



IRAN OPENS FIRE ON ISRAEL

How will Jerusalem, and the world, respond to an unprecedented aerial barrage?

DEMENTED OR JUST DIABOLICAL?

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This *AIR* edition looks at the implications and aftermath of Iran's unprecedented direct missile and drone attack on Israel on April 14.

Israeli analyst Ilan Evyatar looks at the Israeli options for responding, former US Central Command head Gen. Kenneth McKenzie comments on the opportunities created by Iran's embarrassment over the failure of its attack and noted US foreign policy expert Walter Russell Mead urges Israel not to take US advice not to respond. Plus, top strategic thinker Eliot Cohen puts Iran's rogue behaviour into the context of the wider geopolitical struggle against a "Russia-China-Iran-North Korea coalition" seeking to undermine global security.

Also featured this month are veteran reporter Judith Miller's examination of what makes Hamas' Gaza leader Yahya Sinwar tick, and respected Palestinian affairs reporter Khaled Abu Toameh's exploration of why Sinwar appears to be the key barrier to a US-brokered hostages-for-ceasefire deal.

Finally, don't miss international law expert Geoffrey Corn's legal myth busting regarding the tragic accidental killing of seven international aid workers by the IDF on April 1, former US diplomat James Jeffrey on US-Israeli disagreements over the southern Gaza city of Rafah, and Seth Mandel on how history and Jewish morality are shaping Israel's debates about redeeming the hostages still held by Hamas.

We invite your feedback on any aspect of this edition at editorial@aijac.org.au.

Tzvi Fleischer

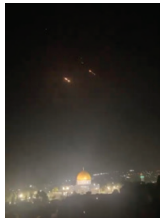
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Israeli military spokesperson Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari displays to the media one of the Iranian ballistic missiles Israel intercepted, in Julis army base, southern Israel, April 16, 2024
 (Image: AAP/Tsafrir Abayov)

COVER PHOTO: AAP/TSAFRIR ABAYOV

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EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN
COLIN RUBENSTEIN**A NEW COALITION
AGAINST IRAN**

The massive, unprecedented Iranian attack launched against Israel in the early morning hours of April 14 was truly a watershed event, combining the first-ever direct fire on Israel from Iran itself with attacks from virtually every single one of the numerous proxy armies Iran sponsors across the Middle East.

In the words of US-based analyst Jonathan Schanzer, “For years, the Israelis have been talking about [the] so-called octopus strategy, where they have said that it’s not sufficient to fight with the tentacles of the octopus but that they need to strike at the head of the octopus. Well, the octopus head has just emerged.”

What Schanzer means is that Iran has been orchestrating a vast plan to surround Israel militarily on all sides and attack it constantly – which the regime openly says is intended to lead to the destruction of the Jewish state by 2040. Teheran’s ability to hide behind the non-Persian proxies it finances, trains, arms and largely controls, and pay no price for this blatant aggression, should now be coming to an end.

Iran’s pretext for the attack, we’re told, was to retaliate for the April 1 killing of seven Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) officers in Damascus, in a building adjacent to the Iranian Embassy, reportedly by Israel. But who were these targets?

Chief among them was IRGC General Mohammad Reza Zahedi, the IRGC’s highest-ranking commander in the region, in charge of coordinating Iran’s network of proxy militias in Syria and Lebanon.

As the only non-Lebanese member of Hezbollah’s decision-making Shura Council, Zahedi held tremendous influence over the Shi’ite terrorist group’s attacks on Israel’s northern border communities, which have been ongoing daily since Oct. 8 and have forced the continued evacuation of more than 60,000 Israelis from their homes.

Also among those killed were Zahedi’s deputy and his chief of staff. These men were at the very centre of Iran’s ongoing, unprovoked war of aggression against Israel.

The IDF strike on these IRGC commanders wasn’t only legitimate, it was effective – seriously disrupting the command-and-control system that Iran uses to coordinate with not only Hezbollah, but with Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Iraqi militias and the Houthis, as well.

Given Iran’s openly-declared multi-front war of aggression, for Israel to give IRGC officers a pass and focus only on the proxies they command and use as cannon-fodder would be both foolish and immoral.

