



LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL?

Signs the IDF campaign
against Hamas may be
reaching a tipping point

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WITH COMPLIMENTS

JAGEN

9 OXFORD STREET
SOUTH YARRA VIC 3141

TEL: (03) 9661 8250
FAX: (03) 9661 8257

TARRAWARRA

ESTATE

311 HEALESVILLE – YARRA GLEN ROAD,
YARRA GLEN, VIC 3775 +61 3 5962 3311
WWW.TARRAWARRA.COM.AU



EDITOR'S NOTE

This *AIR* edition evaluates the current state of Israel's war to dismantle Hamas' military capacities and rule over Gaza – with the IDF now making major inroads into Hamas' last major strongholds in the south, and reports of mass surrenders by Hamas fighters.

Amotz Asa-El discusses the current Israeli consensus on the war – which sees it as going as well as can be expected – while Jonathan Spyer reports from the frontline in Gaza. Top US-based scholars Robert Satloff and Dennis Ross offer advice on how to prepare an endgame for the war – including the possibility Hamas can be forced to surrender – while Israeli intellectual David Hazony takes on the oft-heard claim “Hamas is an idea and you can't destroy an idea.”

Also featuring this month is one of Israel's top Palestinian affairs experts Michael Milshtein explaining why Israel misunderstood Hamas so badly before October 7. Plus, Aviva Winton and Alana Schetzer have assembled a collection of simply harrowing testimony from hostages freed by Hamas.

Finally, don't miss antisemitism scholar David Rich on the meaning of the global surge in Jew-hatred since October 7 and Justin Amler's report on the UN's immoral and utterly unhelpful response to October 7 and its aftermath.

Please let us know what you think of any aspect of this edition at editorial@aijac.org.au.

Tzvi Fleischer

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Israeli soldiers standing next to the entrance to a tunnel in the Palestinian refugee camp of Jabalia, on the outskirts of Gaza City, northern Gaza Strip, December 8, 2023 (Image: Atef Safadi/EPA/AAP)



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Editorial Chairman

Dr COLIN RUBENSTEIN AM

Editor-in-Chief

Dr TZVI FLEISCHER

Staff Writers

ALLON LEE, JAMIE HYAMS OAM, AHRON SHAPIRO, OVED LOBEL, TAMMY REZNIK, JUSTIN AMLER, AVIVA WINTON, GALIT JONES, ALANA SCHETZER

Publishing Manager

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CorrespondentsISRAEL: AMOTZ ASA-EL
NEW ZEALAND: MIRIAM BELL
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PETER ADLER

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ISADOR MAGID AM (OBM), ROBERT ZABLUD (OBM)

HEAD OFFICELevel 1, 22 Albert Road,
South Melbourne, VIC 3205, Australia
Telephone: (03) 9681 6660
Email: aijac@aijac.org.au**SYDNEY OFFICE**140 William Street
East Sydney, NSW 2011, Australia
Telephone: (02) 9360 5415
Email: aijacsydney@aijac.org.au**SUBSCRIPTIONS**Please send all remittances, changes of address and subscription inquiries to our Melbourne office (above), or email: admin-aijac@aijac.org.au
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Print Post Approved – 100007869www.aijac.org.au**FROM THE EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN**
COLIN RUBENSTEIN

A SUSTAINABLE END TO THE WAR WITH HAMAS

On December 12, Australia's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister made a deliberate but very ill-advised decision to break ranks with the US, the UK, Germany and other Western allies and vote in favour of a UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the war between Israel and Hamas.

Although the resolution includes a call for the release of all hostages Hamas is still holding in Gaza, it doesn't make a ceasefire conditional on this. Indeed, Hamas is not even mentioned. It is thus much weaker than the formula that worked in the war's previous multi-day temporary pause, when Hamas agreed to daily hostage releases in exchange for that pause, increased aid shipments and the release of some Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

Moreover, this profoundly disappointing vote contradicted the positive policy goals for a "sustainable ceasefire" set out in an admittedly somewhat internally contradictory joint statement released by Australia, Canada and New Zealand the previous night – namely, release of all hostages, the end of the use of Gaza civilians as human shields, and Hamas being disarmed.

It should be obvious that the only way to achieve any such outcome is for the military pressure on Hamas to continue until that barbaric terror organisation is prepared to concede these terms. Voting in favour of an UNGA resolution calling for an "immediate humanitarian ceasefire" – but making no call for Hamas to either lay down its arms or end its appalling practice of misusing Gaza civilians as human shields – amounted to effectively calling for an end to that military pressure on Hamas. If implemented, this resolution would make it less likely that the "sustainable ceasefire" Australia appropriately supports will ever be achieved.

While everyone is concerned about the humanitarian situation of Gaza civilians and wants to see their plight ameliorated, the best way to end that suffering remains to bring the war to such a sustainable conclusion as rapidly as possible – meaning Hamas must be disarmed – even while stepping up efforts to bring humanitarian aid into Gaza, something Israel has promised to facilitate.

The IDF is already routinely announcing humanitarian pauses of several hours at a time not dependent on Hamas concessions, as well as providing safe corridors for both evacuations and entry of aid convoys. It also recently opened the Kerem Shalom crossing and inspection point to speed up checking of aid trucks, and says any bottlenecks in bringing in aid have to do with aid agency limitations, not Israeli restrictions.

This is not to rule out humanitarian pauses like the one that occurred from Nov. 24 to Dec. 1, but by failing to condition the call for a humanitarian ceasefire on anything Hamas does, the UNGA resolution will likely encourage Hamas to harden its position and make reaching agreement on additional humanitarian pauses less likely.

Meanwhile, with Hamas looking increasingly on the ropes as Israeli forces systematically dismantle the organisation's southern bastion of Khan Younis, with reports of hundreds of its fighters now surrendering, Hamas should absolutely not be given a lifeline.

After all, there is documented evidence that Hamas has been stealing humanitarian aid, including diverting fuel to power generators for lighting and air circulation systems in its sprawling militarised tunnel system – estimated to span 500km – without which they would eventually become unusable.

As implied by the three conditions Australia and its partners specified for a sustainable

ceasefire, any outcome to the current conflict which leaves Hamas in control of Gaza and able to re-build its military capabilities guarantees two disastrous consequences. Firstly, war will soon resume, causing even more suffering to both the civilian residents of Gaza and Israelis – with Hamas having repeatedly expressed its determination to repeat the unprovoked massacre of October 7 “again and again”. And secondly, advancing the negotiated two-state Israeli-Palestinian peace that Australia has long supported will be completely impossible.

Hamas is of course completely rejectionist – with an unwavering commitment to the destruction of Israel “from the river to the sea” and eradication of Jews – and can never be part of any two-state peace deal. Indeed, with Iranian support, it will actively seek to violently torpedo any progress toward peace, as it has repeatedly done in the past, if it survives.

That’s why Israel’s Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has laid out some red lines about what must happen in the immediate aftermath of the war against Hamas to ensure that October 7 can never be repeated. The international community, including Australia, should support outcomes that meet these red lines, because they are also essential to preserving any realistic hope for a two-state peace.

Representing the Israeli consensus, Netanyahu has ruled out Israel re-occupying Gaza long term, but demands the IDF will have post-war freedom of action throughout Gaza to intervene to thwart terror attacks and prevent Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad from rebuilding their military capabilities.

“A UN General Assembly resolution calling for an ‘immediate humanitarian ceasefire’ – but making no call for Hamas to either lay down its arms or end its appalling practice of misusing Gaza civilians as human shields – amounted to effectively calling for an end to that military pressure on Hamas”

Additionally, Netanyahu has ruled out IDF withdrawals from the areas it has cleared of Hamas infrastructure until an alternative administrative body can be found able to maintain stability there. He has strongly repudiated suggestions that the Palestinian Authority (PA) should constitute that body, at least for the time being – and for good reason.

Most high-ranking PA figures have openly taken Hamas’ side since October 7, justifying that bloody pogrom under the rubric of “resistance” to occupation, reframing Israel’s defensive campaign aimed at Hamas as the collective targeting of all Palestinian people, and even spreading conspiracy theories that it was actually Israelis who committed the massacres of October 7 on their own people.

The PA is also so inept, corrupt and unpopular, it has effectively lost control over large sections of the West Bank. It simply is not currently capable of taking effective control of Gaza.

There is also a lack of a clear successor to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who turned 88 in November and is in the 19th year of his four-year term. If the PA were put back in charge of Gaza now, this would simply invite another Hamas coup in the near future.

The task for the world is thus two-fold – find forces, perhaps from Arab states like the UAE and Morocco, that can temporarily and reliably administer Gaza, while also simultaneously trying to reconstruct a pragmatic Palestinian leadership that possesses both the legitimacy and the willingness become a partner for pursuing a viable two-state peace.

AIR

“” WORD FOR WORD

“We have encircled the last strongholds of Hamas in Jabaliya and Shejaiya, the battalions that were considered invincible... are on the verge of being dismantled.”

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant (Times of Israel, Dec. 12).

“When it comes to a ceasefire in this moment, with Hamas still alive, still intact, and again, with the stated intent of repeating October 7 again and again and again, that would simply perpetuate the problem.”

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken explains the US veto of a UN Security Council resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire (Dispatch, Dec. 11).

“If Gaza does not receive the food and medicine it needs, all ships in the Red Sea bound for Israeli ports, regardless of their

nationality, will become a target for our armed forces.”

Military spokesperson of Iran’s proxy militia in Yemen, the Houthis (Reuters, Dec. 9).

“On Oct 7 Hamas terrorists deliberately and barbarically targeted innocent civilians, including babies, children and elderly. It was confronting but insightful to visit Kibbutz Kfar Aza and Sderot to speak with survivors. It is clear that nobody can live alongside a threat like Hamas.”

Australian Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs Simon Birmingham (Twitter/X, Dec. 12).

“The attacks on October 7 were barbaric, they were horrific. They were indiscriminate. They killed women, children, the elderly, it did not matter... And on top of that, it seems it’s okay now to grab hostages and take them away... That is something that we condemn... I don’t think any Arab leader has called on Hamas to release the hostages. So it is a time for straight talking.”

Bahrain’s Crown Prince and Prime Minister Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa (Times of Israel, Nov. 20).





SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

HAMAS' STATISTICS REGARDING "WOMEN AND CHILDREN"

As the *AIR* has previously noted, all casualty statistics regarding Gaza come from the Hamas-run Health Ministry – even though some media outlets insist they are “UN statistics”. The UN has absolutely no capacity to count such casualties and simply rebrands Gaza Health Ministry numbers.

The numbers widely reported are highly dubious, not just because Hamas officials have every reason to lie about them, but also because it is simply not credible that they could be anything like accurate amidst the fog of war. It took Israel about six weeks to get an accurate count of how many people were killed in the October 7 attacks. Yet the so-called-Gaza Health Ministry claims to put out accurate figures about casualties within a day of when they happen.

If the overall casualty numbers are dubious, widely reported claims that 70% or more of the people being killed in the Gaza conflict with Israel are “women and children” are even more so. As researcher Saul Aizenberg has noted by reviewing Hamas’ own figures as republished by the UN, there are huge and obvious anomalies in the supposed statistics on woman and child casualties.

For example:

- The UN reported on Dec. 5 a cumulative total of 16,248 Gazan fatalities, 1,041 more than it reported on Dec. 2. Yet for the same period the UN reported 1,353 new fatalities among women and children. In other words, somehow more women and children died over those three days than the total number of people who died in that period.
- Similarly, on Oct. 19 the UN’s cumulative fatality figure rose by 307. On that same day, the number of children newly reported killed increased by 671.
- On Oct. 26, the UN reported an increase of 481 cumulative fatalities, but reported women and children killed increased by 626.
- On Oct. 29, the UN reported 302 new fatalities, but the number of women and children killed increased by 328.
- There were other days as well where Israeli actions are alleged to have killed almost no adult men at all. On Oct. 31, only six out of 216 claimed casualties are supposed to have been adult men, on Nov. 7, four out of 306, and 44 out of 929 on Dec. 7. These numbers seem impossible; even if Israel was doing everything in its power to attempt to kill only women and children and no adult men.

The figures above make no logical sense, meaning the ‘UN figures’ (aka Hamas figures) on women and children killed are, at best, completely arbitrary and unreliable, or, at worst, fabricated.

And these huge anomalies are on top of the fact that the statistics do not even purport to differentiate armed combatants from civilians (and some of the supposed “children” killed may well be combatants, since Hamas and other armed groups are known to routinely recruit 16- and 17-year-olds.) Further, it is a known fact that the Gaza Ministry of Health statistics include numerous deaths caused by Palestinian “friendly fire” – such as the 487 people it claims died when the carpark of the al-Ahli Hospital was struck by a misfired Palestinian Islamic Jihad rocket.

Yet the numbers of women and children allegedly being killed are widely brandished to condemn Israel – not only by activists but by supposed journalists who should know better.

Civilians are certainly dying in Gaza and that is utterly tragic – though also a predictable and inevitable outcome of Hamas’ human shield strategy. But it is time for our media to admit we have no idea exactly how many, and certainly not how many of them are women or children.

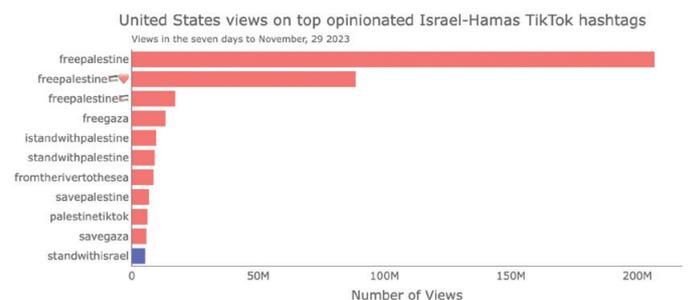
QUANTIFYING THE BEIJING BLUES

In this column last month, I called attention to the fact that, since October 7, China has been a major source of not only global pro-Hamas content on social media, but also of openly antisemitic material. I noted that one main vector spreading this material is the Chinese-owned social media giant TikTok – which is used primarily by younger people.

Recently, US-based Australian tech entrepreneur Anthony Goldbloom set out to quantify how pro-Palestinian and pro-Hamas the content on TikTok is. He found that, in early December, American-based users of TikTok were seeing 54 times more pro-Palestine posts than pro-Israel content, up from 36 times more in early November.

Australian-based users of TikTok saw even more skewed content – 60:1 in favour of Palestine.

Below is the chart of the comparative US views of various TikTok hashtags he published based on data from late November:



A later study organised by Goldbloom showed that Americans spending at least 30 minutes a day on TikTok

were 17% more likely to agree with various expressions of antisemitic or extreme anti-Israel views.

In November, a group of more than 50 Jewish TikTok social media influencers, content creators, and celebrities blasted TikTok in an open letter for not doing more to counteract antisemitism and online hatred on the platform. Many of them – including celebrities Sacha Baron Cohen, Debra Messing, and Amy Schumer – then participated in a private video call with TikTok executives and accused the video-sharing app of “creating the biggest antisemitic movement since the Nazis.”

In early December, Jewish employees also anonymously told *Fox Business* that co-workers at TikTok routinely harass them, spread calls to boycott companies and products related to Israel, and openly expressed antisemitic and anti-Israel sentiments on the company’s internal chat system.

The company has met with Jewish leaders and says it is committed to fixing the problem, but Goldbloom’s data strongly suggests the opposite is happening.

Meanwhile, on the internal Chinese version of TikTok, Douyin, openly antisemitic content is reportedly reaching millions – much of it originating from Iranian government outlets – promoted both by government-blessed “influencers” and official government spokesmen. Israel also no longer appears in the two major Chinese map platforms. 



Hussain Abdul-Hussain

HOW DARE PRO-HAMAS LEFTISTS CLAIM TO SPEAK FOR ME?

I often ignore conspiracy theories and their peddlers, going by George Bernard Shaw’s advice “Never wrestle with pigs. You both get dirty, and the pig likes it.”

That’s why, when watching a short clip of the Oakland City Council debating a resolution on November 27 that called for a ceasefire in Gaza without condemning Hamas, none of the false statements made by the pro-Hamas demonstrators who dominated the meeting bothered me.

Some denied that Hamas, whose terrorists captured their atrocities on video and circulated them, had actually committed their crimes.

It was the Israeli military who killed its own, one speaker said.

But then, a comment from an Asian-American speaker hit a nerve: “I support the right of Palestinians to resist occupation, including through Hamas, the armed wing of the unified Palestinian resistance.”

I have been lucky to survive the Iraq-Iran War, the Lebanese Civil War and many rounds of war between Israel

and different Palestinian and Lebanese armed factions.

Wars have repeatedly displaced my family. We lost one house after another and fled. We also lost real estate to confiscation and forgery.

Family savings repeatedly lost value due to hyperinflation or got wiped out in various economic collapses and consequent bank bankruptcies.

Each time, we picked up our pieces and silently rebuilt from scratch.

Ever since I became politically active in college, many decades ago, I have lost family in wars and friends to assassinations.

In 2019, I enjoyed a breakfast meal in Tunis with my two dear friends: Iraqi Hisham Hashimi and Lebanese Lokman Slim.

Pro-Iran militias in Iraq killed Hisham in July 2020. Hezbollah killed Lokman in February 2021.

