony's book – a best seller, it's almost superfluous to add, that has been translated into 12 languages – serves as a foundation for the foreign policy of U.S. President Donald Trump.

Today, too, two years after the book's initial publication, it continues to stir interest and controversy. Already in its opening pages the author draws a direct line between the European Union and Nazi Germany. And in the meantime, Hazony, who is firmly planted in Jerusalem, has consolidated his status as the house intellectual of certain right-wing circles in the United States, was appointed chairman of the newly created Edmund Burke Foundation, which advocates a policy of "national conservatism," and has, on its behalf, led highly publicized revival conferences in Washington, Rome, London and Jerusalem.

"My life is the life of an entrepreneur," the philosopher, Bible scholar and political theoretician tells Haaretz. "For more than 30 years I have identified people with brilliant ideas, promoted them, supported them, and then

connected them with publishers and PR people. I always thought I'd do that in Israel, among Jews, but God has other plans, and since 2016 there has been a very high demand for my abilities also in the United States and Europe."

What does that demand stem from?

Hazony: "The situation in the United States and in Western Europe is one of internal disintegration and loss of the Christian tradition from which the democratic tradition sprang. Such values as family, independence and even basic things like ensuring that the expenditures of the state treasury do not exceed its revenues – we see there today unruliness that's hard to imagine. And all this before we touch on questions such as the surging hatred between right and left in the United States and Britain, of a sort we haven't seen since the 1960s or possibly even since the American Civil War.

"The situation is hurtling toward violence and nonrecognition of the left by the right and vice versa," he continues. "It's hard to see how they will emerge from this, and it's important to us not only because the United States is a good and supportive friend, but also because Israelis have a tendency to import every social phenomenon that develops in the United States. That hasn't happened so far, thank God, and I hope it stays that way."

My feeling is that the situation here in Israel actually is on the brink of civil war.

"I hope you're wrong, but I can't deny it. I have something of a feeling that our demonstrations are a bit of an imitation of the direction things are taking in the United States and England. Before all this started, it was the left's refusal to accept the election of Donald Trump, and there was a similar phenomenon in England after Brexit. So, when people started to say, 'We aren't willing to accept Bibi [Benjamin Netanyahu] as prime minister,' I felt a little that it wasn't a coincidence. The basic rules of the game in a democracy are that my side chooses my candidate, the other side chooses its candidate, and we arrive at peace between us, because it's better to recognize the legitimate choice of the adversary than to start shooting one another in the streets. What happens when one side – and in my view it's more acute now in the United States and Britain – says: 'You chose Trump, or Brexit, and we aren't willing to accept that'?

"At that point you enter a gray zone and are constantly looking for ways to press harder [to avoid accepting the winning side]. And afterward a few buildings are burned, police officers are attacked," he observes – and for a moment one can almost forget that this year's disturbances in the United States erupted in the wake of the murder of George Floyd by a police officer, and that in a 2017 rally of the radical right in Charlottesville, Virginia, a

woman was murdered and dozens of people were injured. These disturbances, he notes, “are the beginning of the end of democracy in the true sense of the word.”

But here in Israel there’s a prime minister who has been criminally indicted.

“In the United States people claim that Trump is a criminal, and like here – look, I am not an expert in police investigations. Like everyone, I read about it in the paper – part of it is spin and part sounds not right or ridiculous. The problem is that the accusations, even if they’re correct, don’t cut deep enough to persuade the supporters of Trump or Netanyahu, but the opposition says: We are ready to tear everything apart over this. Each side is supposed to grant legitimacy to the other side, to say ‘you’re an idiot,’ ‘you’re leading us to disaster – but ‘you are legitimate because you were elected.’

“But now the whole game has changed, and the issue of legitimacy or lack of legitimacy has become the crux of politics. I ask, why is Bibi suddenly not legitimate? I think it’s related to the weakness of the left, which feels that it fails to create an alternative to persuade the centrist voters.”