Iran’s retaliation, however, was unquestionably reckless. Contrary to some misguided reports, it wasn’t symbolic or intended to fail, but was most likely the largest long-range missile attack the region has ever seen, deploying slower drones as a diversion for the 150 cruise and ballistic missiles carrying warheads of up to one tonne.

Israel’s extensive missile defences and a US-led coalition including the UK, France, Jordan and Saudi Arabia successfully tracked and shot down almost all of the incoming projectiles, with only one Israeli – a young Bedouin girl – injured, and minor damage to an airbase. In US President Biden’s words, this was indeed a “win” for Western allies in their first head-to-head confrontation with Iran.

Moreover, the fact that Jordan and, more discreetly, Saudi Arabia didn’t hesitate to assist in Israel’s defence six months into Israel’s gruelling war with Hamas and Hezbollah dramatically demonstrated that, at the moment of truth, the national interests of Sunni Arab states – in this case, confronting the common threat from Iran – took precedence over support for the Palestinian agenda.

The defence against Iran's attack was so good, in fact, that the Israeli Government is now being pressured not to respond at all. These calls are misplaced, because defence – even the best defence – doesn't deter the enemy. Failing to respond is very likely to lead to future attacks.

Israel's right to defend itself includes the right to respond at a time and in a manner of its choosing. While that response had not happened as of press time, it must be supported in principle. Still, if international actors want to minimise the risk of further military escalation as a result of Israel's response, they need to find other ways to ensure Iran internalises that its acts of blatant aggression lead to serious costs.

Thus, just as a coalition took part in the defence, the response to Iran's unprecedented barrage ought not to come from Israel alone. For its part, the US has already taken the initiative and announced it will be slapping new sanctions on Iran, targeting its missile and drone program and entities that support the IRGC and Iran's Defence Ministry. Washington has also said it is expecting US allies to add their own sanctions – and some European states are reportedly preparing to do so.

The Albanese Government, which warned Iran not to attack Israel and appropriately condemned the attack afterwards but did not participate in the defence operation, has an opportunity here to go beyond mere rhetoric and respond to Washington's call. Given it was mainly the IRGC

behind these attacks, it seems more than timely to now move to implement the Senate Committee recommendation last year to list the IRGC as a terrorist organisation.

New sanctions should just be a curtain-raiser to a much broader policy shift for the US, EU and its allies regarding Iran's nuclear program, which today stands on the cusp of weaponisation.

“Before its April 14 attack, the West could perhaps turn a blind eye to the malevolent actions of Iran's proxies and hope that Iran's aggression could be managed quietly. Following the unprecedented attack that night, such beliefs are exposed as delusional”

As former International Atomic Energy Agency deputy director Olli Heinonen wrote in the wake of the April 14 attack, “Imagine the impunity with which Iran might act if it felt emboldened by possession of a nuclear umbrella.”

Heinonen says it's still not too late to pressure Iran into a workable nuclear deal that, under tight supervision, could stop a nuclear breakout. However, given how close Iran stands to building a bomb, that pressure “must be backed not only by sanctions but also by the willingness to take military action.”

Before its April 14 attack, the West could perhaps turn a blind eye to the malevolent actions of Iran's proxies and hope that Iran's aggression could be managed quietly. Following the unprecedented attack that night, such beliefs are exposed as delusional. What must therefore change dramatically, before it's too late, is an effective response to Iran's destructive and dangerous path from all nations committed to a stable international order, meaning not only the US and Europe, but also Australia.

AIR

“ WORD FOR WORD

“This is a declaration of war. Now, because we are restrained and because we know the repercussions, and because we have deliberations with our partners, we are considering all options and I'm quite confident that we will take the necessary steps to protect and defend our people... It's about time that the world faces this empire of evil in Teheran, and makes it clear to the Iranian regime that this cannot pass by, that this is unacceptable.”

Israeli President Isaac Herzog on the massive Iranian missile and drone attack on Israel (Times of Israel, April 14).