After Lokman’s assassination, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken issued a statement in which he said, “We urge Lebanese officials, including the judiciary and political leaders, to hold accountable those who commit such barbaric acts without delay or exception.”

Washington relied on the Lebanese judiciary, under the thumb of the Hezbollah assassins themselves, to hold Hezbollah killers of Lokman accountable.

I silently wept.

Each and every one of the miseries my family, friends and I faced was blamed on Israel.

Once we eliminate Israel and liberate Palestine, life will become rosy. This has been the justification for our bloody world since before my parents were born. This has been the excuse in the Arab world since I was born.

I refuse to pass this excuse on to my children. The Palestine nonsense, its victimhood and its liberation, have to end and have to end now.

I will not sit back and watch Americans who can barely point out the Middle East on a map tell me what Hamas is or is not or what should happen in Palestine.

I will be happy to help these Oakland “freedom fighters” trade places with hundreds of my family and friends in Lebanon and Iraq: Swap houses and bank accounts.

After all, it is much easier liberating Palestine for free, from the comfort of their sofas in Oakland, than struggling to find basic medication, potable water and electricity in Beirut or Baghdad.

Cool and trendy is one thing. Real life is another.

The “Oakland heroes” better educate themselves in ways other than watching 30-second clips.

A “unified Palestinian resistance” does not exist.

In fact, nothing “unified Palestinian” exists. Palestinians are as divided as ever. The Palestinian Authority and its leading party Fatah, which rule the West Bank, have barely talked to Hamas since 2007, when Hamas took over the Gaza Strip in a coup.



When Israel engaged Palestinian Islamic Jihad in war in 2022, Hamas sat back and happily watched Israel decimate the leadership of its rival.

These falsehoods are only the tip of the iceberg of the erroneous information circulating among Westerners who think they are brave and informed dissenters because they are pro-Palestinian and pro-“resistance”. They don’t know that their demand is an excuse for carnage and a distraction from the oppression of Arabs by other Arabs and by the troublemaking Iranian regime. AIR

Hussain Abdul-Hussain is a Lebanese-born research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD). © FDD (www.FDD.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

TROUBLE AT HOME

Aside from the Israelis themselves, the Philippines was among a handful of countries directly affected by Hamas’ horrific attack upon Israel – an unsurprising fact given there are approximately 40,000 Filipinos working in Israel. Exposure to the Middle East conflict has recently coincided with deadly Islamist violence at home.

Three Filipinos were killed in the violence on October 7, while 22 hostages were rescued by Israeli forces that day. The final two were released during the week-long ceasefire: Jimmy Pacheco, a caregiver, who met with Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen following his release; and Noralin Babadilla, also a caregiver, who was visiting friends in Kibbutz Nirim with her Israeli husband when Hamas attacked. Her husband, Gideon Babani, was killed. With their release, “all Filipinos affected by the war have been accounted for,” wrote President Ferdinand Marcos.

The Philippine Embassy in Israel announced on Facebook that the Israeli Government would provide the hostages and their immediate family lifetime social security benefits and regular stipends similar to those given to Israelis who are victims of terrorist attacks.

At the time that three Filipinos lost their lives in the Hamas attack, the Philippines’ National Security Council confirmed that two alleged operatives of Hamas tried to operate in the Philippines in 2018 and 2022, while also attempting to join forces with local insurgent groups.

It is in this context that Manila has emphasised its support for Israel, while National Security Adviser Eduardo Año also noted that the Anti-Terrorism Council would work to designate Hamas under the Anti-Terrorism Act.

While Israel has long retained broad support among the majority Christian population, Manila is also cautious

of the sentiments of its Muslim minority, largely situated in Mindanao. Carrying Palestinian flags, Muslim Filipinos have protested against Israel’s military operation in Gaza, but Manila’s main concern was conveyed in Philippine Secretary of Defence Gilbert Teodoro’s warning of domestic “ISIS spinoffs” that may seek to imitate the Hamas attacks.

His remarks were shown to be prescient in light of the bomb attack at a Catholic Mass in Mindanao on Dec. 3 that killed four people and injured dozens, which has been claimed by Islamic State.

The explosion occurred at 7:30 am at the Mindanao State University gymnasium in Marawi city. At the time, the gymnasium was hosting a Catholic mass to mark the First Sunday of Advent.

Marawi became known worldwide when it was taken over by militants linked to IS in 2017 and during the five-month battle that followed, at least 1,200 militants, soldiers, police and civilians were killed before the military regained control of the city.

In a statement on the day of the attack, IS said on its website that “soldiers of the Caliphate detonated an explosive device on a large gathering of Christians... in the city of Marawi,” according to the SITE Intelligence Group, an American counterterrorism consultancy. IS also said it was behind the attack on Telegram, *Reuters* reported.

Earlier in the day, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. blamed foreign terrorists for the attack, without elaborating. “I condemn in the strongest possible terms the senseless and most heinous acts perpetrated by foreign terrorists upon the Mindanao State University and Marawi communities early this Sunday morning. Extremists who wield violence against the innocent will always be regarded as enemies to our society,” Marcos said in a statement.

Armed Forces of the Philippines chief Gen. Romeo Brawner Jr. said the attack could be a retaliatory strike for a government offensive on Dec. 1 that killed 11 members of the local Daulah Islamiyah cell in Maguindanao province.

The Daulah Islamiyah is the Filipino name for the Islamic State. Its membership comprises fighters from several Filipino militant factions, including the Maute Group, which had provided men and logistics during the siege of Marawi by pro-IS fighters in 2017.

Also on Dec. 3, military forces killed militants identified as Mundi Sawadjaan and Jalandoni Lucsadato in coordinated actions. Authorities identified Mundi, a sub-leader of Abu Sayyaf Group and nephew of the late Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan who was Abu Sayyaf’s presumed leader, as the mastermind of twin suicide bombings that killed 14 people in August 2020 on the island of Jolo, from where the Abu Sayyaf originated. A year earlier, he plotted a suicide bombing at Jolo Cathedral, leaving 23 people dead, including an Indonesian couple blamed for the attack.

According to *Reuters*, police offices in Mindanao and

the capital region have been placed on high alert, while police checkpoints have been tightened to prevent possible follow-up incidents as Christmas approaches. 



Miriam Bell

HAMAS WAR LEADS TO SHARP RISE IN ANTISEMITISM

New Zealand, like many other countries, is struggling with economic challenges, stretched housing affordability, cultural divisions, and climate change pressures, and has a brand-new government. And yet the Israel-Hamas war is dominating public discourse.

Since October 7, there have been “pro-Palestine”, or more accurately anti-Israel, protests every weekend. They are supposedly motivated by a desire to end the violence, but that’s not what the angry, baying crowds, and their cries of “free Palestine” and “from the river to the sea” suggest.

The Dec. 10 Auckland protest, billed as “the biggest march to support Palestine in Aotearoa’s history,” attracted around 2,500 people.

Inflammatory rhetoric, justifying the Hamas attacks and denying Israel’s right to exist, has been part and parcel of these protests. The media coverage of the protests, and the inaccurate historical revisionism which accompanies them, has been largely uncritical.

For most Jewish New Zealanders, this “pro-Palestinian” movement is linked to a deeply worrying rise in antisemitism – one reflected, and amplified, on social media, and one that has moved from words to action.

Since October 7, both the Auckland reform synagogue and the Christchurch synagogue have been vandalised, the Israeli and US embassies have been defaced with political graffiti, and a statue of a long-serving Jewish Mayor of Auckland had a swastika painted on it.

On the Oct. 13 “Global Day of Rage,” all synagogues, New Zealand’s only Jewish school, and the Holocaust Centre were closed due to security concerns. Prominent Jewish New Zealanders have been targeted with abusive messages and intimidation.

In November, more than 70 anonymous bomb threat emails were sent to schools, hospitals, courthouses and places of worship around the country. Five synagogues received threats.

A Holocaust Centre survey of Jewish parents revealed evidence of high levels of antisemitism in schools. Fifty percent of respondents said their children had been subjected to antisemitism in school since October 7.

The situation was not helped by a political vacuum in

Wellington during the post-election period, as the three parties that now make up the new Government sworn in on Nov. 27 negotiated a coalition agreement.

In the meantime, the Green Party and Te Pati Maori stepped into the breach, and pushed a fervently anti-Israel line. At one protest Green Party MP Chloe Swarbrick led chants of “from the river to sea”, after Labour Party MP Phil Twyford was forced off the stage for condemning the Hamas attacks of October 7.

Once the National-led Government was sworn in, and NZ First leader Winston Peters took up the role of foreign minister, a motion relating to the war was put forward by Peters and debated. It called for all parties to take urgent steps towards establishing a ceasefire, unequivocally condemned the Hamas attacks, and recognised Israel’s right to defend itself.

The motion was ultimately supported by all parties, but the debate was fiery and included Labour MP Damien O’Connor accusing Israel of carrying out genocide in Gaza.

This prompted the NZ Jewish Council and Holocaust Centre to issue a release on inflammatory language, pointing out the terms “ethnic cleansing” and “genocide” had specific meanings, and should not be bandied about.

Jewish Council spokesperson Ben Kepes said that “when some of our political leaders use these terms it directly incites antisemitic behaviour, and we call on all leaders to consider their words carefully.”

Israel Institute of NZ co-director Ashley Church said the new Government had hit the ground running, and was saying the right things in relation to the war.

The use of “unequivocally” in the condemnation of the Hamas attacks, the call for the hostages to be released, and the recognition of Israel’s right to self-defence were important, he said.

The pro-Palestine protests were actually pro-Hamas protests, he said, but they had been relatively muted compared to the violence of other such protests around the world.

“Unfortunately, I’m not surprised to see the rise in antisemitism that has accompanied them. There is a flare up in antisemitism whenever there is Israel-Palestine conflict, but this time it is particularly bad.

“What has surprised me is the speed at which people went from sympathising with Israel after the Hamas attacks to expressing antisemitism in the guise of anti-Zionism. The ignorance, and the hypocrisy of so many involved when it comes to Israel, is appalling.”

There have been some rallies in support of Israel. One in the grounds of Parliament attracted about 600 people.

It culminated in the presentation of a petition calling for New Zealand to list Hamas and Hezbollah as terrorist organisations being presented to Government MP Simon Court.



BEHIND THE NEWS

ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

As of Dec. 11, at least 11,500 rockets and other projectiles had been launched from Gaza since Oct. 7. Hundreds of other projectiles were fired from elsewhere – Lebanon, Syria and Yemen – prompting Israeli retaliatory strikes.

As of Dec. 13, at least 115 IDF soldiers had been killed since the start of the ground operations inside Gaza.

Israel has continued to strike hundreds of targets daily in Gaza and began intensive ground operations in the south of Gaza after Hamas violated a seven-day humanitarian pause by firing rockets shortly before it expired on Dec. 1.

Tunnels and weapons depots have been uncovered in countless civilian structures. By Dec. 12, Israel said it had captured more than 500 Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorists, many of whom had chosen to surrender. No reliable estimates exist for casualties in Gaza, though on Dec. 11, Hamas was claiming an overall number of more than 17,000 killed. Israeli sources say at least 6,000 Palestinian casualties are Hamas operatives.

On Nov. 30, two Hamas terrorists killed three civilians and wounded five in a shooting attack in Jerusalem. A fourth Israeli civilian was accidentally killed by responding soldiers.

On Nov. 24 in the West Bank, Hamas brutally and publicly murdered three Palestinians accused of collaborating with Israel, with Palestinian mobs then abusing the bodies.

Continuing Israeli raids throughout the West Bank have seen the arrests of thousands of terrorist suspects. More than 250 West Bank Palestinians have reportedly been killed since October 7 – a few of these have been civilians killed by

settlers or caught in crossfire, but the overwhelming majority have been terrorists or involved in violent clashes with the IDF.

IDENTIFYING THE OCTOBER 7 VICTIMS

More than two months after the worst massacre of Jewish people in a single day since the Holocaust, Israeli authorities are still working on identifying some of those murdered by Hamas on October 7. As of Dec. 13, 859 civilians and 274 soldiers had been identified, with extra effort being made to identify the remaining deceased babies, children and elderly. Among those identified are two infants, 12 children under the age of ten, 36 aged between ten and 19, and 25 people aged 80 and over. There are another 15 murdered Israelis whose remains are being held by Hamas.

TEMPORARY CEASEFIRE AND HOSTAGE RELEASES

A seven-day ceasefire between Nov. 24 and Dec. 1 resulted in the release of 105 Israeli and foreign national hostages. There were 81 Israeli women and children and 46 people holding foreign passports (including some Israeli dual nationals), 23 of whom were Thais. The hostages were freed in exchange for the release of 240 female and minor Palestinian prisoners, some 60% of whom had been convicted of, or charged with, terror offences. One hundred and thirty-six hostages remained in Gaza – two children, 20 women and 114 men, including ten aged 75 and older. Nineteen hostages have been found or declared dead.

A US State Department spokesperson said the ceasefire ended because Hamas refused to release the



Hostages being freed (top); Israel's evacuation zones map (Images: Reddit, IDF)

remaining female hostages as originally agreed, possibly because it didn't want them to reveal what had been done to them. (For details of released hostage testimony, see p. 22).

IDF PUBLISHES MAP SHOWING GAZA SAFE ZONES

On Dec. 1, when fighting resumed following the breakdown of the truce, the Israeli army released a map advising residents of Gaza of safe evacuation areas. The map, available on an Israeli army website in Arabic, and distributed in flyers and phone messages, divided southern Gaza into numerous numbered districts so the civilians could be advised in which districts there was fighting, and which safer neighbouring districts to evacuate to.

CROSS-BORDER FIGHTING WITH LEBANON AND SYRIA

The IDF resumed daily cross-border fighting with Hezbollah and other terrorist groups in southern Lebanon

on Dec. 1, following the resumption of attacks on northern Israel with the end of the ceasefire with Hamas. Hezbollah, while not party to the truce, temporarily ceased attacks during that week. The IDF has had to respond to mortar, anti-tank missile and rocket fire from Lebanon on a daily basis. Overall, between Oct. 7 and Dec. 12, there were at least 434 attacks on Israel from Lebanon while Israeli counter-strikes have reportedly killed dozens of terrorists in Lebanon, including at least 100 Hezbollah operatives.

Airstrikes on Syria attributed to Israel reportedly killed two Hezbollah fighters on Dec. 8 and three on Dec. 10, while two Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Brigadiers were killed in Syria on Dec. 2.

HOUTHIS ATTACKS ON ISRAEL AND RED SEA SHIPPING ESCALATE

On Nov. 26, the Israel Air Force intercepted an unmanned aerial vehicle en route to Israel from Yemen, and an Israel-linked commercial tanker in the Gulf of Aden was seized by armed attackers, reportedly Somalis, who later surrendered to US forces.

On Nov. 29, a US Navy warship shot down an Iranian-made drone fired from Yemen that flew within 1,370 metres of the *USS Dwight D. Eisenhower* aircraft carrier. On Dec. 3, a US Navy destroyer shot down three drones fired from Houthi controlled areas in Yemen during a sustained attack in the Red Sea that lasted for several hours, with commercial ships nearby also attacked. On Dec. 9, the Houthis vowed to attack any ship in the Red Sea bound for Israel.

On Dec. 10, two drones were fired at a French warship in the Red Sea, which shot down both.

On Dec. 11, a Houthi missile struck a Norwegian tanker they claimed had been heading for Israel.

On Dec. 13, the Houthis fired two missiles at a fuel tanker in the Red Sea, while a US warship shot down a Houthi drone in the area.

The US reportedly began talks with allies to establish a naval task force to guard ships travelling through the Red Sea following the Dec. 3 attack. Australia was asked to contribute a warship on Dec. 13.

INTEL ABOUT THE HAMAS PLAN IGNORED

New revelations suggest Israeli security forces had concrete information about the Hamas October 7 attack plan for more a year, but viewed the plan as aspirational and failed to prepare to meet the threat.

A *New York Times* report in late November exposed that in May 2022, Israeli intelligence had obtained a secret 30-page document code-named “Jericho’s Wall”, outlining Hamas’ battle plan.

Aharon Haliva, the head of IDF intelligence, and Eliezer Toledano,

the head of the IDF’s Southern Command, reportedly dismissed the information presented, arguing Hamas lacked the capabilities to carry out such a large-scale and ambitious attack.

IRAN PROXIES CONTINUE ATTACKS ON US TARGETS

The IRGC and its proxies have attacked US bases in Iraq and Syria more than 80 times since Oct. 7, including firing rockets at the US embassy in Iraq on Dec. 8.

As of Dec. 13, the US had launched fewer than ten retaliatory strikes in response, killing more than a dozen IRGC proxy operatives, including five in a strike in Iraq on Dec. 4.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported in late November that 700 militiamen from Syrian, Palestinian and Iraqi IRGC proxy forces were being deployed to Syria’s border with Israel in the Quneitra province.



STRANGER THAN FICTION

GIMME A BREAK

While most injuries become obvious quickly, some, such as delayed concussion, can manifest well after they’re incurred. Now Palestinians seem to have discovered another example – delayed broken bones. The poor victim of this hitherto undiscovered condition was Palestinian youth Mohammad Nazzal, who was freed from Israeli jail in late November as part of the recent hostage release deal between Israel and Hamas.