There was a time, which Hazony terms “prehistory,” when he didn’t need a newspaper to find out the latest news about the prime minister: From 1991 to 1995 he served as an adviser to then-Deputy Foreign Minister Netanyahu, sat with him in the Knesset, accompanied him to political meetings and to the Madrid Peace Conference, and was also in the room in 1993 “on the day we learned about the Oslo Accords, in the grimmest meeting of the Likud Knesset faction in the party’s history, in my opinion.”

Hazony later burst into the Israeli public consciousness with the think tank he founded in Jerusalem, the Shalem Center. But over the past two decades he has somewhat disappeared from the local map – there’s no doubt that the attention he’s been getting internationally of late is like poking a finger in the eye of everyone who thought they were rid of him. Hazony thinks that, unlike in 2016, probably most people think Trump can pull of a win this time, and meanwhile hopes they will still be waiting for him in the United States – after the election, after the pandemic, after the deluge.

From Princeton to Eli

Yoram Hazony takes a seat across from me in the lobby of the Inbal Jerusalem Hotel. He’s tall, his skin is a porcelain hue, he wears a black kippa and round glasses. His soft voice, which I know well from numberless video clips I watched, is tinged with an American accent. But the softness is misleading. Hazony is an adversary who wears down and disarms his rival, as anyone who has faced off against him can testify.

We remove our face masks and for a moment I contemplate telling him that I already feel defeated. We're meeting in connection with the publication of his new Hebrew-language book, "A Jewish State: Herzl and the Promise of Nationalism." In the two months ahead of the meeting we corresponded via Twitter and I also met his Israeli publisher in what felt like an audition. The interaction was rife with suspicion and hesitation on all sides. While his books have received wide coverage in mainstream and other media over the years, this is Hazony's first significant interview to an established media body in Israel and elsewhere for two decades.

Yoram Hazony, who terms himself "very, very conservative," was born in Rehovot, in 1964, but grew up in Princeton, where his family moved when he was a year old in the wake of his father's academic career: Yehonathan Hazony was a professor of engineering, with an expertise in robotics. Although he did not grow up in a religiously observant home, the foundations upon which his political and religious views rest were planted in his childhood, he maintains. "I grew up in a Ben-Gurionist home – national, Zionist, even though we lived in the United States. But our family tended toward the traditional."

In the end, however, Hazony arrived at the decision to return to Israel and become religiously observant thanks to relatives who were somewhat more pious. An uncle had married a religious woman and became religious; they were among the founders of the settlement of Kedumim. ("The whole family supported that direction," he emphasizes.) The Sabbaths the 18-year-old Hazony spent in their home with their family during a year-long stay in Israel under the auspices of the Young Judea youth movement left a powerful impression on him: "After that year I went back to the United States, knowing that I wanted to return to Israel and establish a religiously observant family. And so it was."

As an undergraduate at Princeton, Hazony concentrated in East Asian Studies. A special place accrues to those years in shaping his personality. In fact, all the dominant elements of his identity – the entrepreneurship, the rhetorical skills and the political approach, too – were already evident there. In 1984, he founded a magazine for conservative thought at the university (the Princeton Tory), and a year later he and the university team won the North American Debating Championship. More important, at Princeton he met his future partners in the establishment of the Shalem Center – Daniel Polisar and Joshua Weinstein – as well as his future wife and the mother of his nine children, Yael (née Julia Fulton), an American-born convert to Judaism. And there was another significant meeting there, which would come to haunt him afterward. But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

Hazony landed back in Israel in 1988, while he was still pursuing his doctoral studies in political theory at Rutgers, in New Jersey. He and his wife were among the founders of the settlement of Eli in the northern West Bank.

The immense potential that some saw in Hazony in the political and academic realms is evident from the fact that the American investigative journalist Robert I. Friedman devoted an entire chapter to him in his 1992 book "Zealots for Zion," cited Hazony's vision of creating an "Israeli Princeton" and termed him, cautiously, as someone who could become a future leader of Israel.

In the meantime, in 1990, Hazony began writing editorials for The Jerusalem Post, and a year later the paper's editor, David Bar-Illan, served as the go-between who put Hazony in touch with Netanyahu. The latter was looking for a research assistant for what became his 1993 book "A Place Among the Nations." Hazony accepted the challenge – and stayed.