“We, the Leaders of the G7, unequivocally condemn in the strongest terms Iran's direct and unprecedented attack against Israel... We express our full solidarity and support to Israel and its people and reaffirm our commitment towards its security... we demand that Iran and its proxies cease their attacks, and we stand ready to take further measures now and in response to further destabilising initiatives.”

Joint G7 statement condemning Iran's massive attack on Israel (White House, April 14).

“We in Hamas regard the military operation conducted by the Islamic Republic of Iran a natural right and a deserved response on the crime of targeting the Iranian consulate in Damascus and the assassination of several leaders of the Revolutionary Guards.”

Hamas statement on Iranian attack (Times of Israel, April 14).

“There is an incredibly significant proposal that went from the United States and Egypt and Qatar and Israel to Hamas last week, and Israel moved a significant way in submitting that proposal. And there is a deal on the table that would achieve much of what Hamas claims it wants to achieve... the bottom line is they have rejected it... It is Hamas right now that is the barrier and the obstacle to a ceasefire in Gaza.”

US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller (State Department, April 15).

“We plan to flood Gaza with aid and we are expecting to reach 500 trucks per day.”

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant (CNN, April 11).

“The aid [to Gaza] has increased and quite dramatically in just the last few days.”

White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby (Times of Israel, April 15).





SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

A “BETTER WAY”?

“There must be a better way!”

This seems to be the cry of many otherwise reasonable and well-meaning people when they look at the devastation in Gaza wrought by six months of war with Hamas. (We are not talking here about the dedicated haters determined to demonise Israel no matter what.)

Israel has a right to self-defence, I can hear them say, but surely Hamas could be defeated without such terrible collateral damage to Gaza’s civilian residents and civilian infrastructure. Such devastation surely amounts to “collective punishment” of Gazans, when only Hamas should be targeted.

But is it true that there’s a “better way” to wage war on Hamas? Well, non-Israeli military leaders with experience of similar situations who are the best-placed to know – agree there is not.

Let’s start with Australia’s own most famous strategic thinker, David Kilcullen, who became a leading intellectual light of the Australian Army, a strategic advisor to the US-led coalition forces in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and is now a leading academic expert on insurgency and counterinsurgency.

Kilcullen wrote in the *Australian* on March 26 regarding Gaza:

The notion of a clean, surgical, stand-off campaign, using precision strikes and small-team raids to destroy Hamas without damaging Gaza or harming civilians – as attractive as it sounds in theory – is simply not practicable, as our own recent history in places such as Mosul shows... Reality is reality: the only way for Israel to avoid the kind of campaign that is happening now would have been not to go in at all, leaving Hamas in control of Gaza...

Kilcullen’s former boss in Iraq, US General David Petraeus, who later served as head of the CIA, clearly agrees, even if he does not say so quite as explicitly. He told an interviewer from the *Times of Israel* (March 15), “Hamas is irreconcilable... They have to be destroyed, just as we had to destroy the core al Qaeda and how we helped the Iraqi security forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces destroy the Islamic State.”

He then went on to say that Gaza is “more difficult and more challenging than anything that we ever did”:

This is the most fiendishly difficult context for urban operations since 1945 at least.

You have 350 miles of very well-developed tunnels, subterranean infrastructure, factories, headquarters, all

these different facilities underground. You have high rises that have to be cleared. You’ve got to clear every building, every floor, every room, every cellar, every tunnel... You have an enemy who doesn’t wear a uniform in most cases... who uses civilians as human shields, still holds over 130 hostages, which obviously complicates a very complex situation.

Then there is John Spencer, a former senior US Army officer who is now the head of Urban Warfare at the US military academy at West Point, making him one of the world’s top experts on such warfare.

Spencer criticises (*Newsweek*, March 25) “analysts who should know better” who, he says, “are still engaging in condemnation of the IDF based on the level of destruction that’s still occurred – destruction that is unavoidable against an enemy that embeds in a vast tunnel system under civilian sites in dense urban terrain.”

He insists the reality is that the IDF is not being careless of Gazan lives but the opposite:

In my long career studying and advising on urban warfare for the US military, I’ve never known an army to take such measures to attend to the enemy’s civilian population, especially while simultaneously combating the enemy in the very same buildings.

