

The Hall Is Not a Judgment

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · 24 September 2026

Empty Seats, a Walkout, and the Republic That Still Has to Govern

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A walkout is not a verdict. An empty seat is not a finding of fact. A speech — even a long one, even a defiant one, even one delivered into a hall that has already decided to leave — is still a speech.

Tonight, on First Avenue, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed the United Nations General Assembly in a compressed visit timed around Sukkot. Delegates rose and left as he approached the lectern. He answered with a line that will travel: if any more “moral cowards” had not left the hall, they should do so now. The cameras got what cameras always get from that choreography — emptiness as theater, defiance as counter-theater. Neither is a court.

Yesterday’s companion argument still holds. The podium is not a bench. It does not swear witnesses. It does not bind a cabinet in Jerusalem, a ballot printer at the Central Elections Committee, or a convoy that moves or does not move for reasons that have nothing to do with applause. Tonight adds only this: the hall can perform judgment without becoming one, and Israel can refuse the performance without mistaking its own oratory for law.

What he actually said

The verified spine of the address, reconstructed from English auto-captions of the C-SPAN stream and corroborated in major English reporting, runs through a few hard themes.

He opened on Iran. Fourteen years after he drew a red line on that same podium, he said Israel had prevented Iran’s dictatorship from obtaining nuclear weapons aimed at destroying Israel and threatening the world. Devastating Iran’s nuclear facilities, he said, was hard to do — and, for him, one of the easiest decisions of his premiership — “because if we had not done it, we would all be dead.” He claimed, as irony, that Israel was defending many of the countries whose delegates had just walked out, and that some of their leaders thank Israel privately.

He returned to October 7, 2023 — the slaughter from Gaza, and the claim that no Israeli civilian or soldier was then present there. He listed a seven-front war: Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, Iran, militias in Iraq, Syria, and Palestinian terrorists — and claimed crippling blows across those fronts. The refrain he borrowed from his brother Yonatan — “We are going to win. We have no other choice” — became the speech’s hinge.

He thanked President Donald Trump as Israel’s greatest partner in a battle he framed against “the barbarians,” and credited joint American–Israeli action over Iran’s skies. Major English reporting (NBC; Guardian) notes there was no Trump bilateral on this compressed trip — Trump was hosting Xi — which makes the podium thanks a diplomatic texture of its own. He named Qatar as a funder of campus and media channels of hatred and as a host of Hamas

leaders; he attacked Turkey's president as a dangerous dictator who hosts Hamas chiefs and who will not, he said, rule Jerusalem, which he called Israel's eternal capital. The "eighth front," he said, was a war for truth in media and social media.

On Gaza and the genocide charge, the line that AP's headline carried into the American feed was the one the hall was waiting to reject or amplify: accusing Israel of genocide is "the greatest lie of the century." He insisted Israel had prevented genocide, not committed it; cited civilian-warning practices; and challenged the hall with the rhetorical questions that travel on the right — polio vaccines, tonnage of food — as if arithmetic could settle a moral category. It cannot. It can still be said as oratory.

He addressed New York's mayor, Zohran Mamdani, from the podium — a "shame on you" sequence reported by NBC and CNN — and said, in the wording those outlets carry, that Mamdani could not silence him and could not silence the truth. He closed with an address to Iranian freedom, a biblical refrain that eternity will not falter, and the Hebrew close reported on Israeli channels: *Netzach Yisrael lo yeshaker* — because, he said again, there is no other choice.

Those are the themes the captions and the corroborating outlets actually support. They are not a PMO brochure, and they are not a UN official text. Where a caption garble appears, the honest essay leaves the garble off the page.

What the hall did, and what it did not do

The walkout was real. The empty seats were real. NBC's post-speech write described hundreds of diplomats rising en masse; the AP feed led on the genocide-lie line and on the walkout as the night's diplomatic picture. That picture will be used in Jerusalem as proof of isolation and as proof of courage, often in the same breath. It will be used abroad as proof of consensus against Israel. Both uses skip the same fact: a General Assembly hall is a room of foreign ministries performing for home audiences. It is not the International Court of Justice, and it is not Israel's Central Elections Committee.

The compressed American visit mattered as texture, not as theology. No meeting with President Trump was on the published schedule. Netanyahu landed, spoke, and aimed to be home for Sukkot. Pre-speech packaging — Danny Danon's "surprises" tease on Fox, PMO lines about fighting terrible lies — framed expectation. The speech delivered familiar theatrical moves: a mayoral confrontation from the podium, a Hezbollah-beeper prop reported across Israeli channels, and a Hebrew close. Surprises, if that is the word, were theatrical, not institutional.

Mahmoud Abbas's appearance by video after a U.S. entry denial belongs to the same week's optical stack: two podiums, two stories, neither one a settlement. Syria's leader used his own turn to press claims on the Golan. Iran's president had already spoken Wednesday. Side meetings and corridor contacts are not the General Debate text. This essay will not pretend a podium closes them.

The republic that still has to govern

Jerusalem is not New York. That sentence was true yesterday when the speaker gap was the problem. It is true tonight when the transcript is arriving and the feed is full.

Israel's open institutional work this month is not in the Delegates' Lounge. It is in the Central Elections Committee record, which this week produced four named decisions: two list-wide bars and two individual bars. The published pieces on that record, "Two Lists, Two Candidates: Four Records, Not One Story" and "The Four Seats That Hold the Door," are where electoral arithmetic and committee method belong. Tonight's podium does not rewrite them. It only reminds a tired public that foreign oratory and domestic ballot clocks are different kinds of time.

A Diaspora Jew watching empty seats on a phone is being offered a ready-made emotion: humiliation, or vindication, or both. The covenantal task is narrower. G-d is not mocked by a walkout, and He is not summoned by the seats that remained. The duty is to keep a republic that can still distinguish a speech from a judgment, a committee from a court, and a night in New York from the morning in Jerusalem when lists still have to be printed.

Empty seats are an argument someone else is making. They are not the decree. The hall is not a judgment. The republic still has to govern.

Sources for speech themes and lines: C-SPAN English auto-captions of the 24 Sep 2026 address (YouTube stream); NBC News post-speech report (updated 24 Sep 2026); AP headline feed on the genocide-lie line and walkout; Jerusalem Post pre-speech schedule reporting; CNN UNGA live-updates framing on Abbas video and the morning session. Pre-speech Danon "surprises" tease: Fox day-of package. Domestic electoral context: Aryeh's published Central Elections Committee essays of 23–24 Sep 2026.

All glory to the Ribono shel Olam. Errors are mine.

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