Video footage of Mohammad’s release shows him freely using his arms without



discomfort. However, within 24 hours of returning home, he was unveiled to media with both his arms in casts from the elbows to fingertips, recounting having had both his hands broken in a beating at the Israeli prison.



Perhaps the poor fellow was extremely stoic – but, far more likely, this was a cynical attempt by Hamas to deflect attention from the appalling way it treated its hostages. Yet our media still treats the terror group as a reliable source.

COVER STORY

A TIPPING POINT?

ISRAELIS SEE PROGRESS IN GAZA WAR

Amotz Asa-El

Trapped inside biblical Gaza, and realising his Philistine enemies had laid ambushes to capture him, the legendary Israelite warrior Samson ruined their plan by marching up to Gaza's wall, uprooting the massive gates and carrying them on his back all the way to the realm of the Israelites.

More than 3,000 years later, Samson's descendants are back in Gaza, intent on proverbially emulating his feat, as the IDF ploughs its way through the major towns of the 40-kilometre long Gaza Strip.

As the fighting sparked by Hamas' surprise attack on October 7 entered its third month, the war's social, political and diplomatic repercussions seemed to become ever more complex – yet the military picture is steadily clearing, suggesting that the IDF has now broken Gaza's gates.

Faced with some 40,000 or so armed men hiding out in well-stocked tunnels under an urban landscape thick with civilians, the IDF set out to fight sequentially in the Strip's three districts – after emptying each of as many non-combatants as possible. The first such area was the Strip's northern part, which includes Gaza City, and contained about half of Gaza's population of more than two million.

The northern Strip's civilian population was told – via leaflets, loudspeakers, social networks and mobile phone calls and messages – to move south. Hamas, realising it was being deprived of its human shields, commanded the population to stay put and also positioned roadblocks to prevent civilians fleeing.

The people, however, voted with their feet in what became a massive exodus from north to south.

The IDF then surprised Hamas by emerging in the heart of Gaza City with two armoured divisions, which engaged the enemy's troops face to face. The troops on the ground reached the headquarters of multiple Hamas battalions, assisted by drones that directed them to specific buildings. Whenever the troops detected clusters of gunmen, they called in airstrikes targeting them.

Coupled with aerial bombing of rocket arsenals and missile launchers, and the targeted killings of Hamas commanders, Hamas' northern army was soon decimated. This outcome convinced the Israeli public that dislodging Hamas militarily is indeed feasible.

This northern phase of Israel's invasion was close to completion when a truce was announced on Nov. 24 to allow a gradual exchange of Israeli female and child abductees for female and minor Palestinian prisoners. The truce lasted one week, during which time Hamas released 105 abductees – including Thais and other foreigners who were released

under separate arrangements from the Israel-Hamas deal – in return for more than 240 prisoners, as well as the entry into Gaza of increased amounts of fuel, medicine and food.

Fighting resumed on Dec. 1, after Hamas reneged on its promise to release all of the kidnapped women and children held in Gaza, and then began firing rockets. The IDF then moved to the Strip's central district, focusing on its largest city, Khan Younis – making plain Israel's resolve to send ground troops throughout the Strip's entire 365 square kilometres.

The intention of Israel's military planners, it now seems evident, is as simple as it is painstaking: to find, engage and defeat every Hamas unit, and to find and destroy every

“The intention of Israel's military planners, it now seems evident, is as simple as it is painstaking: to find, engage and defeat every Hamas unit, and to find and destroy every tunnel, rocket, missile, bunker and armoury built by the terrorist group”



IDF soldiers are making progress in Gaza and have universal support in Israel; however, the plight of the remaining hostages continues to be a vexed issue (Images: IDF; Shutterstock)

tunnel, rocket, missile, bunker and armoury built by the terrorist group.

As the Jewish festival of Hanukkah arrived, beginning on Dec. 7, and Israeli soldiers in Gaza were lighting candles amidst the jeeps, tanks, and levelled houses, Hamas' defence was showing definite cracks.

For the first time since the war began, hundreds of Hamas troops surrendered. Civilians, speaking to Egyptian and Israeli media, began to openly accuse Hamas of having destroyed their lives and stolen much of the humanitarian aid that arrived from abroad to Gaza's gates. Some also spoke bitterly of Hamas leaders hiding underground, abandoning the civilians of the Strip above ground to war, anarchy and starvation.

This does not mean that the fighting is easy, nor that it is likely to end anytime soon.

IDF casualties in the fighting, 115 soldiers as of Dec. 13, are hardly a fraction of Hamas' losses, which are uncounted but clearly in the thousands, and according to the IDF comprise a large proportion of the casualties suffered

by Gazans, despite Hamas' effort to wage war while surrounded and shielded by civilians.

The IDF death toll, while far lower than Hamas', is quite high by the standards which normally apply in Israel's close-knit society. Even so, there is a broad consensus in Israel concerning the need to eradicate Hamas, even at great cost. The sense that the war affects everyone in Israel became even more chillingly palpable on Dec. 7 when the IDF's list of fatalities included 25-year-old commando reservist Sgt.-Major Gal Eisenkot. Eisenkot was the son of Lt-Gen (res.) Gadi Eisenkot, a member of the Government's five-person war cabinet representing the National Union party and a former IDF Chief of Staff. The following day Gen. Eisenkot also lost a nephew, Sgt-Major Maor Eisenkot, who fell in northern Gaza.

Indeed, the barbarity and scope of Hamas' October 7 assault, which Israelis now call Black Saturday, has produced a broadly accepted new Israeli security doctrine, namely, that the Jewish state cannot tolerate the build-up of jihadist militias anywhere along its borders.

This means that while Israel seeks to eradicate Hamas down south, in the north it will also have to eventually seek to push Hezbollah into the Lebanese hinterland, beyond the Litani River which marks south Lebanon off from the rest of the country.

Israeli analysts believe that Hamas did not expect the IDF to invade Gaza in response to October 7, much less as forcefully as it did, or IDF soldiers to be as highly motivated as they have been in clearing Gaza's towns and streets. The IDF's constant targeted killings of key Hamas figures, mostly from the air, are also diminishing Hamas' ability to resist the counterattack it triggered.

Casualties of Israel's targeted killings include numerous leaders of the October 7 massacre, as well as battalion commanders, regional commanders, intelligence officers, missile engineers and key Hamas political leaders – such as Zakaria Abu Maamar, Hamas' Chief of External Relations, and Jawad Abu Shammala, the Treasurer who financed Hamas' military machine.

While the fighting in Gaza has consensus backing inside Israel, beyond the battlefield, the war has generated its fair share of social, political, and diplomatic controversies.

The most urgent issue in Israeli public debate remains



the fate of the 138 abductees believed to still be held by Hamas. In a tense meeting with the war cabinet on Dec. 5, relatives of those abducted demanded new swap deals to secure their release and pointed to new reports from released abductees that women captives were often being sexually abused.

When urged to release all Palestinian prisoners held by Israel in return for all the abductees, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said such a deal “does not exist”, and that Hamas’ aim in any such deal would be to secure its survival and later launch yet more atrocities like October 7’s, “and this we will not accept, nor will you.”

The plight of the abductees and the limbo in which their families live is reflected in the uncertainty also affecting some 130,000 Israeli civilians who remain displaced from their homes, after the Government evacuated them from communities along the Gaza and Lebanese borders to hotels throughout the country.

While this spiked overall Israeli hotel occupancy to 90%, it is obviously an abnormal situation, and also an economically costly one – not only because of the price of accommodation, but also because of the thousands of businesses that these evacuees were compelled to shutter.

This financial burden has generated political controversy after Netanyahu’s Finance Minister, Bezalel Smotrich, refused to fully shift funds promised under coalition agreements for assorted sectarian causes to the war effort.

Incorporating the budgetary demands of Netanyahu’s coalition partners – including increased funding for ultra-Orthodox education – the fiscal-2024 budget was approved by the Knesset in a first reading on Dec. 6. The opposition and much of the media cried foul, and the National Union party voted against the budget despite having joined an emergency government to assist in running the war.



While Israelis are mainly focused on the war, the Netanyahu Government’s budget proposal, which provides increased funds to various sectarian causes, has occasioned controversy (Image: GPO/ Flickr)

Beyond the social angst and political stress, mounting diplomatic pressure is also being felt and debated in Israel.

Initially after October 7, Israel’s allies rallied behind it unequivocally and unreservedly. US President Biden and French President Macron travelled to Israel personally to display their solidarity, as did three current and former British prime ministers – Rishi Sunak as the incumbent, David Cameron as the Foreign Minister and Boris Johnson, accompanied by former Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, both as private citizens.

However, as the fighting continues and the number of civilian casualties in Gaza grows, foreign pressure to end the fighting has been gathering. This was underscored by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s statements on Dec. 1 that “the way Israel defends itself matters,” and that it is imperative that “the massive loss of civilian life and displacement of the scale that we saw in northern Gaza not be repeated in the south.”

The Israeli Government and army say they hear the American comments and are making very certain that the IDF’s tactics and strategy fully comply with the demands of international law. Having said this, there is no indication that anyone in Israel is ready to prematurely halt the IDF’s assault.

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Having seen Hamas torch Israeli families in their homes, shoot Israeli children in the head, kidnap others, and commit rape and murder against numerous Israeli women – Israelis from centre, right and left now tell each other, every hour, every day: “This is a war of *Ein Brera* (‘no choice’) – it’s either us or them.” AIR

(Ed. We are saddened to announce that this will be Amotz Asa-El’s final column for the Australia/Israel Review. He is retiring after serving as the AIR’s Israel correspondent for more than 17 years. Everyone at AIJAC is immensely grateful for his inimitable contributions over such a long period of time – offering us the fruits of his long journalistic experience and immense knowledge of Israeli and Jewish history and contemporary Israeli political, social and economic debates. We wish him all the best in his retirement and future endeavours as a Fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute.)

WITH THE 36TH DIVISION IN SHEJAIA

Jonathan Spyer

“What you can see before you is the destruction of Hamas infrastructure,” Col. Oded Adani tells us as we look toward a row of ruined buildings. “Every building that received fire is one in which we located terrorists. It’s hard fighting, but we’re here and we’re going to destroy them. That’s the mission.”

Adani is the deputy commander of the IDF’s 188 Armoured Brigade, which is part of the 36th Division. The division is currently tasked with the conquest of the Shejaia neighbourhood, one of the centres of support for Hamas in the Strip, and a vital node in the mission of destroying Hamas authority in Gaza.

This week, I spent an afternoon in the company of the 36th Division’s fighters in Shejaia as they continued the slow, methodical work of clearing out Islamist gunmen and their infrastructure from the neighbourhood.

As we speak to Adani, a line of the division’s M109 Howitzers next to us is laying down fire at buildings about two hundred metres away. We shelter behind a ruined house. Between the loud thumps of the 155mm cannons, the commander describes a hard, gruelling fight against a dug-in, well-prepared and resourceful enemy.

“The main challenge is that the enemy hides, and then arrives by surprise, setting

traps and making use of civilian infrastructure – schools, cemeteries, and so on. So, a building from which a terrorist emerges gets destroyed.

“There isn’t a building where there isn’t weaponry. There isn’t a school from which terrorists don’t emerge. We see it. So, we’re developing new techniques, finding ourselves anew each day.”

NOT THE FIRST TIME AROUND

The 36th Division and the 188 Brigade have a long history in Israel’s wars. It was this division which stopped the Syrian advance on the Golan Heights in 1973. Now, 50 years on, it is fighting a very different war, at a similar moment of crisis for Israel.

I have something of a long history of my own with these units. I served with the 188 Brigade and the 36th Division as a young immigrant lone soldier 30 years ago, in Hebron, Lebanon, and northern Gaza. Now, here we are again in the Gaza Strip, still facing the same enemies.

The destruction in Shejaia is immense. The troops and tanks of the division are fighting their way across a largely ruined landscape. With the Hamas military capacities tightly woven into the civil infrastructure, it has become impossible to cleanly divide the two.

Further into Shejaia, over the rubble, we enter a warren of alleyways and half demolished buildings. Here, the infantry and armoured elements of the 36th are carrying out their painstaking work of cleansing the area of Hamas presence. It is a tricky and dangerous task.

“Most of Hamas’s infrastructure is based on schools, mosques, hospitals, international structures of various kinds,” Lt.-Col. Tal Tourjeman, commander of the 906th Infantry Battalion, says.

“We find ammunition boxes hidden under the beds of children, rocket launchers placed outside of kindergartens. Ninety-five percent of the buildings we’ve entered contain military materiel of one kind or another – 95%!



Scenes from a war – fighting inside Gaza (Image: IDF)

You see this and you understand that you're fighting an enemy on a very low level, whose only objective is to strike at you at any price, including sacrificing his own people, firing from kindergartens and mosques."

Tourjeman fought in Shejaia ten years ago, in Operation Protective Edge, with the Golani Reconnaissance company. Now he is back, moving through the same rubble-filled alleyways, this time commanding a battalion from the Infantry Commanders School, attached to the 188.

The process he describes is one of methodical pace, careful targeting, and then the application of concentrated, massive force.

"We're destroying terrorist infrastructures, taking apart the structures that threatened Nahal Oz, Alumim, and Kfar Aza. So that when we've left here, not a single terrorist will be able to reach those communities and the civilians that live there.

"We use air power, tanks, drones, all available means, and set out and conquer ground. As a battalion commander, my job is that the soldiers should step over corpses, not to go down to the level of the enemy."

So, as an old Gaza veteran, has anything surprised Tourjeman about the current iteration of the enemy? The battalion commander replies, with an expression of genuine bewilderment, to the apparent indifference of the Hamas fighters to the lives of their own civilian population.

"They didn't come to defend the ground, or to preserve a framework of normal life after the fighting is finished. They came to get achievements against us as much as possible, and at any price. The enemy doesn't hold life sacred. He holds death sacred."

A few days earlier, the 53rd battalion of the 188 brigade lost three soldiers in northern Gaza – Tuval Sasnani, Eitan Fisch, and Yakir Shinkolevsky. One of our colleagues asked Adani, the 188's deputy commander, about the losses. I expected the kind of brief, dutiful response that one might get from a commander in the field, weighed down with immediate tasks and responsibilities.

Instead, Adani was silent for a few long seconds. "It's difficult," he said. "We're in touch with the families." Then he waved his hand and ended the interview.

"In the end, we came to drive out darkness," Tourjeman told us, by way of conclusion. "Soon, we'll be marking that. Well, we're marking it here, too. Physically."

We left as night was falling, to the inimitable screech and din of armoured tracks on the move. The fight for Shejaia continues. 

Jonathan Spyer is director of research at the Middle East Forum and director of the Middle East Center for Reporting and Analysis. He is author of Days of the Fall: A Reporter's Journey in the Syria and Iraq Wars (2018). © Jerusalem Post (www.jpost.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

ENDING THE WAR

Robert Satloff & Dennis Ross

"If Hamas cared at all for Palestinian lives, it would release all the hostages, give up arms and surrender the leaders and those responsible for Oct. 7."

US President Joe Biden, November 18, 2023, *Washington Post* op-ed.

This call for Hamas to lay down its arms may be viewed as a throwaway line in the Biden Administration's campaign to counter the graphic images of Palestinian civilians dying at the hands of Israeli troops armed with American weapons. After all, the predicate is clear: Hamas' conscious use of Palestinian civilians – including women, children, and hospital patients – as human shields shows that it does not care for Palestinian lives. But on closer inspection, Biden was right to raise the prospect of Hamas' surrender. Actively pursuing that goal might be the best way to save Palestinian lives and to achieve US strategic objectives in the Israel-Hamas war.

Since October 7, President Biden has held fast to the principle that Israel has both the right and the obligation to wage war against Hamas for its unprovoked aggression against civilian communities in southern Israel. Two conditions have been layered on that foundational principle. One is tactical – that Israel operate within international humanitarian law that requires combatants neither to target civilians nor cause them disproportionate harm. And one is strategic – that victory on the battlefield should pave the way for a political process that results in the establishment of a Palestinian state next to Israel, on terms commensurate with Israeli security requirements.

For its part, Israel has accepted the tactical constraint. It has implemented numerous operational procedures to keep the tragically high civilian death toll from climbing substantially higher; it has also allowed inspected humanitarian goods to flow into the war-zone. At the same time, while Israel has neither accepted nor rejected the strategic principle regarding the long-term goal of "day-after" planning, its leadership has at least ruled out permanent occupation of the Gaza Strip and the forced expulsion of its civilian population. It does, however, plan to maintain a security presence there for the foreseeable future.

Although Washington and Jerusalem do not currently see eye to eye on the strategic question, both recognise that the precondition for any effort to bridge those differences is Israeli victory over Hamas. That is to say, any talk of a post-war political process is meaningless without Israeli battlefield success: There can be no serious discussion of a two-state solution or any other political objective with Hamas either still governing Gaza or commanding a



If Hamas ends the war battered but still operational, and thus able to claim victory, its rejectionist ideology will likely gain traction across the region (Image: Shutterstock)

coherent military force.

