

A display by the lords of the land

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It was enticing for me to accept the invitation to speak at the “Herzliya Conference on the Balance of Israel’s National Security.” Here is an opportunity to talk to the real lords of the land. I imagined myself standing on the podium, in the shadow of the seven-starred flag, delivering a fiery address to a yawning audience that had woken early after an amazing dinner with all of the who’s who. It was an urge to throw stones at a plastic hut that pretends to be a crystal palace. It was not polite to refuse the invitation that came my way, so let me explain.

The conference, held at the Daniel Hotel, is defined as a “summit meeting of the leaders of the state and key figures in the various sectors.” Most of the sectors of Israeli society are represented, at best, by a fig leaf. There is no ultra-Orthodox sector; there is no religious Zionist sector; there are almost no Arabs. There is also no sector for the nine and a half lowest deciles. It cannot be said that there is no *rav* [rabbi]. In addition to several *ravei alufim* [major generals], Rabbi Eckstein will participate in the conference. He is billed as “the State of Israel’s goodwill ambassador to the evangelical Christian world.” But the “Friendship Fund” he heads just happens to be one of the main contributors to funding the ostentatious display. And, by the way, could it be that Molner and Alperon were insulted that their sector was not represented at “the most important and prestigious annual gathering in Israel” and already held their own summit at the Daniel Hotel at the beginning of the month?

The conference organization is outstanding in its splendor and magnificent meals, but its public taste is not so great. The list of speakers includes familiar names like Gaydamak, Lauder and Cyril Stein. Of course, no profound strategic balance can be undertaken without their views. In general, the conference is replete with Jews from the Diaspora and *yordim* [Israeli emigrants], who find it appropriate to pull the strings of Israeli society without blinking twice. There is a surprise in the list of contributors. The State of Israel is so desperate that its strategic summit is funded with the

assistance of the Congress of Jewish Communities in Russia. To remind you, this organization does sacred work among our brothers in the Russian exile, who are facing an economic and cultural fight for existence. Strange, or maybe not. The conference program reminds us that the head of the Congress of Jewish Communities is the owner of Beitar Jerusalem.

Yisrael Aumann honored the conference with his lecture. He is a man I greatly esteem for his personality and contributions to economic thought, despite his political ideas – which he also defines as not deriving from his craft. Here, a serious security blunder is exposed: Only after winning the Nobel Prize did the learned people from the Institute for Policy and Strategy remember to seek Aumann's advice. But have no fear, game theory as a discipline has nothing to say about national strategy, and Aumann will personally make sure not to serve as the backdrop for the compute.

The conference is organized in the framework of the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy at the Interdisciplinary Center. The president of the college in Herzliya, Uriel Reichman, the Kadima list's candidate for education minister, took advantage of the opportunity to present his educational philosophy. The college excels in posing national questions as if they were scientific matters. In less elegant words: "academic bullshit." For example, the "indexes of strength and assessment of national security" are presented at the conference. A small question for the professors behind the indexes: Does the fact that the Herzliya Conference has become the leading forum for national discussions (not the Knesset, for example) enter the calculation of the index of national strength as a "plus" or "minus"?

The Herzliya Conference is nothing more than a display of strength by the elite of Israeli society. The established part, self-satisfied and dominating Israeli society, is torn over issues of occupation and security, but stands in a polished front to defend its status vis-à-vis the overwhelming majority of Israeli society. And I simply don't feel like being there.