"I was a kind of jack of all trades," he recalls. "We worked in an apartment that had been rented for our joint work. He delivered speeches and I wrote, added material and did research, and that's how we constructed it."

Hazony also served as an editor for Netanyahu's next book, "Fighting Terrorism," which came out in 1995, when Hazony stopped working with him. But he's stingy with words when it comes to talking about what happened between him and Netanyahu during the time he served as his adviser. Media reports describe their relations as ranging between "can't stand each other" and "confidants," depending on the source. Hazony says only that the relationship between them boils down to his being Netanyahu's former consultant, and today they are not close.

Be that as it may, his view of his former employer is unequivocal: "Netanyahu is the best prime minister since [David] Ben-Gurion. It's possible that a large part of the public doesn't yet understand how he succeeded in transforming Israel from a marginal country under threat into a country that plays a central role in international alliances and is growing financially rich thanks to that – a country that, strategically, is becoming stronger to a point where it's impossible to imagine the European-Middle Eastern-African arena without it. He is truly a great statesman. I think that is understood better in the United States than here."

Historians will probably remember also Levi Eshkol's visit to Lyndon Johnson's ranch in 1968, where the foundations of the diplomatic and military alliance with the United States were laid. Also the "alliance of the periphery" that Ben-Gurion forged a decade before that with Turkey, Ethiopia, Iran and the Kurds of Iraq. And there's also Yitzhak Rabin and

Shimon Peres, who set in motion the relations with the Gulf States back in the 1990s. But in Hazony's view, Netanyahu is irreplaceable.

"Is there anyone of stature on the right [in Israel] today who can manage a system of international relations of this kind? At the moment there is no one who comes close," he asserts.

Hazony quickly moved on after the end of his working relationship with Netanyahu. In 1994, toward the end of his period with the future premier, Hazony, together with Dr. Daniel Polisar, Ofir Haivry and Joshua Weinstein, founded the Shalem Center, which until a few years ago was perceived as his life's work. The business of think tanks, he explains, depends on recruiting donors "who don't like the state of discourse and want to invest in the development of a new idea." In this case the donors over the years included wealthy American business people/philanthropists Ron Lauder, whom he met through Netanyahu, and Sheldon Adelson. And the ideas the institute was going to invest in were not intended to remain within the realms of academia but to influence policy, in part with the aid of Azure, a now-defunct quarterly put out by the center, whose major aim was to reintroduce the term "Jewish state" into public discourse.

How else did you plan to influence policy?

"The situation in Israel in the 1990s was such that even a traditional term that's 3,000 years old, like 'Am Yisrael' [the Jewish people, the people of Israel], had become anathema, because it offended the Arabs or was racist or I don't know what. To say that you were a Jew and that the state was Jewish was simply… passé at least. In that period, when the centenary of the Basel Congress [where the Zionist Organization was founded, in 1897] was being marked – and I am talking about the mainstream, not about the vociferous handful of post-Zionists – no one saw any reason to acknowledge, learn or think about those things. People said that 'Zionism's place is in the past, now we're on the way to peace with the whole world.'

"So we [at Shalem] found investors who were ready to back a multiyear process in which we would study the subject, explain, find people who possessed the requisite skills, decide together with them what books they would write – books that were lacking – and then we would teach them how to get to the media and talk about those things. We established the Shalem Center in 1994, and the nation-state law passed in 2018, so that's about the range, 24 years."

Do you mean that you deserve credit for the law?

"I can't take credit for the concrete efforts to promote it, because others, such as the Kohelet Policy Forum, took the ball and ran with it. But we at the

Shalem Center inaugurated the process, and there was no one other than us. I myself was part of the last team that formulated the Kinneret Covenant [an effort by Jewish intellectuals and policy makers to agree on a set of principles for coexistence among the state's diverse Jewish communities] in 2001, which I see as a turning point. After it, politicians like [Ariel] Sharon and [Ehud] Olmert began to demand Israel's recognition as a 'Jewish state' in international negotiations, too. So, yes, we developed it until we arrived at a situation where others could employ the term 'Jewish state' and turn it into a law."