This strategic reality – as much as his post-October 7 sympathy for Israel – animates Biden’s opposition to a ceasefire, which would leave Hamas battered but still potent. Put another way, President Biden recognised early that “ceasefire now” presents an insurmountable obstacle to any “political process later”, and his decision – correct and courageous – has been to fight the growing chorus for a ceasefire and to play the long game.

Sustaining this policy will become increasingly difficult. Biden has shown remarkable resilience in keeping his finger in the dike of international opinion and rejecting calls for a ceasefire, but his ability to do so may be finite. Israel has turned its attention to southern Gaza, operating with different tactics than its bombing-heavy, scorched-earth approach that appears to have largely driven Hamas out of the north.

Success for Israel is certainly possible but it will take time. Along the way, the pursuit of Hamas leadership in the vast warren of underground tunnels or in the sea of displaced people in southern Gaza may itself produce precisely the type of unintended civilian calamity that would heighten calls for a ceasefire. How long the White House can resist calls for a ceasefire from within the President’s own party and his closest international partners is uncertain.

Even then, there is little clarity as to what precisely defines success – is it killing or capturing the senior Hamas decision-makers? Decimating the upper ranks of Hamas political and military leaders? Destroying the organisational structure of Hamas military forces? Killing the vast majority of Hamas fighters in the field? What mix of these objectives will end Hamas control of Gaza and also convince the vast majority of Israel’s evacuated southern citizens that it is safe to return to their homes in order to rebuild their lives and communities – the most tangible

human test of Israel’s military success?

In the fog of war in Gaza, the only certainty is that the survival of a substantial element of Hamas would be a political and diplomatic disaster. Such an outcome will make it impossible for any Arab, international, or UN force to police the post-conflict environment in Gaza; impossible for any concerted effort by UN specialised agencies, major NGOs or international donors to invest in the needed repair and reconstruction in Gaza; and impossible for the United States to lead an international diplomatic initiative to advance a negotiated outcome to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Indeed, with a ceasefire leaving a battered but still operational Hamas in control of key parts of Gaza and therefore able to claim victory, Hamas’ rejectionist ideology will likely gain traction among Palestinians and throughout the Middle East. This would put Arab states on the defensive, and they would hesitate to take risks to advance their rhetorical calls for a reinvigorated Arab-Israeli peace process. By the same token, Hamas’ survival would validate the desire by some in Israel for a long-term “forward defence” presence deep inside Gaza territory, almost ensuring a perpetual conflict.

It makes sense, therefore, for the United States to pursue an outcome to the Israel-Hamas war that ends in Israeli victory. However, given that battlefield success is inherently uncertain, the White House should consider embracing another option that breaks the stranglehold of the binary choice – war or ceasefire – that is currently being debated. One option that achieves an outcome similar to Israeli victory, but at lower risk and fewer civilian casualties, is Hamas’ surrender.

Modern wars rarely end in surrender. It is rarer still for surrender to mean the effective dissolution of one of the warring parties. Serbia, for example, was forced to capitulate to NATO in the Kosovo War but the result was its withdrawal from Kosovo territory, not its destruction as a political entity. Conversely, there are

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recent examples of insurgencies led by non-state actors that ended in the annihilation of the latter – such as Russia’s victory over separatists in the Second Chechen War and Sri Lanka’s victory over the Tamil Tigers – but both took over a decade to achieve, with intermittent bouts of diplomacy as well as many multiples of the current Gaza death toll.

There is no example of surrender – or, to use the more felicitous term, “laying down arms” – in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Past wars have ended in armistice agreements, UN Security Council resolutions, and sometimes even peace treaties. But there have been two “first cousins” to surrender: the August 1982 sea-borne departure from Beirut of about 11,000 armed PLO fighters, with most heading to Tunis, where Yasser Arafat re-established his headquarters; and Arafat’s October 2004 departure from the Muqata in Ramallah after a year’s siege and his relocation to Paris, where he died two weeks later. Neither is analogous to the current situation. But the Beirut example does provide some aspects of a template, especially as it was brokered by the United States and other regional actors in order to end the siege of Lebanon’s capital and to safeguard the city’s population.

In the current situation, Hamas is probably not close enough to battlefield defeat to consider the option of laying down its arms. It retains significant military capacity in southern Gaza and few of its highest-level leaders have been killed. If Israeli military operations in, around, and under Khan Younis begin to achieve their objectives however, this situation could change rapidly. If it appears that Hamas has lost command/control of most of its military units, if a critical mass of senior leaders is captured or killed, or if the trickle of street protest against Hamas rule in Gaza becomes a flood, pursuing Hamas’ capitulation would become a real policy option. It is important, therefore, to begin discussing and assessing the idea now.

In practical terms, Hamas is unlikely to consider laying down its arms – that is, to surrender – unless its leadership believes it faces imminent annihilation. Even then, it may require the collective will of a coalition of forces – including key Arab states, PLO/Palestinian Authority leadership figures, and key foreign capitals (including those in the so-called “global south”) – to transform this from a talking point to a concrete policy option. No doubt, many of them would frame this proposal as a way to spare the Palestinians of Gaza further suffering and death.

For its part, Israel could consider Hamas’ surrender much earlier, in order to escape the inexorable ticking of the political clock that may soon expire for waging war with the support of its principal ally in Washington. But even so, Israel would be thinking of Hamas’ agreement to lay down its arms as a way to achieve its original war aims without having to complete the military mission of destroying Hamas in Gaza. Domestic politics would

weigh heavily on decision-makers, because not only would Hamas’ surrender look very different from its promised destruction, but also getting to that outcome would require Israeli leaders to grapple with hot-button political issues for which the War Cabinet, the governing coalition, and the nation at large may not be ready.

In this environment, reconciling the two views of Hamas’ surrender is difficult but not impossible, especially if the alternatives are war-to-the-finish or an imposed ceasefire. This would require clarity on several critical issues, including:

- the fate of Hamas leaders inside Gaza and other perpetrators of the October 7 attack (that is, does surrender lead to arrests or only exile; if there are arrests, what principles determine who is arrested and tried for their crimes versus who is exiled; where are the exiles sent; what are the conditions of their exile; who will pay for, supervise, and patrol their exile)
- the disposition of Hamas rank-and-file (who among the thousands of Hamas fighters will go into exile versus who will be allowed to stay in Gaza after renouncing violence and any affiliation with Hamas or another terrorist organisation)
- the definition and implementation of demilitarisation and the mechanism to ensure no subsequent rearmament (meaning, who will supervise and implement the collection of all remaining Hamas weapons, including rockets, and the destruction of Hamas’ military industrial capacity)
- the connection between Hamas’ surrender in Gaza and the status of Hamas in the West Bank (will Hamas operatives captured in the West Bank be subject to the same surrender terms as those in Gaza)
- the connection between Hamas’ surrender and other terrorist combatants like Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) (meaning, what if PIJ refuses what Hamas accepts; will surrender terms differ for PIJ)
- implications of Hamas’ surrender for its external leadership (will current host countries, like Qatar, enforce the terms of surrender on Hamas leaders residing there)
- Israeli commitments within the context of surrender (what promises, if any, will Israel make about its post-surrender pursuit of Hamas leaders and October 7 attackers, and about the lawful punishment Israeli courts will impose on those convicted of crimes related to that attack)

If this list of issues were not daunting enough, one cannot pursue this option of surrender without also defining the basic architecture of the post-Hamas regime in Gaza. After all, unlike the grey outcome that would accompany even the most robust definition of Israeli military victory – and which could still see thousands of angry, armed young men roaming the alleys of Gaza cities – Hamas’ surrender

would be a clarifying moment. Its full implementation, over the course of at least several weeks, would mitigate the need for Israel's long-term security presence inside Gaza and instead allow for Israel's withdrawal behind a border buffer zone.

This means it is essential to work out in advance the details of the three legs of Gaza's immediate post-Hamas future – civil administration; public safety; and repair/reconstruction – especially because it is essential to prevent a

“It is essential to work out in advance the details of the three legs of Gaza's immediate post-Hamas future – civil administration; public safety; and repair/reconstruction – especially because it is essential to prevent a governance and security vacuum in Gaza”

governance and security vacuum in Gaza. Moreover, because the United States and so many of the international and Arab regional actors who would be asked to play a role in that effort insist on linking the outcome of Gaza's fighting to both the revitalisation of the Palestinian Authority and the reinvigoration of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, it is necessary to fold early discussion of both those issues into

deliberations over the idea of Hamas' surrender. None of these issues will be easy for the current Israeli leadership to discuss, let alone embrace.

There are two additional issues that will deserve attention. In the Gaza context, surrender may be just as effective as military defeat in undermining the appeal of Hamas' radical ideology – and therefore something that Hamas' leadership will oppose unless faced with imminent disaster – but it is not alone sufficient.

Filling the vacuum left by a vanquished Hamas is not solely an issue of governance; it will take proactive efforts to prevent the reincarnation of Hamas under a different name and different branding. It will not be enough just to enforce the original language of the Oslo Accords outlawing any political party that “commits or advocates racism or pursues the implementation of their aims by unlawful or non-democratic means.” Recognising that “you can't beat something with nothing,” this will require the invigoration of a more moderate political alternative, one that would likely draw on Gaza's clan structure, local community and business leaders, the technocrats who maintain public services (including those who direct and staff UNRWA operations), and Gaza veterans of the Palestinian Authority. Identifying and empowering local leaders in the immediate post-Hamas environment will be a tricky but necessary task.

More broadly, none of this will succeed without deterring Iran from playing the role of spoiler. Already, Iran

is playing a double-game in the Israel-Hamas War. On the one hand, under pressure from the unusually robust US deployment to the region of two aircraft carriers, an amphibious battle group and a nuclear submarine, Teheran has taken pains to signal its distance from Hamas' October 7 attack; it has also refused to get directly involved in the conflict on Hamas' behalf.

But on the other hand, Iran has unleashed its Yemeni Houthi proxies to lob multiple ballistic missiles at Israel and to attack Israeli-connected shipping vessels, while having its Shi'ite militia proxies in Syria and Iraq turn up the heat on US ground forces there with attacks on US installations and personnel. And thus a key element of any Biden Administration plan to fill the post-Hamas vacuum must be additional pressure on Iran to stop the flow of arms, funding, and training to radicals in the Arab-Israeli arena, and convincing Teheran it will pay a heavy cost for trying to undermine US efforts. AIR

Robert Satloff is the Segal Executive Director and Howard P. Berkowitz Chair in US Middle East Policy at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Ambassador Dennis Ross is the Institute's counsellor and William Davidson Distinguished Fellow. © Washington Institute (washingtoninstitute.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

IS HAMAS AN “IDEA”?

David Hazony

“Hamas is an idea, and you can't destroy an idea.” This is one of the most pervasive bromides emerging over recent weeks from both pro-Hamas apologists and a wide range of well-meaning commentators and analysts grappling with the complexities of the war.

Yet it is not only false, but also exceedingly dangerous.

First – Hamas is not really an idea. It's a terror organisation, with funding, hierarchy, operations, and weapons that include rockets, RPGs, anti-aircraft missiles, and tens of thousands of armed soldiers. Nobody ever called Hamas an idea before October 7. Suddenly, in light of Israel's decision to end Hamas' reign in Gaza, it's fashionable to call it an “idea”. This swift rhetorical redefinition is transparently manipulative – and alone should suffice to make critically-minded people think twice before repeating it.

Second – to the extent that Hamas really is an idea, it's a pretty horrifying one. The idea, after all, is to kill Jews. More specifically, it is a fantasy of the destruction of Israel and its replacement, not with a prosperous and peaceable independent Palestinian state, but with brutal Islamist rule.





To the extent Hamas is an “idea”, it is like ISIS – a genocidal, imperialist one (Image: AAP)

Of course, killing Jews is not a new idea, and the Palestinian cause has been advocating it for almost a century. The PLO, which is the parent organisation of today’s Palestinian Authority, was founded on a similarly destructive eliminationist ideology and can be credited with inventing modern terrorism.

But as Hamas leaders have made clear, even Israel’s destruction would not satisfy the needs of this particular variant. The Islamist idea is not nationalist; it knows no borders and embodies no national aspirations. It is more like the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood that spawned it, or like the Iranian regime ideology of a grand global battle.

Like that of ISIS, Hamas’ idea is a genocidal, imperialist one, which must be eviscerated if we are to live in peace.

Third – and perhaps this is most important – you actually *can* destroy an idea, or at least sufficiently disempower and disincentivise it so that it becomes harmless. Our entire enlightened world is built on the destruction of bad ideas, from the geocentric view of the universe to the abolition of racial discrimination through the Civil Rights Act. The Nazi idea was sufficiently “destroyed” to allow peoples to live without Nazi rule. So was Soviet Communism.

The implication of the phrase – if you can’t destroy an idea, after all, one shouldn’t bother trying – is tantamount to abandoning the world to the worst ideas of its worst actors.

What does it take to destroy an idea?

First, you take away its guns. Ideas with power are far more dangerous than those without, as we saw on October 7. And to the extent that ideas have the appearance of real-world power, they grow stronger in people’s minds. Ideas are like sports teams: Losers are less attractive than winners.

This is what the US did to ISIS, and what Israel is doing in Gaza.

Second, you take away funding, legal status, and social licence from organs that propagate the idea. Destroying Hamas as an organisation is merely a first step in what should be a prolonged campaign to defund, ban, and shame bodies and individuals that support its aims – whether in universities, international NGOs, or publications.

But the most important thing you can do is to provide better ideas. To develop them, hone them, empower them, fund them, repeat them, teach them in schools. To show, over and over, why those ideas are better than the barbarism of Hamas and Iran and their ideological bedfellows in the West.

As we all now see, this battle of ideas is much bigger than Hamas. The assaults of October 7 unleashed an entire world of antisemitic, anti-Western activism that rides roughshod over truth, morals and decency. In the process, it has laid bare the failure of Western countries to defend their own foundational ideas – especially in academia, which has become the hornets’ nest of anti-Western agitation in media, non-profits and even government.

This must change. Professors and administrators who negate the intellectual foundations of Western democracy should be ostracised and routed from campuses. Funding from foreign sources should be scrutinised, publicised, and highly regulated. Public funding should be removed from any institution that fails to act.

We are in a war for our civilisation’s survival, and we have scarcely begun to fight.

Is this problematic from a free-speech perspective? Of course it is. Just as assaulting a hospital is problematic, if necessary, when it’s being used by terrorists. In the same way that Hamas exploits the vulnerabilities of our humanitarian order in Gaza, so too have enemies of the West exploited our academic freedoms to attack our civilisation. This dates back to the Soviet era and continues today in “anti-colonialist” movements affecting science, law, and especially the humanities.

Today, every prestigious university has become a Gaza hospital. Our top students and scholars have all become human shields. The threat to our future is staring us in the face.

It’s time to wake up. Some ideas are worth destroying, and right now it is imperative to take up the long fight. AIR

Dr. David Hazony is editor of Jewish Priorities: Sixty-Five Proposals for the Future of Our People (Wicked Son, 2023). © Jewish Journal (www.jewishjournal.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.



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“I went through hell”

What the released hostages say about their captivity

Aviva Winton & Alana Schetzer

Hamas terrorists kidnapped 240 Israeli and foreign nationals as part of their barbaric massacre across southern Israel on October 7 which claimed the lives of more than 1,200 people and injured another 10,039. Babies, the elderly and disabled people were among those kidnapped and taken into Gaza.

Over the course of seven days, between Nov. 24 and Dec. 1, 105 hostages – including 81 Israelis (some of whom were dual nationals), 23 Thai nationals and 2 Filipinos – were returned to Israel as part of a deal brokered by Egypt and Qatar, and supported by the United States. The deal, which focussed on children and women hostages, included an initial four-day ceasefire (which later was extended to seven days) and the release of 240 female and minor Palestinian prisoners, more than 60 per cent of whom had been convicted of, or charged with terror offences.

The truce reportedly broke down after Hamas refused to return the remaining female hostages, which the US Administration charged was likely because Hamas did not want these women to reveal what it had done to them.

There were also two US and two Israeli hostages released prior to the ceasefire deal, and one Israeli was rescued by Israeli forces. At the time of publication, Israel says that another 138 people, including 17 women and two children, remain as hostages in Gaza.

Hamas broke the seven-day ceasefire multiple times, including launching rockets at Israel – a war crime – and two Hamas members from the West Bank murdered three Israeli citizens in a shooting attack at a bus stop near the



Hamas has been trying to gain PR benefits from images of the release of hostages (Image: Screenshot)

entrance to Jerusalem.

Propaganda has been an enormous part of Hamas’ strategy for years, and Hamas and its sympathisers have used the hostage release to attempt to burnish Hamas’ reputation, with widespread claims on social media and in Arab media that hostages were grateful and sympathetic to their captors.

Returning hostages were forced to smile, shake hands with their captors and thank them publicly as part of Hamas’ propaganda. However, in one video a Hamas fighter is seen ordering captives to keep waving – and there are also reports that hostages were given tranquilisers prior to their release to make them appear happy.

According to testimonies collected so far, returned hostages, their families and medical workers have spoken about how they were treated while in captivity. These include:

- Starvation and lack of food;
- Physical abuse;
- Sexual abuse;
- Psychological abuse;
- Confinement, cages and no access to sunlight;
- Lack of hygiene;
- Fear and anxiety;
- Medical neglect and lack of medical care; and finally
- PTSD and post-release recovery.