Another example is Col. Richard Kemp, a long-serving British Army officer who commanded all British forces, together with some American forces, during a major operation in Afghanistan in 2003. He also played a senior intelligence role in Iraq.

Responding to critics of the IDF’s actions in Gaza, he wrote in January:

I have not yet heard one single realistic proposal for an alternative way of operating that would reduce civilian harm while still achieving the necessary objectives. That tells me that the IDF has no choice but to prosecute this conflict along current lines, despite the terrible loss of civilian life...

[The IDF’s] daunting combination of concurrent and conflicting challenges, coupled with the fact that Hamas systematically uses Gazans as human shields, and operates within and beneath civilian infrastructure, means that it is literally not possible to achieve the objectives of defeating Hamas and rescuing the hostages without the tragic consequence of civilian casualties and the regrettable destruction of civilian property from both ground and air. No army in the world would be able to do so, no matter what tactics they employed.

Those who accept Israel has a right to self-defence but imagine there “must be a better way” need to recognise, as Kilcullen urged, that “reality is reality” – no “better way” exists.

Concern about the welfare of suffering Gazans is a moral imperative. However, if your concern about them

causes you to say Israel must be prevented from defeating Hamas, then let's be clear: you are saying Hamas has created a situation where, because it illegally uses Gazans as human shields, Israel has no right to self-defence against it. You are saying Israel just has to accept that nothing effective can be done about the Hamas threat in the wake of the mass murder, torture, rape and abductions of October 7, as well as Hamas' determination to repeat that attack "again and again".

AIR



DECONSTRUCTION ZONE

Oved Lobel

CITING HAMAS' GAZA CASUALTY CLAIMS AMOUNTS TO JOURNALISTIC MALPRACTICE

Thousands of civilians have tragically been killed in Gaza due to the war Hamas decided to launch against Israel on October 7, and then fight from behind, amidst and beneath its own civilian population. But how many civilians precisely, and how many of them are women and children?

The answer is that nobody knows. Since January of this year, when Gabriel Epstein of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy released a detailed analysis of the data available, it has become clear that the widely cited statistics and claims being released by Hamas' Ministry of Health (MoH) cannot be viewed as remotely reliable.

Not only do these numbers fail to differentiate between combatants and civilians, but vast discrepancies and inexplicable statistical irregularities suggest deliberate manipulation or outright fabrication.

Epstein's January report was followed in early March by further analysis by Abraham Wyner, a professor of statistics and data science at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, in *Tablet Magazine*. Looking at MoH data from Oct. 26-Nov. 10, Wyner found that there was essentially no correlation between the number of women and the number of children killed per day and a strong negative correlation between the number of women and men killed per day, among other anomalies. Wyner correctly concluded that this "makes no sense at all" and "is highly suggestive that a process unconnected or loosely connected to reality was used to report the numbers." (Wyner's analysis was published in April's *AIR*).

A more extensive statistical analysis by professors Tom Simpson, Lewi Stone and Gregory Rose titled "Statistically Impossible: A Critical Analysis of Hamas's Women and Children Casualty Figures" was recently published in *Fathom Journal*. It demonstrated that the widely reproduced claims that about 70% of the casualties are women

and children actually contradict the MoH's own data – something, the authors note, any journalist could have checked using publicly available data.

MoH data shows that 58% of deaths recorded in hospitals have been women and children, dropping to 42% when assessing deaths since Jan. 1. This is despite women and children comprising approximately 75% of Gaza's population.

However, more than 43% of all deaths recorded by the MoH in Gaza, over 12,000 casualties, are not coming from deaths registered by hospitals at all. The MoH derives these from unspecified "media sources", including Google forms submitted by Gazans. When Simpson, Stone and Rose analysed these non-hospital deaths for 2023, they discovered an impossibility – 92% would have to be women and children for the "70% of Gaza casualties are women and children" claim to be true.

They concluded that the numbers being released "are manipulated to contain an impossibly low number of males" and should be considered disinformation. Other anomalies in the data noted by the authors include an apparent miraculous resurrection of more than 1,000 men between Dec. 1 and Dec. 8.