Between traitors and Kahane

Hazony says he invested many months in that process, but also advanced the goal by another route. In 2000 he published "The Jewish State: The Struggle for Israel's Soul" (Basic Books and The New Republic), which depicted "Israel's decline as a Jewish state" and criticized intellectuals and writers who sought to impart their radical ideas to the entire society, he says.

Hazony did not make do with the usual suspects: Amos Oz, David Grossman, Yehuda Amichai; nor did he only term the Oslo Accords "the branzha's [left-wing 'guild's'] most spectacular political achievement." He also castigated Martin Buber, Gershom Scholem, Hannah Arendt and other Jewish-German intellectuals – most of them the original backbone of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem – for having opposed Israel's establishment and viewing its nationalistic nature as an immoral deviation from the ideal destiny of the Jewish people.

That book, too, stirred anger and controversy among American Jewry and became a best seller. Amazon promoted it by maintaining (as its relevant page still does) that it "may be the most controversial book on Zionism and Israel published in the last 20 years," and the mainstream American media covered it extensively. The Pulitzer Prize-winning conservative political commentator Charles Krauthammer wrote a long cover story on the book in the Weekly Standard in which he warned, apocalyptically, that "the collapse of Zionism may be the story of the 21st century." He concluded by asserting that "Israel's enemies see the future, a future Israelis themselves may now be creating: a world without Zionism, a world without Israel."

The criticism did not resonate so powerfully in Israel, but the Hebrew University for its part was defended by Israel Bartal, now emeritus professor of history, who savaged the book in the Hebrew history journal Cathedra. "The greatest danger that emanates from texts like Hazony's," he says today, "is to free, critical thought, which I actually identify with modern nationalism and with Zionism at its best."

Indeed, Hazony, with his book and articles and their wide dissemination in the United States, caused embarrassment to Israeli policy makers and academics.

"At the time, our consul general in New York, Shmuel Sisso, asked me to appear at meetings with American Jewish leaders in order to reply to the book's allegation that Israeli intellectuals from the Zionist mainstream are traitors," Bartal recalls. "I confronted Hazony professionally. He is charismatic, a superb media figure, and his English makes mincemeat of mine. I can compete with anyone in English, but not with him. Afterward I paid him back in debates conducted in Hebrew."

The knockout was finally delivered by the tried-and-true method of delegitimization via the archives. Journalist Akiva Eldar came across a eulogy that Hazony had written in The Jerusalem Post a decade earlier for Rabbi Meir Kahane – yes, he's that other figure with whom Hazony encountered at Princeton – and published sections of it in Haaretz (Sept. 14, 2000). In his article, Eldar drew a direct connection between the views of the leader of Kahane's Kach party, which was disqualified from running in the 1988 election because its views were deemed racist, and Hazony's views. This, it should be noted, even though Hazony's piece was titled "Farewell from a 'non-Kahanist'" and despite the fact that Hazony emphasized his dissociation from Kahane's racism and violence.

You wrote about the immense influence that Kahane had on the course of your life. What's the story there?

"You saw the headline of the [Haaretz] article, 'Yoram Hazony's teacher and mentor'?" he retorts with a dry laugh. "I myself was never a Kahanist, I was always a Likudnik, but after his assassination, I saw that everyone thought it right to write about how evil he was, so I simply said to myself: If, heaven forbid, something like that were to happen to someone from the other pole, I am certain that everyone on the right and the left would find a way to say something in his or her commemoration. People infer from that article that he had great influence on me, and that is not accurate."

Confrontations of one sort or another studded the path of Hazony's career at the Shalem Center. But he probably never anticipated that the greatest confrontation of all would originate from within the institution itself and terminate his involvement in it. At its peak, the center employed several dozen personnel, most of whom were native English speakers and religiously observant. Perceiving themselves as the pioneers of neoconservatism in Israel, they imported political, social and economic discourse to the country from the doctrines of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. With the generous funding of American tycoons – the center's annual budget stood at $1 million by its fourth year and at almost $10 million in its 10th year – the

institution acquired prestige and mobilized academics and public figures some of whom were actually identified with the left, such as the jurist Ruth Gavison and former Education Minister Amnon Rubinstein.