STARVATION AND LIMITED FOOD

Returned hostages have revealed what food they were given – or not given – by their Hamas captors. Some have spoken of being given one slice of bread for a whole day, which was sometimes substituted by rice. Others have spoken of only being given a limited amount of rice, canned hummus and beans, and occasionally cheese and pita. Of the food they were given, they had to cook it for themselves, even the child hostages.

During their last two weeks in captivity, hostages reported that food supplies ran low, which meant they ate even less food.

Merav Mor Munder, cousin of returned hostage Keren Munder, said: “There were days when there were no sup-

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plies, so they only ate pita bread. They were not tortured, but there were days when they barely had any food, in the last few days they only ate very little rice.”

Survivors have spoken of suffering from constipation and digestive problems due to the hummus and beans, as they were not used to eating it every day (note: made from legumes, i.e. chickpeas, eating a lot of hummus is known to cause gastrointestinal problems). Several stated that even though they were given very little food, they tried to eat as little as possible of the hummus and beans because of the side effects, as they were afraid of getting sick while in captivity.

Dr Yael Mozer-Glassberg said the returned hostages she treated lost between 10 and 15% of their body weight while in captivity. The impact on the elderly women who were kept hostage was even more extreme, with several having lost between eight and 15kg.

Professor Itai Pessach, who has treated other returned hostages at Lily Safra Children’s Hospital at Sheba Medical Center, said some hostages were sometimes given no food, and when they were, it was “sometimes only a cup of tea and a biscuit or a single dried date in the morning and rice in the evening.”

PHYSICAL ABUSE

There are multiple accounts of hostages, including children, being subjected to physical assaults. Several stated that they were beaten with sticks soon after they were brought into Gaza on October 7. Eitan Yahalomi, 12, said he was beaten by Gazan residents when he was taken into the strip; he was then kept in solitary confinement for the first 16 days of his captivity.

“A 12-year-old, kidnapped alone after his father was shot, was beaten by Gaza residents and forced at gunpoint by Hamas to watch videos of their murder spree and massacres,” *Yedioth Ahronoth* journalist, Nadav Eyal, said of Yahalomi’s experience.

Hamas allegedly drugged multiple children and used motorcycle exhausts to deliberately burn ‘identification marks onto their legs; this was done to “brand” them so if they escaped they could be identified and to signify that they “belonged” to Hamas.



Yocheved Lifschitz (Image: YouTube screenshot)

Peace activist and grandmother, Yocheved Lifschitz, 85 – who was one of four women released in October – said of her ordeal: “I went through hell.” She said she was beaten with sticks while being taken against her will to

Gaza, leaving her with bruises and difficulty breathing. Her 83-year-old husband, Oded, remains a hostage.

Dr Hagai Levine, head of the Hostages and Missing Family Forums’ medical team, said returned hostage, 84-year-old Elma Avraham, had marks on her body that revealed “she was dragged from place to place, that she was handcuffed. She has chemical wounds from not treating her basic needs.”

A returned Thai hostage, Anucha Angkaew, reported that he and other Thai nationals were repeatedly beaten during the early days of their captivity but were treated better than two Israelis held with them, who were beaten more severely and more often, including with electrical cables.

SEXUAL ABUSE

A doctor who treated some of the 110 freed hostages told the *Associated Press* that at least ten men and women among them were sexually assaulted or abused. He provided no further details to protect their privacy.

Reports say further details of the sexual abuse were shared at a meeting this week between the Israeli war cabinet and a group comprising recently freed hostages and family members. At the meeting, Aviva Siegel, one of the freed hostages, reportedly said that some of the women hostages were “being touched” and others also reported sexual abuse.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

Hostages have spoken of being forced to sit in silence and threatened with being killed by their Hamas captors.

Thomas Hand, whose nine-year-old daughter Emily – she was originally thought to have been murdered on October 7 – said that since returning home, Emily would only whisper so quietly he could hardly hear her; she has also learned Arabic for “keep quiet”.

“The most shocking, disturbing part of meeting her was she was just whispering, you couldn’t hear her. I had to put my ear on her lips,” Hand said of his daughter. “She’d been conditioned not to make any noise. Last night she cried until her face was red and blotchy, she couldn’t stop. She didn’t want any comfort, I guess she’s forgotten how to be comforted.”

Emily is just one of several children who have refused to speak above a whisper since they were released; Hand said Emily was mostly silent and when she did cry, she would crawl under her bed covers.

Child hostages were banned from making any noise, including crying. Some were allegedly forced to watch footage of the October 7 massacres, which depicted graphic and highly distressing images of rape, torture and murder.

Omer Lubaton Granot, who founded the Hostages and Missing Family Forums, said terrorists held a gun to 12-year-old Eitan Yahalomi’s head as a threat to stop him from crying.

“What we hear from the stories from children – the

captivity’s harsh reality is unbelievable,” she said. “Sisters of other children told them that Hamas have told the children that their whole family has died, that nobody wants them back, that they don’t have a home to go to. They tried to scare the children.”

Dr Mozer-Glassberg said the terrorists had “psychologically tortured” the children and teens who were kept isolated, repeatedly telling them neither their families nor the Israeli Government were searching for them and that they would remain in captivity all their lives.

CONFINEMENT, CAGES AND NO ACCESS TO SUNLIGHT

Many hostages were kept captive in a single crowded room located in one of the tunnels that Hamas built up to five storeys underground and which could only be accessed via a long corridor. It’s been reported that hostages were kept in a room together, with beds pushed together on the ground; others were forced to sleep on plastic chairs.

Thai hostages said they had to sleep on the sandy ground.

However, reports allege some women and children hostages were kept in cages for parts of their captivity; Hamas itself released video showing children in cages. Several hostages were kept in houses above ground.

Being five storeys underground, hostages largely had no access to natural light for the entirety of their captivity. Some said they were only allowed two hours of artificial light per day, meaning they spent 22 hours of each day in the dark. Experts have recognised sunlight deprivation as a form of torture due to the physical and mental harm it can cause.

Eyal Nouri, whose 72-year-old aunt Adina Moshe, was among the hostages freed, said after she was dragged from her home’s safe room in Israel, she and other hostages were forced to walk several kilometres through the elaborate tunnel system.

“Dr Mozer-Glassberg said the terrorists had ‘psychologically tortured’ the children and teens who were kept isolated, repeatedly telling them neither their families nor the Israeli Government were searching for them”

“They took her inside the tunnels... she walked, bare feet in the mud of the tunnels,” he told CNN. “It was very hard to breathe. They marched [for] hours in the tunnels.”

Nouri said his aunt had to “adjust to the sunlight” after being kept in near-total darkness for seven weeks.

“She was in complete darkness; she was walking with her eyes down because she was in a tunnel. She was not used to the daylight. And during her captivity, she was disconnected... from all the outside world,” Nouri said.

CNN reported that hostages were forced to sit in silence. Humanitarian organisations, such as the Red Cross, have been refused access to the remaining hostages in Gaza.

LACK OF HYGIENE

Doctors treating returned hostages said some never bathed for the entirety of their 50 days in captivity. They also didn’t have any changes of clothes, so they were forced to wear the same clothes they had on the day they were kidnapped. Any washing was done in the same room that they slept and spent all their time in. Returned hostages said they were forced to wait “hours” to use the toilet and were only allowed to do so after asking permission first.

The Thai hostages said the only toilet was a hole in the ground near the room to which they had to be escorted by an armed guard.

Different hostages have spoken of different experiences to others; 85-year-old Yocheved Lipschitz said conditions were clean and that “captives were treated well.”

Many hostages returned with skin rashes, infected wounds that were not properly treated and extreme cases of head lice.

Dr Mozer-Glassberg said: “They returned with extremely deficient hygiene. I have never seen hygiene this bad. Their head lice was the worst I have ever seen. Even with five or six treatments, the lice were not gone.”

FEAR AND ANXIETY

“It was hard for them to sleep at night due to stress and fear,” one doctor, who treated some of the returned hostages, said. Because hostages were kept underground and were cut off from the world (banned from reading, writing and no access to television, internet and radio), many lost all track of time.

Hand said his nine-year-old daughter Emily had no sense of time and thought she had been held in captivity for a year. She also referred to the room she was kept in as “the box”.

Upon preparing to be returned to Israel, several

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hostages spoke of their fear that their terrorist captors or even Gazan residents would attack them at the last minute; some said Gazans threw stones at the car they were traveling in to take them out of Gaza.

“Until the last moment we weren’t sure, we thought they would lynch us on the way to Israel,” a returned hostage said.

Hamas terrorists forced some hostages to write letters praising them and how they treated hostages, releasing them publicly as part of their propaganda campaign. One letter, allegedly written by Danielle Aloni – who was kidnapped alongside her five-year-old daughter, Emilia – thanked the terrorists for their “extraordinary humanity” towards Emilia, adding “I will forever be a prisoner of love because [Emilia] did not leave here with psychological trauma forever.”

MEDICAL NEGLECT AND LACK OF MEDICAL CARE

One returned hostage, 84-year-old Elma Avraham, was immediately airlifted to an Israeli hospital after being released. She needed a ventilator to breathe and was in a critical condition for several days as she fought for her life; at the time of publication, she is in a stable condition. Her family said she had been “medically neglected” because she did not have access to essential medications, blaming the Red Cross as well as Hamas for this.

Avraham’s daughter, Tal Amano, said her mother suffered a “double betrayal” – first from Hamas and then by the Red Cross.

“Clalit [an Israeli medical health fund] was the one who fought for us. It delivered the medication that Elma required to my brother in person,” Amano said. “Yet, when my brother attempted to pass on the medication to a Red Cross representative at a meeting they held together, he was told no, they cannot do that.”

Dr Nadav Davidovitch, who treated Avraham in hospital, said medical staff implored Red Cross workers to take necessary medications with them when they collected the hostages from Gaza. “We were in meetings with the Red Cross and asked them to make every effort to bring the medications to her, because some hostages are just dying. From a medical and nursing standpoint, what we witnessed is unlawful neglect.”

Another hostage returned to Israel using crutches.

PTSD AND POST-RELEASE RECOVERY

Israel has announced that returned hostages are allowed to stay in hospital as long as they wish, with ongoing medical care and counselling provided. While information on how the returned hostages are recovering from their ordeals is limited, due to respect for their privacy, some relatives have spoken about the trauma survivors are experiencing.

Yair Rotem, whose 13-year-old niece Hila Rotem-Shoshani was among the returned hostages, said the child had changed from who she used to be.

“She’s a little bit distant now, she’s a little bit cold. She talks about things that happened like it’s in third person, like it happened to someone else. She’ll say she saw horrible things, but she says it with a straight face,” he said.

Experts have stated that it will take time for survivors to recover and that they may suffer from a range of psychological reactions, including grief, survivor’s guilt, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress and disorientation. Many of the hostages also had relatives or friends murdered on October 7 and only recently learned of their fate. Some also had their homes destroyed by Hamas terrorists, and so face having to rebuild their lives.

Adva Adar, whose 85-year-old grandmother Yaffa Adar was released after 50 days in captivity, said: “For an 85-year-old woman, usually you have your house where you raised your kids, you have your memories, your photo albums, your clothes. She has nothing, and in her old age she needs to start over. She mentioned that it is tough for her.”

But Dr Efrat Bron-Harley, chief executive officer of Schneider Children’s Medical Center of Israel, said staff treating the returned hostages were optimistic about the future they face, saying they were “determined and strong”.

“We heard from many of the children and women unimaginable accounts, some of them really surreal. We have heard stories, which are hard for us as doctors and as caregivers to believe they can exist,” she said.

“Over the last five days, we met children who were initially withdrawn and lost, and after a day or two, they were already running around the ward, playing and laughing.” 

THE UN SINCE OCTOBER 7

Justin Amler

The United Nations has a long history of bias against Israel, dating back to the 1970s, when it declared Zionism, that is, support for Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish homeland, a “form of racism”.

While that resolution was repealed in 1991, the extensive pro-Palestinian bureaucracy inserted into the UN as an institution from that time remains today.

Year after year, Israel continues to be singled out for scrutiny with numerous resolutions condemning the Jewish state on numerous different pretexts. More resolutions are passed against Israel each year than the combined total of every other state on Earth.

That means that, thanks to the numerical domination of the UN by states aligned with the Arab and Islamic blocs,



Israel – a democratic state with a strong human rights record – is condemned much more than mass-murdering, totalitarian terrorist-supporting entities like Iran, Syria, or North Korea.

But perhaps this shouldn't be a surprise in an institution dominated by human rights abusers and the "special rapporteurs" these abusers arrange to appoint, some of whom have spread antisemitic tropes.

The UN's ideals were always honourable, even inspirational, formulated in the aftermath of the horrors of World War II to work towards preventing the world falling into such moral disrepair again.

Unfortunately, those ideals are seldom being met.

On October 7, Israel experienced the worst terror attack in its history. Approximately 1,200 people were butchered, many in their homes in some of the most cruel and depraved ways one could ever imagine. Women were raped. Children beheaded. Families burnt alive. The worst of human savagery was in full display, recorded on GoPro cameras in high definition by terrorist monsters who rejoiced in their blood lust. Even the mass-murder was not enough, as about 250 innocents were dragged to Gaza as hostages, including babies, toddlers, and elderly men and women.

And yet, the aforementioned UN, whose ideals are supposed to shine like a beacon of light in a murky world, was nowhere to be seen, with no words to be heard. UN bodies have overwhelmingly failed to even condemn this most heinous act of butchery, which should have been the easiest thing in the world to do.

Let's review for a moment what the United Nations has done since this infamous day of horror.

Just two days after the October 7 massacre, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) demonstrated exactly why it is one of the UN's most notorious and hypocritical organisations. The Pakistani representative, Zaman Mehdi, called for and received a minute's silence to remember the victims in the "occupied Palestinian territories" and elsewhere, saying it was a result of more than "seven decades of foreign occupation, aggression and disrespect for the international law." He didn't mention Israel and he also failed to mention Hamas – the perpetrators of the massacre.

In other words, even as the blood of Jewish victims of Hamas' pogrom was not yet cold, and even as their bodies had not yet been collected or even discovered or identified, the UNHRC made a point of blaming Israel's very existence for the massacre of its citizens, attributing all the blame to over "seven decades of foreign occupation" meaning Israel's existence since 1948.

Another disturbing aspect of the Hamas attack was the deliberate sexual violence Hamas perpetrated against Israeli women. Jewish women were raped, degraded and

murdered in an attempt to "dirty them", in the words of captured Hamas terrorists, who said such sexual violence was part of their orders on October 7. In many cases, the rape was so violent that women's pelvic bones were shattered. There is overwhelming forensic evidence, including eyewitness reports, as well as Hamas' own videos of naked dead women being paraded on pickup trucks in the heart of Gaza along with living women who had blood all over their pants indicating the violent sexual assault against them.

Yet this use of rape and sexual violence was completely ignored for months by the United Nations, including groups whose entire purpose is to protect women, such as UN Women. Only after two months did the UN Women organisation issue a weak condemnation after an international campaign to call attention to the UN's complete failure to even acknowledge the sick sexual violence.

Interestingly, on Nov. 30, UN experts did in fact say they were "appalled" by the use of sexual violence as a tool of war – but they were talking about Sudan, not Israel.

Then there is the United Nations Relief and Works Agency known as UNRWA. It is an organisation supposedly dedicated to helping Palestinian refugees, but in reality it is one of the major impediments to any kind of peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians. The majority of its \$1.6 billion (A\$2.4 billion) budget is dedicated to educating children. However, it is not the kind of education that promotes peace and cultural understanding, but rather perpetuates rejectionism and violence, including advocating the "right of return" for Palestinians into Israel – meaning ending the existence of the State of Israel.

Australia contributes \$20 million dollars annually to UNRWA.

Although UNRWA staff, officials and teachers have been exposed for involvement in terrorist violence multiple times

in the past, the last couple of months have revealed even more damning evidence. This included celebrations of the October 7 massacre by numerous teachers and in schools, the discovery of Hamas weapons caches in UNRWA schools and even the holding of an Israeli hostage in the attic by an UNRWA teacher. And yet, the United Nations has not condemned any of the pro-Hamas activities by UNRWA officials.

UNRWA instead released a statement saying it is being defamed.

Finally, there is the most powerful person in the UN hierarchy, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who on October 7 itself, had the nerve, even as Hamas terrorists were still running wild and massacring civilians through



Pakistani UN representative Zaman Mehdi (screenshot)

towns and villages of southern Israel, to call for “maximum restraint” from Israel.

He then continued his descent into the moral abyss by appearing to encourage “understanding” of the attacks by Hamas, even while ostensibly condemning them, saying they “did not happen in a vacuum. The Palestinian people have been subjected to 56 years of suffocating occupation. They have seen their land steadily devoured by settlements and plagued by violence; their economy stifled; their people displaced and their homes demolished.”

He then took a further seven weeks, despite the overwhelming evidence, before calling for an investigation into the sexual violence that occurred on October 7, saying “gender-based violence must be condemned. Anytime. Anywhere.” It’s hard to take those words seriously considering how long it took him to say them.