Following the *Fathom* analysis, an investigation published in the UK *Telegraph* by Mark Zlochyn further undermined the casualty claims by Hamas-run organs.

Reviewing data on United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) staff killed between October 7 and Jan. 4, Zlochyn found that male workers were more than twice as likely to be killed as female workers and represent nearly two thirds of reported UNRWA deaths – despite being only 41% of the staff. This is substantially different to hospital-recorded death ratios among the general population, and could potentially mean that official reports coming out of Gaza "grossly underreport adult male casualties," he observed on X.

Interestingly, UNRWA female deaths do track hospital records. Based on this and other evidence, Zlochyn suggests there is a case to use female casualties recorded by hospitals and by UNRWA as a proxy for the overall death toll. If you do this, the estimated number of deaths in the Gaza conflict would be about 18,000 – not the 33,000 widely being cited. Regardless, the MoH numbers are clearly fundamentally unreliable, he concluded.

Zlochyn later analysed a list of 21,323 "identified fatalities" released by the MoH and found more than 500 duplicates, nearly 400 names with no ID numbers and thousands of names with invalid IDs, among other anomalies and mathematical impossibilities.

The actual civilian death toll, as well as the civilian-combatant casualty ratio, in Gaza, is unknown and will likely remain so for years. What we can say with some certainty is that journalists who continue to present the MoH numbers – and especially MoH claims about the



proportion of women and children among the dead – as reliable and accurate are simply spreading disinformation.

The civilian death toll in Gaza is a horrific tragedy. Nonetheless, citing statistics published by a listed terrorist organisation which, according to multiple statistical analyses, are unreliable and manipulated if not outright fabricated, is not journalism.

AIR

ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

HYPERSENSITIVITIES

It doesn't take much to arouse the political and religious sensitivities of Malaysians. All the more so when an Israeli comes into their midst.

Fevered speculation broke out on March 29 when Malaysia announced the arrest of an armed Israeli man at a hotel in Kuala Lumpur. Inspector-General of Police Razarudin Husain told the press conference that the 36-year-old man, who was found carrying six handguns and 200 bullets, had arrived at Kuala Lumpur International Airport from the United Arab Emirates on March 12 using what authorities believed to be a fake French passport. Upon being questioned by police, the suspect turned over an Israeli passport, Razarudin said.

The *Times of Israel* reported that Hebrew-language news outlets had identified the suspect as Shalom Avitan, an associate of the Musli brothers crime family. The *Mako* news site reported that Avitan was en route to assassinate Eran Haya, head of a rival crime family.

The two syndicates have been engaged in a violent feud for months. According to Israel's *Channel 12*, Avitan's home in Tel Aviv's upscale Bavli neighbourhood was the target of several grenades tossed by Haya's men in mid-March, around when Haya was said to have entered Malaysia.

Indeed, Avitan admitted to authorities that he had entered Malaysia to hunt down another Israeli citizen due to a family dispute, but Malaysian police are not buying it.

"We do not fully trust this narrative as we suspect there may be another agenda," Razarudin said, adding that police were investigating the possibility that Avitan was a Mossad agent.

Three Malaysian citizens including a married couple have also been remanded into custody for allegedly providing Avitan with his weapons and acting as his driver, for which he is said to have paid using cryptocurrency.

Noting the backdrop of Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza, Razarudin said that authorities were on high alert following the arrest, with security beefed up for Malaysia's king, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and other high-level figures.

For context, Malaysia is home to only around 600 Palestinian refugees, according to the United Nations refugee agency, while the Palestine Cultural Organisation Malaysia (PCOM), an NGO headquartered in Kuala Lumpur, has long been believed to be a Hamas front. In 2018, a Palestinian engineering lecturer named Fadi al-Batsh – said to be skilled in rocket design – was shot dead from a motorcycle in the Malaysian capital by two unidentified men in a killing that the Hamas terror group suggested was carried out by the Mossad. Israel denied the allegations.

As if all this is not enough to worry about, Malaysia's majority Muslim community apparently needs protection from threats coming in the form of shoes and socks.