However, over time, cracks began to appear in the high-intensity enterprise. In 2007, the Shalem Center was the subject of a wide-ranging investigative report in Haaretz by Naama Lanski and Daphna Berman. They described centralized, wasteful management by the institution's senior figures, notably Hazony, who was the "provost" at the time, and Polisar, the center's president. Staff talked about Hazony's "peculiar habits," which included fastidiousness about food and excessive meticulousness about font size in publications and "a 45-degree angle when stapling pages together." He was also said to be prone to outbursts of rage, especially when the staff did not hasten to perform private tasks for him, like babysitting his children.

The Shalem Center offered this statement to Haaretz in response to the allegations: "As the founder and leader of the center, Dr. Yoram Hazony is undoubtedly one of its pillars," a statement asserted, adding, "Every person, certainly a social or business leader, has his own human distinctiveness… Yoram Hazony and Daniel Polisar view the Shalem Center as their life's work. It is definitely possible that on occasion, while preparing for a trip or in some other pressured situation, specific help is needed."

That same year another top figure, the American Jewish educator and writer Daniel Gordis, joined Shalem. He was appointed vice president with the aim of assisting in the ongoing efforts to obtain accreditation for it as a degree-granting academic institution. Gordis took a pragmatic line to obtaining the coveted designation from the Council for Higher Education; Polisar sided with him. A rift developed between Polisar and Hazony, who would not retreat from his more conservative vision – "to build universities that are more receptive to tradition, nationalism and religion" – and in 2012 Hazony found himself removed from his life's project.

In 2013 the institution received academic accreditation and became Shalem College, with Polisar and Gordis holding senior positions; the think tank itself closed.

Asked now why he left, Hazony responds with a bitter smile: "ideological differences." In the acknowledgments of "The Virtue of Nationalism," he notes, "The last few years have been trying ones for me and my family."

"It's a farewell from work of more than two decades and a great many friends," he says frankly. "There were friends who left with me [Weinstein, Haivry], but I left an important part of my life there. For 18 years I tried to establish an American-style college that would teach the Western and Jewish texts and tradition. I brought the college to the brink of recognition by the

CHE and then the institution fell apart and the founders left and I'm not there. I haven't yet found the right channel to get to the place I want to get to."

Deal with Trump

Hazony did in fact find a new outlet for his ideas after leaving Shalem: He is the founder and president of the Jerusalem-based Herzl Institute, which opened in 2013 and is named for the Zionist leader to whom his new book is devoted. In this work, too, he returns to the central themes of his doctrine and points an accusing finger at an anti-Zionist figure: Ahad Ha'am (Asher Ginsberg, 1856-1927), the nemesis of the visionary of the Jewish state. In "A Jewish State: Herzl and the Promise of Nationalism," Theodor Herzl is portrayed as charismatic and determined, commanding extraordinary rhetorical skills, a brilliant diplomat; in short, he evokes Hazony's Netanyahu to a degree. He is a national Zionist leader whose vision was a "Jewish state" (medina yehudit) and not – Hazony emphasizes – the newspeak term to which public figures and academics have had recourse in recent decades, the "state of the Jews" (medinat hayehudim).

Prof. Bartal notes that 20 years ago, in "The Jewish State: The Struggle for Israel's Soul," Hazony also described Herzl's liberal-universalist novel "Altneuland" as a propaganda tract for the masses that did not express the Zionist leader's true inner conservativism.

"I wrote at the time that Hazony had turned Herzl into the father of American-style neoconservatism," Bartal says. "In place of a person who advocates universalism and is far from any idea of insularity and xenophobia, he presents a new Herzl. I don't know what sin Herzl committed that he has to serve today as a propaganda instrument in Trump's election campaign."