Eventually, he also decided to take the rare and unprecedented step of invoking Article 99 of the UN charter which states “The Secretary-General may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security” to demand the Security Council impose a ceasefire in Gaza.

Note that he has failed to invoke Article 99 for any other conflict that has raged during his tenure – including the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, or the Syrian civil war, in which hundreds of thousands of people have been killed.

Since October 7, the United Nations has only underscored the degree to which it remains obsessed with the only Jewish state, while largely ignoring all misdeeds and crimes of the world’s worst human rights abusers

The world body has, unfortunately, failed to show basic moral clarity even in the face of an unprecedented, unprovoked atrocity like October 7.

It therefore shouldn’t be a surprise when a terror-supporting, serial human rights abuser like Iran was elected to chair the UNHCR Social Forum at the end of October.

Since October 7, UN “experts” and bodies have focussed almost solely on condemning or questioning what Israel is doing in its defensive war against Hamas, while pretending the events of October 7 never happened or are ancient history. While almost every Western government has recognised Israel’s right to self-defence against Hamas, we were unable to identify any UN body or expert who did so – indeed some “experts” have explicitly and absurdly argued that Israel does not have any such right to self-defence.

Instead of shocking the UN out of its long-standing pattern of complete one-sidedness when it comes to Israel, the atrocities of October 7 appear to have only led to the UN entrenching itself even further on the side of undemocratic actors which seek to undo Israel’s creation, with UN approval more than 75 years ago.

AIR

TIME TO STOP THE NICE WORDS ABOUT QATAR

Jonathan Schanzer

David Barnea, the head of Israel’s Mossad, announced on December 2 that he was withdrawing the Israeli negotiating team from the Gulf Arab emirate of Qatar. The announcement signalled the end of the hostage channel facilitated by the Qataris that worked to secure the release of more than 100 hostages held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip. War returned to Gaza shortly thereafter.

A gaggle of senior American officials has thanked the Qataris for their efforts since the outbreak of the war on October 7. They say Doha worked for weeks to try to end the war and to broker the release of Hamas prisoners in Israeli jails in exchange for the release of Israeli hostages.



Secretary of State Antony Blinken with Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in Doha, Qatar (Image: Alamy Live News)

These American statements are cringe-inducing. In fact, the Qataris are long-standing financial sponsors of Hamas, having forked over hundreds of millions of dollars to the terrorist group in recent years. The regime has also provided Hamas with a headquarters where the terror group has operated for more than a decade. Top Hamas figures Khaled Meshal and Ismail Haniyeh have for years operated out of Doha. Hamas military official Saleh Arouri — who

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masterminded the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teens that triggered the 2014 war between Hamas and Israel – often travels to Qatar too.

In other words, when America thanks Qatar for its assistance, it's a bit like thanking the thug who punched you in eye for bringing you an ice pack.

But it's worse than that. In their efforts to steer the Gaza conflict toward a permanent ceasefire, the Qataris have actively tried to help save Hamas from destruction, which is Israel's stated war aim. In other words, Washington's support for Qatar's efforts directly contradicts President Biden's assertion that Israel cannot go back to the "status quo" that existed before October 7.

All of this points to a deeply dysfunctional relationship between America and the terror-sponsoring Gulf emirate.

Qatar has secured a level of immunity from American criticism through a massive lobby and influence campaign in Washington, which is buttressed by the hosting of US forces at the sprawling, high-tech Al-Udeid Air Base, America's largest in the Middle East.

This arrangement has somehow endured amidst criticism of the group's lax terror finance controls. One US Treasury official in 2016 stated that Qatar has demonstrated "a lack of political will... to effectively enforce their combating terrorist financing laws." Another Treasury official stated that "designated terrorist financiers" are "operating openly and notoriously" in the country.

In addition to Hamas, the terrorists running around in Qatar include al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, the Taliban, and more. Famously, the Qataris sheltered 9/11 mastermind Khaled Sheikh Mohammed, and likely alerted him to the fact that American forces were closing on him, enabling his escape.

Despite this track record, the United States has continued to work with the Qataris as partners. And with a full understanding of this dynamic, the Israelis somehow agreed to enable the Qataris to provide a steady stream of funds to (in theory) keep the Hamas government functioning. It was never an arrangement the Israelis trusted. But Qatar insisted that a flow of cash would help keep Gaza quiet. And Washington leaned on Israel to keep the scheme going.

We know how it all worked out. Gaza has been anything but quiet for years. Multiple rounds of conflict (2008, 2012, 2014, and 2021) have undermined the logic of the Qatari role in the region. And then came the Hamas pogrom on October 7 that claimed the lives of 1200 Israelis. Doha insists it was surprised by the attack. But that doesn't let Qatar off the hook. As former Israeli national security advisor Eyal Hulata recently revealed, the Qataris have sent funds surreptitiously to Hamas fighters.

The mask has fallen. The Qataris are terror sponsors, not stewards of Gaza.

The regime has been taking fire for nearly 60 days now.

The emirate's leaders know that the entire war has reflected poorly on them. They have tried to explain themselves in the media. But that has largely failed. This is why they are trying to resuscitate the hostage channel.

While it is certainly possible that Qatar could make itself relevant again, the Israelis don't seem particularly interested at the moment. They are now signalling that they have reached the end of the line with Doha. A Foreign Ministry spokesman recently noted that all accounts would soon be settled with Doha. And after an initial news report suggesting that officials in Doha would be spared in Israel's forthcoming assassination campaign of Hamas leaders, the head of Israel's Shin Bet announced in early December that Hamas chiefs in Qatar (and Turkey) will soon meet their end.

Washington, for its part, is not threatening Hamas. But the Biden White House is signalling the need for a revision of the contract between Qatar and the United States. According to *Politico*, the US may soon demand that Qatar jettison its Hamas leaders from the country.

That move would be long overdue. But additional steps are needed. Qatar must be stripped of its status as a Major Non-NATO Ally. It should be sanctioned as a State Sponsor of Terrorism by the State Department. The Pentagon should also begin to make contingency plans for moving our air assets out of the country.

All of that should happen while the Israelis embark upon their campaign of eliminating the leaders of Hamas worldwide.

AIR

Jonathan Schanzer is senior vice president for research at Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a nonpartisan think tank in Washington, D.C. © Commentary magazine (www.commentary-magazine.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

AMUST AFTER OCT 7: DEFENDING HAMAS AND ANTISEMITISM

Ran Porat

The *Australian Muslim Times* (AMUST) is a repeat offender when it comes to publishing extremist content, anti-semitic material and conspiracy theories regarding Israel. Yet the barrage of such material in the AMUST following the October 7 massacre by Hamas was unusual in terms of both volume and viciousness.

In this first part of a two-part series, I will review AMUST's editorials and a few examples of the material published in October, November and December 2023.

AMUST EDITOR: POOR HAMAS ONLY HAS INACCURATE ROCKETS

Zia Ahmad is the Editor-in-Chief of *AMUST*. In the November edition, Ahmad sought to “educate” readers about the “Historical background to 7 October attack.” Alas, Ahmad’s “education” involved not historical facts, but rather untruths.

For example, he asserted Israel’s response to October 7 was “mounting revenge killing of many times more Palestinians.” Yet Israel’s stated war aims in its campaign of self-defence are about removing Hamas from power and rescuing its hostages in Gaza, not about revenge, and certainly not targeting all Palestinians.

Ahmad offers an apologetic defence of Hamas’ attack: “the root cause of 7 October attacks has a long history where Palestinians have been made to live under brutal military occupation in the West Bank and under siege in an

open-air prison in Gaza while Israeli settlers live in leafy suburban settlements armed to the teeth, enjoying life and partying under the protection of Israeli military and police.” Apparently, according to Ahmad’s rationalisation, Israeli Jews partying, or just living in their homes, is sufficient reason to rape, murder and kidnap them.

Hamas, according to Ahmad, “is a democratically elected legitimate authority governing Gaza Strip” – ignoring the fact that this terrorist organisation seized sole control over Gaza in a bloody coup d’etat in 2007 during which it killed many Palestinian opponents in cold blood.

After portraying Hamas as just like any other governing party, Ahmad does note that Hamas’ “armed wing Al-Qassam Brigades have engaged Israel from time to time, justifying its attacks to resist Israeli occupation and occasionally targeting Israeli civilians in Israel proper and armed settlers in the occupied areas.” He fails to note that this “engagement” came mainly in the form of the tens of thousands of rockets fired from Gaza at Israeli civilians for more than 15 years – each one a war crime.

Despite acknowledging the reality of the “indiscriminate attacks by the Al-Qassam Brigades,” Ahmad argues that the real reason why Hamas was listed as a terrorist organisation in several countries (including Australia) is that this measure was “pushed by the Israeli lobby in these countries” – a claim clearly invoking antisemitic tropes about Jewish power, as well as suggesting the Australian Government is incapable of recognising its own security interests and examining objective realities.

The editorial concludes with Ahmad laying out, and not

demurring from, Hamas’ extremist ideology, which views Israel as “a racist and apartheid state with discriminatory laws incorporated to promote the settlement of foreign Jews while denying indigenous people of Palestine to live peacefully on their own ancestral land.”

In the closing lines of the editorial, Ahmad defends Hamas by insisting that it had to confront Israel “with only inaccurate rockets against missiles, pickup trucks against tanks and gliders” – all of which were the means cruelly used for the mass killing and war crimes conducted by the Palestinians on October 7.

The image for *AMUST*’s December editorial (“War on Gaza: The battle of the two narratives”) was a popular online meme spread by Hamas and its supporters. Two pictures, side by side: on the left, an Israeli border patrol officer holding a Palestinian teenager, possibly arresting him after a crime, such as an attempt to harm an Israeli; on the



The image chosen for the *AMUST* December 2023 editorial (Image: *AMUST* website screenshot)

right, an armed Hamas terrorist in a ‘friendly’ gesture next to an allegedly Israeli child, smiling. There is ample evidence that Israelis, including children, kept by Hamas in Gaza after they were kidnapped on October 7, were held in very harsh conditions, were basically tortured in many cases and then forced or drugged into making friendly gestures toward their captors as they were released.

The editorial itself opens by immediately tapping into anti-Jewish conspiracy theories by alluding to the trope that Jews have global domination over politicians and the

media. Soon after the attack, Ahmad says, “Israel’s highly sophisticated propaganda machinery with its reach into Western centres of political power, the mainstream media and its global network of lobbyists particularly in US, UK, Canada, France and Australia started building the pro-Israel narrative targeting and demonising Hamas.”

Describing Hamas’ well-documented crimes against humanity by using the “Keywords of Hamas, terrorists, murderers, killers, rapists, hostage takers, baby killers, decapitators, arsonists,” was just a smokescreen, he said, “in order to deflect blame from the Israeli government and the incompetence of the Israeli forces and its intelligence agencies.”

Ahmad appeared to be saying Israeli victims were butchered by the Palestinian “fighters” for a good reason: “Hamas was blamed for the killing of 1400 people initially that was later reduced to 1200 by break away fighters from Gaza of ‘innocent civilians’ without clearly spelling out that almost 300 killed were Israeli soldiers and the rest settlers occupying Palestinian lands and overseas work-

ers employed by these settlers.” Of course, Israeli civilians butchered near Gaza are “settlers...occupying Palestinian land” only if you believe every single Israeli Jew should be deemed a “settler...occupying Palestinian land.” Ahmad then denied the well-established fact that Hamas terrorists raped many women, while also regurgitating the lie circulated by the Palestinian Authority that Israeli army helicopters killed large numbers of Israeli civilians on October 7.

The editorial reached new levels of self-righteousness when Ahmad sanctimoniously defended pro-Palestinians in Australia (and elsewhere) who celebrated the death and horrors of October 7. “At the initial stages, the supporters of Palestine celebrated the spectacular success of the militants breaking out of the high-tech barrier with their crude gliders, pick up vans, motor bikes and of [sic] the shelf drones, some in their thongs and taking on the mighty Israeli high tech militarised machinery.”

Yet Ahmad immediately contradicts himself. After claiming that reports of Hamas crimes were false, he then argues that atrocities did actually occur but were repudiated by Palestinian supporters in Australia: “However later when the large number of those killed in Israel, atrocities being committed and abduction of women, children and the elderly came to light, those who supported the initial success of the militants retracted their celebratory statements.”

Other *AMUST* articles from the same period, for example by Mohamed Ainullah, repeated the exact same arguments, often in the same words put forward by Ahmad.

JUSTIFYING AND PRAISING HAMAS

Defending and glorifying Hamas and the bloody October 7 campaign of mass murder is a motif of *AMUST* stories for the last three months. Here are a few examples.

Imam Ali, the former President of the Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand, could not hide his admiration for Hamas. In his piece for *AMUST* (Oct. 27), he proudly states, “The resilience of Hamas is remarkable and their most recent incursion across the border was predictable given the air, sea and land blockade of a city with 2.4 million for nearly two decades. Gaza has the dubious distinction of being the largest open-air prison in the world.”

He then suggests a moral equivalence between the Hamas attack on women and children, and Israel’s war to remove the murderous threat of Hamas from Gaza. “Killing of innocent people by Hamas is of course abhorrent,” he sanctimoniously says, “but the State of Israel’s hands are arguably no less brutal.” Ali ends his text by concluding that “Colonisation and occupation must end as should apartheid. The two-state solution has gone nowhere. Is it time to consider one-state solution?”

In “Uncovering justifications to exterminate forgotten

Palestinians” (Oct. 27), Shahjahan Khan, a retired statistics professor from Bangladesh, rhetorically asks: “So why are Palestinians treated worse than animals by Israelis; why is ethnic cleansing not a crime to them, more so to the world?” His conspiratorial answer is “With the full backing of almost all Western powers and their leaders, the Murdoch media conglomerate, and immeasurable military funding, the Zionist army is in full action in the air, from the sea, and on the land to annihilate as many blameless Palestinians as possible to secure their apartheid state and expand the illegal settlements for foreign Jews.”

Khan indirectly admits his own support for Hamas’ actions by pointing to “Many prominent anti-Israeli activists and organisations [that] have expressed their full support for the Hamas actions on different media outlets. They are framing Hamas’s surprise attacks as a natural outburst of an anti-occupation struggle and hence a form of ‘resistance’ for self-determination. They [are] correct [by noting the] fact that many Jews are against Zionism and apartheid state of Israel.”

“Hamas is a resistance force committed to regain the land, dignity, and nationhood,” states Khan who then goes on to equate Israel with Nazi Germany: “Ironically, the way Hitler treated Jews in Germany, the Zionists are treating the people of Palestine much worse than that.”

Khan is certain that Israeli Jews are racist evil beings who seek to dominate and exterminate all others: “The rulers of Israel strongly believe that they are superior to Arabs, Christians and Muslims, because they are intellectually, morally, physically much better than Palestinians (and others [sic] non-Jews). This superior status drives them to abuse, assault, humiliate, and kill anyone, let alone the people of Gaza.”

Finally, Khan finishes off his *AMUST* article with the old-fashioned antisemitic conspiracy theory about the Jews seeking to take over the whole region from the Nile to the Euphrates: “Gradual occupation of Palestine is the beginning of expanding Israel’s borders [sic] to the ‘Greater Israel’, ‘from the Brook of Egypt to the Euphrates’ as dreamed by the founding father of Zionism Theodore Herzl, as a Jewish State. So, make no mistakes, Gaza is just the beginning. Once the buffer state with strong resistance force is defeated, the IDF would move to other neighbouring Arab kingdoms to create the ‘Greater Israel’ soon.”

In the next *AIR* I will review more of the toxic narratives promoted in *AMUST*’s articles, and on its social media accounts, since October 7.

AIR

Dr. Ran Porat is a lecturer on Israel and Middle Eastern Affairs at Monash University and an affiliate research associate at the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation. He is also an AIJAC research associate and a research fellow at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism at Reichman University in Herzliya.



Misreading “the other”

Why Israel failed to understand Hamas

Michael Milshtein

As they were marching towards Jerusalem, the knights of the First Crusade lay siege to the city of Antioch in southern Anatolia from October 1097 to June 1098. They were approached there by envoys of the Fatimid dynasty ruling Egypt, who offered the Crusaders a plan to cooperate against the Seljuk state then in possession of Jerusalem, a plan to divide between them territory to be conquered from the Seljuks.

Based on past experience and historical memories, the Fatimids deemed the Crusaders to be mercenaries in the service of the Byzantines, European adventurers motivated primarily by material gain. Thus, the Muslim side fundamentally failed to understand “the Other”: the force they now met was driven by faith, and was determined at almost any cost to realise the messianic vision for which they undertook their prolonged and bloody march from Europe to the Levant.

A thousand years later, the roles are reversed. Now it is the West which is stricken by distortions in its perceptions of the Middle East, where key players are driven by ideological fervour, largely religious in nature. Westerners adhere to theories of *realpolitik* which centre on the belief that realities and the very essence of being can be shaped by material means. America’s roles in both Afghanistan

and Iraq were undertaken under optimistic assumptions and ended in painful retreats – reflecting the West’s failure to recast consciousness, to create new collective identities, to implant imported political and social patterns, and to bend ideologies through economic leverage. But the Americans are certainly not the only ones with failed perceptions of the Other.

