

The following comment is included in the second Spirited Debate essay collection, “American Jewish Identity and Israel.” It follows the author’s original essay and responds to the essay by Tevi Troy, “Four Wartime Visits to Israel Reveal a Resilient Nation.” To see all the Spirited Debate essays currently published and continue reading about the PRRUCS Religion & Democratic Renewal project, see [Spirited Debate](#).

## Postscript

*Jane Eisner*

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I thank my colleague Tevi Troy for his thoughtful response to my essay. Knowing his honesty and integrity, I have no doubt that the Israel he describes—in tremendous pain but resilient, unified, determined—is a true picture of a battered but righteous nation. It is also, sadly, incomplete.

Before I explain, I’d like to respond to two assertions. Tevi implies that by attending the massive weekly protests in Tel Aviv orchestrated by families of hostages, I was participating in “protest tourism.” He is mistaken. I’m a journalist; I don’t participate in protests. Attending is not participating. Attending is witnessing the unbearable suffering endured by these families, caused by Hamas’ unconscionable actions but also, let’s be clear, prolonged by the political decisions of Israel’s government.

The protests showed another side of Israel that Tevi sidesteps—the immense capacity for civic organization that has been on display since October 7th, by patriotic citizens who are critical of their leaders but utterly devoted to their country.

Tevi also implies that I don’t recognize the existential threat posed by Israel’s enemies. I did not mean to leave that impression and am grateful that I am given the opportunity to explain. Of course, Hamas and Hezbollah, fueled by their patron Iran, have terrorized, injured, killed, and captured civilians, and will continue to do so unless they are stopped. But I am hardly the first to observe that the intense polarization in Israel along political and religious lines—lines that have all but merged—poses an existential threat to this vulnerable country and that threat is also reverberating in the American Jewish community, which was the subject of my essay.

It is this threat that I feel most acutely as an American Jew, and Tevi's response exemplifies that divide. It is dismaying that he does not acknowledge the decades of suffering caused by Israel's occupation and now the enormous and ongoing suffering in Gaza. Palestinians are not all perpetrators; they are victims, too. This doesn't negate Israel's own suffering, but it complicates the pain and creates a moral challenge that we Jews have ignored at our peril.

**JANE EISNER** is an independent journalist, educator, non-profit leader, consultant and public speaker. She most recently was director of academic affairs at Columbia School of Journalism, and before then was editor-in-chief of *The Forward* for more than a decade. Her work has appeared in major publications and garnered numerous national awards. She has taught in several universities, including the University of Pennsylvania. Her next book, an interpretive biography of Carole King, will be published by Yale University Press in 2025.