"The Jewish State" resonated widely; there's no knowing whether "Herzl and the Promise of Nationalism," published this month, will do likewise. But the book that transformed the 56-year-old Hazony into the harbinger of "national conservatism," and continues to make waves, is "The Virtue of Nationalism." Between Twitter activity (31,300 followers) and a new talk-show broadcast via Zoom from the living room of his home in Jerusalem's post-1967 Ramot neighborhood – Hazony continues to promote that 2018 book, which is also doing well abroad (a German version was recently published, and a French translation has just come out).

The basic premise of "Virtue" is that from the dawn of history, a titanic struggle has been waged between two dichotomous forces over the desirable political order of the world: nationalism – and in our conversation Hazony stresses that this is not tantamount to racism – and imperialism. According to Hazony, imperialism, which is today represented by the European Union

and what he refers to as the new world order, will never succeed, because it is always compelled to rule by force of arms – that is the only way empires can impose their culture, language and religion among diverse groups. It follows that the spread of imperialism dooms the world to constant instability.

Nationalism, by contrast, is an engine for order. People are social beings who function in collective frameworks, such as family and tribe, whose formation and survival are dependent on one central element: loyalty. The national state is the largest unit that allows people to collectively maintain ties of loyalty within it and to operate together for the sake of a particular goal; an international order that rests on national states will not be undermined even if wars break out between them, because each state aspires to preserve only what already belongs to it.

Hazony has been assailed from various quarters over this thesis and the book that expounds it.

“There is no theory in the study of nationalism, beginning 100 years ago and until yesterday, that fits Hazony’s method,” Bartal says. “He presents a contradistinction between empires and nationalism: Do you realize that this is the very opposite of the understanding of how the modern national movements were created in the 19th century? In the first stage of nationalism – in the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire and also in the German Reich – the nation was an integral and recognized part of the empire. In other words, the empire did not reject the nationalism of ethnic groups in most cases, but integrated them as recognized units within the state administration.”

New York magazine took a somewhat different approach. “The book’s major flaw is that Hazony tends to define his terms as ideal types and then argue from those definitions, which, while producing the elegant dichotomy between nation and empire, can also lend his arguments a sense of unreality,” Park MacDougald wrote in a review of the book.

The Palestinian issue

One conclusion that can arise from the book is that the Palestinian people deserves a state of its own, and another possible conclusion is that the Palestinians should leave here voluntarily and disperse among our neighbors.

“There are other conclusions between [those two] that one could arrive at. But at the level of principle I didn’t address the Palestinian issue, because I wanted to write a book that could reinforce the nationalism both of those who believe that the Palestinian people deserves independence, and of those who

believe that the Palestinian people is a sort of tribe within the Arab people and would do better to obtain its self-determination in Jordan."

Hence my question.

"I think that that's a reasonable reading of the book, and yet it's also possible to read it from an opposite point of view. But what's nice about it is that it's not a book about issues that are bothering us about the Palestinian case. Part of what is problematic in general with the idea of the national state is that it's always difficult to decide where the border lies. I say that explicitly. Therefore, the English are still in Northern Ireland, the Indians are in Kashmir, and we have the problem of Judea and Samaria. The question of how to solve the problem is, I think, primarily a practical one, because there is nothing that can determine the issue unequivocally in one direction or another. Therefore I ..."

... try to avoid the issue.

"I know many Israelis think that the Palestinian issue is the most important one in the world, but there are other very important issues. In my view, one of the most important issues in the world is the question of whether the national state is legitimate at all. Today, more than 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a liberal globalist approach is spreading that says there is no need for borders and that the national state is an inherently bad thing, and that all the national states should be weakened and finally dismantled, including Israel. This notion has gained traction over 30 years, and today there's a need to explain and debate and understand who's right about this issue, which is why I wrote the book."

And which is why you write in the Introduction, "Europeans might not relish the prospect of a renewed 'German empire,' even one that was nominally governed from Brussels." What's so bad about the EU?

"Look, if the peoples in Europe want to eliminate their borders and unite, it's their right. But will it be good, in the end, for the Italians or the Hungarians? Is it good for Israel or for other states? I'll start from the end. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, in 1989, and the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht, in 1992 [which effectively created the EU], the world was euphoric: Now all the wars are over, peace has come to the whole world. Part of that was Shimon Peres' "New Middle East," part of it was the Europeans who said: That's it, we don't need borders or independent states any longer, we're moving toward John Lennon's 'Imagine.'