Israel’s 36-year-long confrontation with Hamas constitutes a unique test case of the difficulty in reading another culture, generally, and modern Islamism, specifically. It is an experience that exemplifies a number of basic problems: the projection of one’s own logic on “the Other” – and particularly the difficulty for a society in which ideological fervour has declined to understand another in which it is still at full force.

MISTAKEN PERCEPTIONS FROM THE BEGINNING

The failure to decipher what drives Hamas goes back to well before Hamas was officially founded in December 1987, shortly after the eruption of the First Intifada. Contrary to the common myth, Israel did not set up Hamas as a counterweight to Fatah and the PLO, Israel’s main enemies at the time. For decades prior to that, the Muslim Brotherhood movement had been active in Gaza and the West Bank. Its core activity was a social and

spiritual appeal (*da’wah*). It became the “organisation womb” giving birth to Hamas. Israeli thinking at the time assumed that the Brotherhood was less dangerous than other Palestinian groups, since it was focused on moral, faith and social activism, and thus it would be safe to let it be. Only by the mid-1980s did the first alarm bells ring, as religious leaders and charity organisers showed signs of involvement in terror activity as well.

Once established, Hamas has been engaged in a constant dynamic of extending its realm and building up its political and public base. Its domestic goals are taking over the Palestinian system as a whole and posing an alternative – political, social and cultural – to the PLO and its secular nationalist creed. This was to be the way station to the destruction of Israel and the establishment of Shariah-based religious governance in all of historical Palestine. Adherence to this long-term goal enabled the movement to survive multiple low points in which its activities were curtailed, its cadres arrested *en masse*, its leaders struck down, and heavy losses incurred in confrontations with Israel.

Inside Hamas, there are no clear distinctions between social, military and political activity; ambiguities are deliberately created to blur those distinctions. The questions raised in

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Israel over three-and-a-half decades: Is Hamas a terror organisation, a political party or a social movement? Answer: all of the above. Is it more Palestinian or more Islamic? Answer: it is both. Is there a difference between its political and military wings? Answer: this is another myth that the movement seeks to perpetuate.

Hamas' win in the 2006 parliamentary elections, and its violent takeover in Gaza in 2007, were seen by many in Israel as stepping stones towards an "evolution" of the movement which would force it, in a deterministic manner, to follow the trajectory of the PLO – i.e. "soften up" in both ideological and practical terms, when faced with governing. Israelis falsely assumed that radical and revolutionary elements, in coming to power, would find themselves facing unfamiliar constraints forcing them to moderate their stances.

But, as modern history taught us, extremist ideological elements who take power – by force or through the ballot box – usually move in the opposite direction: they gain more resources which enable them to set in motion more violent action than ever, aimed at realising their vision. Nazi Germany, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) all followed this path. Being in government does require them to provide public services and the daily needs of people – but it also enables them to amass and develop weapons, use service provision as a means to extract loyalty, and shape the orientation of the societies they control and mobilise them for the struggles they conduct.

Thus, for the last 16 years Israelis came to describe an intense divide within Hamas between the polarised aspects of "resistance" (*muqawwamah*) on one hand and governance on the other, along with the claim that the movement assigns growing priority to the demands of the latter due to its new duties as a sovereign, and particularly the need to take care of the heav-



The October 7 attacks were Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar's life mission, not something undertaken for political or security reasons (Image: Shutterstock)

ily burdened and needy Gazan population. In fact, during this past decade and a half Hamas deliberately avoided any such choice and handled both poles with equal attention: managing the sewage in Gaza while also investing in a military build-up and preparation for a doomsday war with Israel.

Since the round of fighting between Israel and Hamas in May 2021, Israel conducted a strategic experiment in Gaza. At its core was an attempt to improve the conditions of life there, mainly through the promotion of civilian projects, allowing for the flow of money into Gaza and more Gazans to work in Israel. All this was driven by the basic assumption that these were means to prevent escalation and create for Hamas a disincentive for war. Public pressure would restrain the movement's hand in the case of deterioration with Israel, and the steady rise in the quality of life would over time lead to the transformation of Gaza's rulers, bending their ideological will and weakening their position in the Palestinian balance of power.

In hindsight, it was plain to see warning signs that should have alerted Israel to its fundamentally false conceptual framework. Hamas actively promoted terror and incitement in the West Bank and east Jerusalem,

allowed Palestinian Islamic Jihad to conduct rounds of violence against Israel from the Gaza Strip, and utilised the work of day labourers in Israel and the passage of goods to pursue its military goals, such as intelligence collection and arms smuggling. Yet when sharp contradictions emerged between Israeli groupthink and the actual behaviour of Hamas, explanations were forthcoming. Prominent among these was the claim that Yahya Sinwar, the Hamas leader in Gaza, had become "messianic" or pathological and had lost his sense of reality.

THE OCTOBER 7 ASSAULT

The assault on October 7 proved to be the most extreme and tragic expression of Israel's difficulty in deciphering Hamas. While everyone agreed that Hamas was an enemy preparing itself for a future war with Israel, it was also agreed that Hamas had no current intention of launching a war. It was defined as deterred and focused upon improving governance and quality of life in Gaza. Insofar as there was any discussion of its offensive options, what was envisioned was usually a limited military action. A combined assault by 3,000 men on all neighbouring communities and the temporary conquest of some of them were way beyond any imagined IDF

military intelligence scenario.

The groupthink that held until that fateful morning was the product of dialogue among policymakers and politicians in both the government and opposition, and the security establishment. Hamas contributed its own part by a prolonged and deliberate strategic deception – aimed at confirming that it was deterred and turned inwards. And thus, while Israeli decision-makers focused during these last two and a half years on promoting civilian advancement for Gaza, Hamas leaders were busy at the very same time planning the most painful attack ever launched by the Palestinians against Israel.

Remnants of the old groupthink still surface in the ongoing public discussion in Israel of Hamas’ “motivations” and “goals” on October 7. Analysts and pundits still fail to understand that for Hamas, the duty of Jihad is paramount. Hamas’ purpose is to undermine the foundations of Israeli existence, paving the way for the latter’s utter elimination. This way of thinking has no use for “scenarios” or an “exit strategy.” Sinwar has been working on this plan for a decade. He knew full well the heavy price that it would exact from the Palestinians. This attack was his life’s mission, not a step taken for security or political reasons such as the wish to derail Israeli-Saudi normalisation or to improve living conditions in Gaza.

STOP THE GROUPTHINK

Sinwar may indeed have a messianic streak and live in the timeframe of *al-Akhirah*, “the end of days” – based on the sober assessment that at any moment he and those close to him may be killed. And yet, the accusation of being cut off from reality applies even more to those who studied him, and yet could not figure out his intentions. Instead of cracking open the enemy’s logic, and carefully reading its value system which reflects a different model of rationality, many of the analysts and pundits were projecting their

own logic upon Sinwar, effectively playing chess with themselves.

This failure also reflects some structural problems of Israeli society, where fewer and fewer people – even among those in government, academe, media, and even security and intelligence – have command of the region’s languages, fully understand its culture or know its history. Among other reasons, this is the result of a steady decline in the study of the humanities and social sciences and of the reverence, within the defence establishment and elsewhere, of the information and cyber revolution, the ease of Google translate, AI and Big Data. These are seen as tools that can absolve an analyst from the need to know Arabic – and yet seemingly enable her or him to accurately assess what will transpire in a region driven by very different cultural imperatives.

The security and intelligence communities have indeed long been captured by the allure of technological capabilities which seemingly assure Israel of superiority over its enemies. It is already becoming clear that many of the early warning signs of what was about to happen on October 7 came from relatively simple collection devices – tactical signals intelligence, direct observation, even open-source material. Over all of this loomed a severe gap in *humint* – human intelligence, sources within Hamas – who

could have offered crucial details as well as warned against enemy deceptions. Israelis at all levels today – particularly in the intelligence community – know much more now than they did in the past, but understand much less.

Once the war is over it will not be enough to investigate the policymakers, reorganise the intelligence bodies and enhance their internal controls, and expand the IDF and improve its fighting capabilities. There must also be a national soul-searching, posing as a challenge to ourselves the question of whether as a society we truly understand our regional environment, both in terms of fighting our enemies and of building up relations with our partners. In this respect, we must discard the infatuation with technology, and return to traditional skills such as command of the language, knowledge of history and appreciation for the culture of “the Other,” and, to the degree possible, engagement with our neighbours. AIR

Michael Milshtein is the head of the Forum for Palestinian Studies at the Dayan Centre of Tel Aviv University and a senior researcher at the Institute for Policy and Strategy at Reichman University. He wrote (in Hebrew) The Green Revolution: The Social Profile of Hamas (2007). © Jerusalem Strategic Tribune (JST-tribune.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.



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NOTED AND QUOTED

THE MONTH IN MEDIA

HOSPITAL CORNERS

In mid-October, ABC Middle East correspondent John Lyons was reluctant to comment on the overwhelming evidence that a misfired PIJ rocket, not an Israeli missile, caused a blast in the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital carpark in Gaza.

Yet Lyons was more than happy to talk about what the IDF found when it took control of Al-Shifa Hospital, which Israeli and US intelligence believe sat atop a major Hamas command and control centre.

On *ABC TV* “News” (Nov. 16) Lyons said, “For weeks, they’ve been telling us, the United States and Israel, that [Hamas has] been using hospitals generally and specifically the largest. They haven’t found it.”

IDF footage exhibiting weapons collected – three AK 47s, a backpack with grenades – was “pretty thin,” he said. [*Ed: A large tunnel network connected to the hospital was found later.*]

Lyons said he’d seen a BBC interview with a doctor who complained that for 40 days Israel has been “trying to kill us” but now “they want to give us dressings and saline.”

As Lyons knows, the IDF was trying to kill or capture Hamas fighters, not medical personnel.

On *ABC Radio* “PM” (Nov. 16), host David Lipson asked if the weapons located “justif[ied] this raid?” Lyons said the “smoking gun that the Israeli army had sort of built up expectations for has not been found” but did concede Israel “gave a lot of notice” and “Hamas... had a lot of time to clear out and cover its tracks.”

CEASEFIRE? CEASE HAMAS FIRST

In the *Courier Mail* (Nov. 29), AIJAC’s Justin Amler called a “long term

or permanent ceasefire” a “terrible idea” if implemented before Hamas’ offensive capabilities were degraded.

A premature ceasefire would “prolong” conflict and “cost... more lives, because it would effectively mean Hamas survives,” he said.

The next day, in the *Daily Telegraph*, AIJAC’s Colin Rubenstein insisted that a permanent ceasefire was impossible “as long as Hamas refuses to surrender and release all remaining hostages, and wields the power and intent to murder, massacre, fire rockets into Israel and take more Israelis hostage as it did on October 7.”

Earlier, on Nov. 22, Israeli Government spokesperson Avi Hyman explained on *Sky News* why the Palestinian Authority (PA) “can’t be in charge” of Gaza after the war ends.

He noted that the PA had issued “an official statement, claiming that [the] 360 Israelis... gunned down at that peace festival, that rave, didn’t happen, denying that it happened.”

NOT A FIT STATE

In the *Canberra Times* (Dec. 9), AIJAC’s Paul Rubenstein rejected the demands of pro-Palestinian activists calling for a one-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Dissolving Israel would end “the Jewish right to self-determination,” he said, which “raises so many alarm bells” for Jews.

The consequence would be a loss “of power over their own safety, security and destiny,” he said, and noted the fate of Yazidis, Kurds and Christians who have suffered persecution in the region because of their minority status.

Earlier, on *Sky News* (Nov. 26), AIJAC’s Joel Burnie discussed how “Palestinian television... is just littered with grotesque antisemitic references,

whether that be the televised sermons of imams who referred to Jews as apes and pigs or these TV shows for young children.”

CLUELESS

On *ABC RN* “Drive” (Dec. 4), Israeli investigative journalist Ronen Bergman explained the significance of a 30-page document that Israeli intelligence had uncovered that outlined Hamas’ goal of carrying out a massacre in Israel, which it accomplished on October 7.

Bergman said Israeli intelligence viewed the document as “not reflective of what Hamas can do. But... a wish plan [of] what Hamas wants to do.”

Bergman rejected the conspiracy theory that Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu ignored the evidence in order to create an excuse to attack Gaza.

PERVERSE PRIDE

ABC Middle East correspondent Adam Harvey’s report on *ABC Radio* “AM” (Nov. 30) showcased the pride Palestinians in the West Bank feel when their sons die fighting against Israel.

Host Sabra Lane’s introduction said, “in and around the city of Tulkerem, Israeli forces have killed more than 50 Palestinians since the Hamas October 7 attacks.”

Harvey’s report noted that “many” of the more than 50 killed “were fighters with Fatah, the armed wing of the Palestinian Authority.”

An online article Harvey co-authored with fellow ABC reporter Riley Stuart noted that in a recent poll of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, 59.3% of respondents supported Hamas’ October 7 attack

“strongly” and a further 15.7% “supported it somewhat”.

Both reports quoted Samah Shehadeh expressing pride that her 24-year-old son had been killed during an IDF operation in November: “Yes, of course. Of course. Why shouldn’t we be proud?”

AN UNHEALTHY OBSESSION

In a 2,500-word article on the ABC website (Nov. 27), ABC Global Affairs Editor John Lyons revealed an obsession with the idea that Israeli

PM Netanyahu shoulders most of the blame for the failure to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict following Oslo.

Lyons said Netanyahu achieved this by building new settlements and sabotaging the peace process.

According to Lyons, during Netanyahu’s first stint as PM, his “announce[ment of] a new settlement – Har Homa” in Jerusalem “began one of the biggest bursts of new settlements since the creation of Israel.”

This is wrong. Netanyahu’s immediate predecessor, Shimon Peres, approved Har Homa’s construction, but legal action delayed actual build-

ing until after Netanyahu became PM.

Moreover, Netanyahu only approved the establishment of two other settlements during his tenure in the 1990s. The vast majority of construction during this period occurred within settlement blocs that Israel expected to retain control of if a peace deal was signed.

Lyons’ claim that, “under Netanyahu, a system of roads was established exclusively for settlers and non-Palestinians” is also wrong. First, these roads are accessible for all Israelis, including Arabs, not just settlers. Moreover, this process started in the



IN PARLIAMENT

Prime Minister **Anthony Albanese** (ALP, Grayndler) – Dec. 7 Chanukah message: “I know Jewish Australians are carrying a deep pain in your hearts... As you light the Menorah... be proud of your Jewish faith and the strength of the community in Australia.”

Opposition Leader **Peter Dutton** (Lib., Dickson) – Dec. 7 Chanukah message: “May Australians of Jewish faith find comfort in the fact that you are not alone in the fight against evil. You have many friends and allies.”

Foreign Minister **Senator Penny Wong** (ALP, SA) – Dec. 7 – “We unequivocally condemn Hamas’s terror attacks... the heinous acts of sexual violence... We call for Hamas to immediately and unconditionally release all remaining hostages. We... affirmed Israel’s right to defend itself as guaranteed by the UN charter... Civilians and civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, must be protected... The world has witnessed a harrowing number of civilian deaths, including of children. This must not continue.”

Senator **Wong** – Dec. 7 – “We know that Hamas has no place in the future of Gaza.”

Shadow Assistant Foreign Affairs Minister Senator **Claire Chandler** (Lib., Tas.) – Dec. 5 – “[Israel] raised the travel warning for Jewish citizens travelling to... Australia, to... ‘Potential threat’... Will the Prime Minister... commit to practical measures to ensure the safety of Jewish Australians?”

Senator **Dean Smith** (Lib., WA) – Dec. 4 – “I... stress my support for the innocent Israelis illegally being held hostage by Hamas, my sympathy for those... brutally killed and my solidarity for the families and friends who remain.”

Greens Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Senator **Jordon Steele-John** (WA) – Dec. 4 – “Dropping leaflets and giving evacuation warnings are offensive distractions from the reality that the policies of... Israel have no regard to the right of Palestinians

to live... The Greens call on the Senate... to recognise the very real risk of genocide and of ethnic cleansing in Palestine.”

Senator **Janet Rice** (Greens, Vic.) – Dec. 4 – “our government is effectively saying that international human rights law doesn’t apply to the Israeli government?... We are clearly joined at the hip with US imperialism, the Israeli occupation, and Israel’s persecution and illegal killing of Palestinians.”

Senator **Nick McKim** (Greens, Tas.) – Dec. 4: – “The acceptance of Zionist sponsored junkets to Israel by journalists and politicians... skews the narrative and compromises integrity. The Zionist lobby’s playbook is to use the media to attack and undermine pro-Palestine figures... to cloud the real issue... the destruction of Gaza and the slaughter of the people... The tactics of Zionist lobbies in stifling legitimate debate are egregious and deeply undemocratic.”

Anthony Albanese – Nov. 30 – “Why people would... protest where the families of [Israelis killed or kidnapped on October 7] were staying is beyond my comprehension and beyond contempt. I’m appalled.”

Peter Dutton – Nov. 30 – “[That protest] is an act of depravity, and... rightly condemned.”

Senator **Rice** – Nov. 29 – “The humanitarian catastrophe... in Gaza... is putting the Palestinian people at grave risk of genocide, as described by the UN special raconteurs [sic].”