"Similar euphoria reigned in the United States, too, on the right and also on the left, and people began dreaming about the new world order of President George Bush in which the whole world would be under one law and the

American army would be the world's policeman. All these dreams were different versions of the liberal globalist dream of the End of Days. But in Europe they took it to an extreme, they simply became part of some sort of messianic cult."

Really?

"Except that, amid this utopian conception, the Western world said: 'We'll make a peace agreement with China, never mind that it's a dictatorship, never mind that they are murdering, that they are oppressing – peace will come,' and they gave China Hong Kong. Giving it Hong Kong is very similar to the agreement with the PLO. After all, even those who said that we need to build a Palestinian state in Judea and Samaria, didn't necessarily have to say: For that purpose we'll bring [Yasser] Arafat. That was not the only possible choice.

"I see the apparatus of the EU as an ideological, idealistic one that is creating and exporting to the whole world a utopian worldview and demanding that countries like Israel join – which is liable to put those countries at great risk. They can also put Europe at risk, because Europe has enemies – it has Russia, it has all kinds of security problems coming from the direction of the Muslim world. And they are not cultivating their ability to defend themselves in the face of that."

You say that they are captive to naïvete.

"It's a worldview that resembles Marxism in the sense that it's a deep and interesting philosophy that denies reality. It's really a type of religion. You can see it as upgraded Christianity. And that's not good for us. Because 350 million people [who are part of the EU] whose political apparatus is relentlessly generating demands – stop being national states, stop defending yourselves, join the peace, when there is no peace – is a danger. And we didn't think it could be otherwise until Trump and [Indian Prime Minister Narendra] Modi and the Emirates and a few more started to say: What's wrong with Israel defending itself according to its lights?

"On the other hand, on the European right – and this is something that's hard to swallow – there are national movements that see Israel as a model and want cooperation with it. People on the left in the United States don't like it that Bibi is working hand in hand with the European right, but this is a new situation that we have to become accustomed to. I am not saying that all these people are good, but it's part of my activity in recent years – to conduct an initial study and to understand whether there are among the new European right, in the national right, people who are truly open to good and proper relations with Israel – or whether it's all a charade."

You yourself met with Viktor Orban and autographed your book for him.

"Orban sat with me for 90 minutes, and it's pretty surprising that a prime minister has 90 minutes to devote to just some intellectual from another country. He is a very impressive person, he wanted to listen and to emphasize his feelings of esteem and identification with the State of Israel and the Jewish people. But I have met quite a few politicians in my life, and I don't customarily judge a politician on the basis of a first impression. Because politicians are good at that, they know how to market themselves.

"What impressed me more were the two days I spent with the young people around him, who are not polished politicians. They projected amity toward the Jews and Judaism and the State of Israel, and they actually see us, so they say, as a model: a successful independent national state that respects its roots and enjoys economic and demographic growth. So I came away with the feeling that there are many there who are looking for true friendship with us."

And how does Trump see us?

"Trump takes an interest in national questions. He is right that the United States is disintegrating and that it has a tough enemy, China, that is growing constantly stronger, and he says: Now we are going to strengthen ourselves. He applies that paradigm to foreign relations and says: Can I find an ally who, like me, will say, 'I want to strengthen my country. I don't want an empire, but to halt internal disintegration'? And he sees Modi or Netanyahu or Orban and says: I can make deals with people like that. And if the Palestinians interfere, as he sees it, he says: Okay, I tried, but they don't want to make a deal with me, so I will make a deal with other Arabs, who are stronger and richer."

I understand that your book found its way to senior officials in the Trump administration.

"I have to say that I enjoy the fact that it's being read in the White House. The media reported that Trump himself also read it. I don't say that I believe those reports, but there were also reports that people in the administration gave my book to senior officials in Germany and told them to read it in order to understand Trump's policy. I truly feel that a few times in my life I succeeded in introducing the right ideas into a situation where they were lacking."

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