Senator **Jacqui Lambie** (JLN, Tas.) – Nov. 29 – “People marching and chanting for the eradication of Jews once again is absolutely terrifying.”

Senator **Fatima Payman** (ALP, WA) – Nov. 29 – “I call on Israel... to end the indiscriminate killing of women in Gaza.”

Shadow Education Minister Senator **Sarah Henderson** (Lib., Vic.) – Nov. 27 – “School students may not even be aware that chants like ‘from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free’ call for the destruction of Israel. Students... should not be used as political pawns by activists.”

Senator **Lidia Thorpe** (Ind., Vic.) – Nov. 27 – “There is nothing more moral than resistance to evil and genocide. We have resisted for 75 years and we are not stopping now. Free Palestine.”

Second Intifada under Ariel Sharon's leadership and was continued by his successor Ehud Olmert to hinder Palestinian shooting attacks directed at vehicles with Israeli plates.

Referring to his long stint as Middle East correspondent for the *Australian*, Lyons wrote, "in my six years living in Israel I saw Netanyahu take many positions to avoid having to agree to a Palestinian state. In his second term, starting in 2009, he again boosted the settlement expansion. He always had a public reason why Israel could not make peace... Netanyahu sabotaged any prospect for peace" and "undermined the moderate faction of the Palestinians" led by President Mahmoud Abbas.

This ignores the indisputable fact that between 2000 and 2008 – when Netanyahu was not PM – Palestinian leaders, including Abbas, turned down three generous offers to create a Palestinian state made by Israeli leaders.

It also erases Netanyahu's own substantial peacemaking efforts, including withdrawing from large parts of Hebron in 1997, and signing the 1998 Wye River memorandum that committed Israel to territorial withdrawals from the West Bank.

In 2009, Netanyahu delivered his historic Bar-Ilan University speech in which he committed to the creation of a Palestinian state. Netanyahu backed this up by agreeing to an unprecedented ten-month settlement construction freeze intended to coax Palestinian President Abbas to restart peace talks he abandoned in late 2008.

In 2013, Netanyahu agreed to free 104 Palestinian terrorists from Israeli jails to incentivise Abbas to attend peace talks. US Middle East envoy Martin Indyk has said Netanyahu was "sweating bullets" to reach a deal in 2014, but Abbas had "checked out" at that point.

H2 WOE

ABC reporter Riley Stuart's online article (Oct. 25) about his visit to the

West Bank city of Hebron regurgitated Palestinian propaganda.

Stuart noted that "Hebron, the West Bank's largest city... is home to more than 200,000 Palestinians and about 850 Jewish settlers. For people wanting to understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Hebron is a good place to start."

The city, he said, is "split into two zones — one controlled by the Palestinian Authority (called H1), and another that has the Jewish settlers living in it, under the control of the Israeli Defence Force (IDF)," H2, where "Palestinians aren't allowed to drive, or even walk, down some streets. Since the war broke out, Israel has been restricting the movement of Palestinians all over the West Bank."

On Dec. 12, ABC Global Affairs editor John Lyons also reported from H2, saying, "nothing more starkly illustrates Israel's military occupation than this part of the world. This is a major street in one of the largest Palestinian cities in the West Bank. And yet there are Israeli Army guard towers, there are settlers... it's these soldiers in these guard towers who have the ultimate authority over any Palestinian here."

What Stuart and Lyons failed to say is that H2 is tiny compared to H1 and while Palestinians do face some movement restrictions within H2, it is illegal for Israelis to enter H1 at all.

PRISONERS' DILEMMA

Some media reports of the Hamas-Israel deal that secured the release of 105 hostages (81 of them Israelis) held in Gaza in exchange for 240 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails drew a false equivalence between the two groups.

ABC Radio "PM" (Nov. 27) reporter Ryma Tchier – who signed the 2021 #dobetteronpalestine open letter calling for the media to preference the Palestinian narrative – described a group of prisoners released as "detainees" who were "teenagers,

mainly accused of public disorder and property damage."

Tchier conceded that some harmed "Israeli soldiers by throwing stones or Molotov cocktails. Among them, Majd Freihat, who spent a year and a half behind bars."

In fact, according to both the Israeli Justice Ministry and Palestinian news sources, Freihat was arrested on serious weapons charges and for connections with Palestinian Islamic Jihad. He had also only been incarcerated for six months, not 18.

More importantly, Tchier's report failed to convey to the listeners the fact that victims of stone-throwing and firebomb attacks are often killed or seriously injured, while misleadingly portraying these attacks as directed towards soldiers alone. In fact, many were convicted of attacks against civilians.

On ABC Radio "AM" (Nov. 23), reporter Nicole Johnston focused on Shorouq Dweiyat who was released after serving eight years of her 16-year prison sentence for an "attempted stabbing". In fact, Dweiyat was convicted of attempted murder after she stabbed and injured one person and attempted to stab another before being subdued.

After AIJAC pointed out the report's inaccuracy to the ABC, an editor's note was placed on the "AM" website clarifying the nature of Dweiyat's crimes.

DEADLY CHILD'S PLAY

SBS's Ewa Staszewska's online report (Nov. 24) noted that one Palestinian prisoner released – Nafoz Hamad – was 14 when he stabbed and critically injured a young Jewish mother who was his neighbour.

But Staszewska left out the key fact Hamad was released after serving less than two years of a 12-year sentence, and once free would return to his family home, near where his victim still lives.

CATASTROPHE AVERTED?

ABC journalist Nabil al-Nashar's report for *ABC News Radio* and *ABC TV News* (Nov. 25) concerning the arrival into Sydney airport of a group of Palestinians from Gaza on temporary visas included a false explanation of what happened in 1948.

Al-Nashar said, "some of those who have gotten Australian visas to come here don't want to leave Gaza because they say they are afraid of a second Nakba. Nakba is the Arabic word meaning 'catastrophe' and it refers to 1948 when over 700,000 Palestinians were forcibly expelled from their homeland."

An article under al-Nashar's byline on the ABC website more accurately said, "The Nakba... commemorates the loss of land and homes in 1948 in the war that accompanied Israel's declaration of independence, when more than 760,000 Palestinians fled or were driven out of their homes."

AIJAC contacted the ABC to query the discrepancy and request an editor's note be placed on the "News Radio" webpage pointing out the error. The ABC said it had "issued guidance on the Nakba... since that story."

On Nov. 22, ABC Radio "PM" reporter Rachel Hayter claimed that the strike on al-Awda Hospital that killed a number of doctors was a "hit by Israel".

In fact, the identity of the party responsible for the hit had not been determined, as Médecins Sans Frontières' Simon Eccleshall told *ABC TV* earlier that day. An editor's note was put on the item's webpage pointing this out after AIJAC contacted the broadcaster.

INDIGENOUS WISDOM

In the *Australian* (Nov. 15), veteran indigenous leader and academic Marcia Langton called out members of the indigenous community movement "Blak sovereignty" for supporting Hamas and espousing extreme anti-Israel views.

Langton wrote, "they claim that Indigenous Australians feel solidarity with Palestinians" and "they refuse to condemn Hamas. I am aghast and embarrassed. They do not speak for me. I fear... that our multicultural society is being torn apart by people deluded about terrorism who have used their protests as a cover for anti-Semitism."

"Hamas are terrorists; Palestinian Islamic Jihad are terrorists," she said, explaining that "the majority Aboriginal view is a repulsion of terrorism."

On Nov. 30, writing in the *News Corp* papers, Indigenous Australian Olympic gold medallist Nova Peris condemned "the loss of life in Israel and Gaza," in particular the rape and torture of women on October 7. Peris also condemned Hamas' ideology and called for the implementation of the two-state solution recognising both Jews and Palestinians as indigenous to the region.

WINGING IT

In the *Canberra Times* (Dec. 8), analyst Clive Williams attacked Australia's decision last year to proscribe the entirety of Hamas as a terrorist organisation.

Williams argued that "most such organisations have political and military wings, and it's the military wing that often engages independently in acts of terrorism. Should the entire organisation be branded a terrorist group – or should there be some differentiation between the non-violent and violent parts?"

Proscribing both wings impedes "political progress on the Israel/Palestine issue," he insisted.

But making a distinction between "wings" in this case is ludicrous, not least because Hamas leaders have themselves repeatedly said that no such "wings" exist.

OUTTHERE

On Oct. 13, freelance writer David Leser's article in the *Nine news-*

papers quoted the former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's statement in 1977 that "The Palestinian problem is the core and essence of the conflict... so long as it continues to be unresolved, the conflict will continue to aggravate."

Leser claimed "that is a very dangerous passage to quote at this terrible moment. Dangerous because it could be read by some as an apology for the heinous acts we have witnessed in Israel in recent days. It is not."

This is nonsense. A large majority of Israelis would support a Palestinian state if it meant the conflict was really over.

On Dec. 6, *Nine Newspapers* columnist Jenna Price argued that Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu's war against Hamas "strengthen[s] Hamas' power and influence" and said that by "murdering Palestinians... he is also harming the diaspora. He is risking the lives of Jews."

Price essentially blamed Israel, not antisemites, for antisemitism.

HONEST DISCUSSION

On the ABC "Religion & Ethics" website (Dec. 4), AIJAC research associate and Monash University academic Dr Ran Porat wrote movingly of returning to campus to teach a course on the Middle East for the first time after the October 7 massacre.

Dr Porat said he "felt fear" knowing "some students had families in both Israel and Gaza" and having observed "wave after wave of fierce anti-Israel – and often openly antisemitic – demonstrations flood the streets of cities in Europe, Australia, and the Arab world, to say nothing of American university campuses."

He said he decided the best approach was to share his feelings with the class, allowing the students to reciprocate. He said the discussions and questions were challenging, honest, but respectful. "If we are to emerge from this night together, I'm convinced we need more" similar discussion, he concluded.

Allon Lee

MEAA TOO

In May 2021, as a limited conflict played out between Hamas and Israel, pro-Palestinian activists in Australia convinced hundreds of media professionals to sign an extraordinary letter called “dobetteronpalestine”.

The letter called on Australia’s media to avoid “both siderism that equates the victims of a military occupation with its instigators,” and instead “make space for Palestinian perspectives, prioritising the voices of those most affected by the violence.” The terms of the letter were largely seen as antithetical to the fundamental principles of journalism.

Fast forward to the current Hamas-Israel war and the the National Media Section of the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA) endorsed a similarly worded letter, sparking major public debate.

On Nov. 24, News Corp reported that editors of the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* had warned that staff who signed the letter would be “unable to participate in any reporting or production related to the war.” Indeed, CBD columnist and signatory Noel Towell’s name subsequently disappeared from that column when items involving Jews or Israel appeared in it.

The *Australian Financial Review* reported (Nov. 26) that ABC News Director Justin Stevens emailed staff advising, “You should not sign any petition that may bring into question your impartiality or that of the ABC’s coverage.”

Prominent journalists expressed serious concerns about the MEAA letter.

Writing in the *Australian* (Nov. 27), Julie Szego, who was sacked as an *Age* columnist in June for “speaking out about activist journalists at the paper,” scoffed at a demand in the letter that “the government of Israel and the terror group Hamas” be regarded with the same “professional scepticism”.

“We can only presume,” she said, that the letter’s signatories believe Hamas “fiercely respects the Fourth Estate.”

In the same edition, former ABC journalist and board member Ramona Koval disclosed details of an extraordinary meeting of ABC executives with 200 staff journalists, many of whom wanted to “freely use the terms ‘genocide’, ‘occupation’ and ‘ethnic cleansing’ in their own reporting” on Israel.

Koval said they “were rightly told no. But when some, with family or political allegiances, claimed they were up-

set by the reporting of the war, another executive agreed to go away and think about what might be done. What are they running, a kindergarten? They should have said feelings have nothing to do with reporting.”

Australian columnist Janet Albrechtsen (Nov. 29) pointed out the glaring contradiction of journalists saying their aim is “to deliver truth and full context” while simultaneously “pick[ing] a side”.

In the *Australian Financial Review* (Nov. 17), former *Age* editor Michael Gawenda noted that the signatories to a similarly worded letter on the *Overland* journal website, did “not refer to themselves as journalists but media workers... Perhaps they believe the designation journalist is no longer meaningful. After all, being a journalist implies an adherence to certain values and ethical principles. Like fairness, like factual accuracy.”

In a later piece (*Australian*, Dec. 2), Gawenda said, “Many journalists no longer want to be journalists... they want to be activists, fighters for a good cause,” in this instance, “the cause of the oppressed Palestinian people, occupied for 75 years by a racist white supremacist state that is perpetrating a genocide in Gaza.”

The *West Australian* business reporter Neale Prior (Dec. 1), a member of the MEAA’s media national council, slammed his own union for “publicly endorsing a letter that... prescribes how journalists should cover unfolding events in the Palestinian territories and Israel, complete with justifications for the actions of Hamas as it spearheads a 75-year campaign to wipe out Israel. Under the guise of promoting ‘ethical reporting on Israel and Palestine’ journalists are urged to give ‘historical context’ to Hamas’ murder of 1200 people and kidnap of about 250 others.”

Australian columnist Gerard Henderson (Dec. 9) criticised *ABC TV* “7.30” chief political correspondent Laura Tingle’s soft interview with anti-Israel publisher Louise Adler to discuss a controversy over three Sydney Theatre Company actors who donned keffiyehs as a protest at the end of their opening night performance.

Henderson mocked Adler for claiming critics of Israel “are being silenced” even while appearing “on one of the taxpayer-funded public broadcaster’s leading current affairs programs.”

He also noted Tingle had an op-ed supporting the STC actors in the *Financial Review* two days before interviewing Adler, meaning “missing from 7.30... was any debate.” 

“Neale Prior (Dec. 1), a member of the MEAA’s media national council, slammed his own union for ‘publicly endorsing a letter that... prescribes how journalists should cover unfolding events in the Palestinian territories’”

THE LAST WORD

Dave Rich

NOT NORMAL

It is often said that antisemitism is a light sleeper lying just beneath the surface of society, ready to raise its head whenever the opportunity arises – and the last two months have proven this.

There have been arson attacks on synagogues in Germany, Tunisia and Armenia. In Canada, there have been three different fire-bombings of Jewish buildings and shots fired at two Jewish *yeshivot* (religious schools). Terrorist plots targeting Jews and Israelis have been foiled by police in Germany, Cyprus and Brazil. Angry protestors have burnt Israeli flags in Spain and Sweden, not outside the Israeli embassies in those countries, but outside synagogues (in Malmo they chanted “Free Palestine, Bomb Israel”).

In Vienna, part of a Jewish cemetery was set alight and swastikas daubed on the walls. In Paris and Berlin, multiple Jewish homes were marked with antisemitic graffiti. In Turin, a man with a knife shouting “Allahu Akbar” was stopped by police outside a synagogue. In the United States, a man fired shots outside a synagogue and when he was arrested, he declared “Free Palestine” to the police. Elsewhere in the US, a woman drove her car into a school building, wrongly believing it to be a Jewish school.

In Russia, a mob stormed an airport looking for Jewish passengers to attack. Most tragically of all, Paul Kessler, a 69-year-old Jewish man, died after being struck on the head by somebody at a pro-Palestinian demonstration in Los Angeles.

In Britain, there has been graffiti on synagogues, Jewish schools, a Jewish cemetery and a Holocaust research library, alongside an unprecedented wave of verbal abuse and threats directed at Jewish people in the street.

Thankfully the level of violence described in the paragraphs above has not (yet) hit the UK, but that doesn't

mean it won't. What has happened is bad enough: a record increase in anti-Jewish harassment. Antisemitic incidents recorded

by the Community Security Trust since October 7 have exceeded the total for all of 2022.

The police recorded 533 antisemitic hate crimes in London alone in October 2023, compared to just 39 in October 2022. It is as if for some people there is a belief, a sense of excitement even, that the conflict over there also belongs here.

“The war is starting – free Palestine,” is what one anti-semitite shouted at a Jewish man walking in north London a day or two after the Hamas terror attack.

It's important to acknowledge just how abnormal this is. No other foreign conflict triggers waves of hate crime against minority communities in the way that the Israel-Palestine conflict does (there has been an increase in anti-Muslim hate crime since October 7 as well, although not to the same degree). The scale and intensity of the reaction to this conflict from people who have no personal connection to either Israel or Palestine suggests that something different is going on.

It would be staggering if a global movement to condemn the world's only Jewish state as a unique transgressor of all moral and human values didn't attract people who dislike Jews. We've had Zionists supposedly controlling the government and the media, the blood libel allegation that Jews consume the blood of children, Israeli leaders as devils, an

Israeli snake wrapped around the globe, swastikas entwined with Stars of David, and, of course, the ubiquitous comparison of Israel with Nazi Germany.

We've even had a Palestinian baby Jesus on a cross, juxtaposed with a placard declaring Zionism – the national movement of the Jewish people – to be “White Settler Colonialism”. You couldn't get a more apposite image of the old and new forms of antisemitism entwined. AIR

Dr. Dave Rich is Head of Policy at Britain's Community Security Trust (CST). His latest book is Everyday Hate: How Antisemitism Is Built Into Our World – And How You Can Change It. Reprinted by permission of the author.



Paul Kessler: Fatally struck down by a pro-Palestinian protester in Los Angeles (YouTube screenshot)



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