Most recently, conservative culture warriors have fixed their sights on a brand of women's shoes. Vern's Holdings, a Malaysian shoe company, agreed on April 8 to stop selling one of its popular lines of women's shoes after complaints from Muslims that the brand's logo also resembled the word "Allah" written in Arabic script.

By the time police had announced the confiscation of more than 1,100 shoes from Vern's stores, the company had no option but to issue an abject apology.

"We have absolutely no intention of designing a logo aimed at belittling or insulting any religion or belief," Vern's said in a statement on Instagram, adding that it had withdrawn the shoes from sale and would issue refunds to customers who bought them. "The management would like to humbly apologise and seek forgiveness."

A similar public apology was required of KK Mart, Malaysia's second-largest chain of convenience stores, after photos were posted online of socks bearing the word "Allah" being sold at several KK Mart outlets.

The images went viral and triggered a backlash from many Malays, particularly because it occurred during Ramadan. Among those who condemned KK Mart were several politicians, as well as Malaysia's king or *Agong*, Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar, who called upon authorities to investigate the incident and for "stern action" to be taken.

Despite their apology, two KK Mart executives were charged with "hurting religious feelings", while three representatives of Xin Jian Chang, the company that supplied the Chinese-made socks, also face the same charge. At least three KK Mart branches were attacked with petrol bombs and Molotov cocktails.

A key factor is that KK Mart is a Chinese-owned business, and many Malay-Muslims interpreted the "Allah socks" incident as a deliberate and calculated attack by non-Muslims against Islam. Underlying this is the resentment of majority Malay-Muslims towards the minority Chinese (and to a lesser extent the minority Indians as well), who are generally more urbanised and economically dominant. In turn, this is harnessed by Malay politicians for performative religious politics in order to attract Malay votes.

AIR



Miriam Bell

GRADING NZ'S NEW GOVERNMENT

New Zealand went to the polls on October 14, just one week after the Hamas terror attacks on Israel. While the centre-right block of the National, ACT and New Zealand First parties won the election, it took another six weeks to finalise the agreements needed to form a coalition government led by new National Party PM Chris Luxon.

Over that period, the country operated in a vacuum, and little was said by either the outgoing caretaker government or the new government-in-waiting on either events in Israel or the escalation of antisemitism in New Zealand.

But six months on from the election, the coalition Government has had time to settle in, so it seems timely to ask Jewish community leaders about the new leadership's relationship with the community.

NZ Jewish Council President Juliet Moses said the new Government's response on the Gaza war has been somewhat inconsistent. It has said different things about a ceasefire in different forums around the same time, varying in part based on who was speaking.

Regarding the actions of new Foreign Minister, Winston Peters, she said, "It could be better, could be worse. His recent speech at the United Nations was disappointing in its lack of pressure on Hamas, except for a passing mention of releasing the hostages, or acknowledgement of Iran's role."

There has been minimal formal contact between the new Government and the community, which is disappointing, Moses said.

"It likely would have been worse under the previous government, although to be fair we did have a meeting from a senior member of the Opposition who was concerned about the community."

On an individual basis, some ministers have stood up for the community, she added. "Simon Court of the ACT party has been a standout in terms of his commitment, outspoken support and knowledge." She also mentioned David Seymour and Brooke Van Velden, also of ACT, and National's Chris Bishop as other consistent supporters.

Moses said the community would like to see engagement and support from the Government and other politicians about rising antisemitism and security concerns.

"The fact that Jewish schoolchildren are being hounded out of schools and Jews are being hounded out of public life should worry them and prompt action. Right now, we

experience apparent apathy and, in some cases, outright hostility."

Rob Berg, the former president of the Zionist Federation of NZ, said only a few people in the Government have connections to the Jewish community, but his first impressions are that the new Government is more open to dialogue than the previous government.

Initially its reaction to the war in Gaza was very encouraging, but of late it seems to be more focused on the narrative that Hamas is providing, he added.

"It seems to be taking that as given, despite knowing the Hamas numbers and narrative are not to be trusted. It is also disappointing that New Zealand seems to just follow the crowd at the UN when it comes to Israel."

Berg also described Winston Peters' performance as "*pareve*" [a Yiddish term meaning, roughly, "neutral"], saying, "He's made some statements in support of Israel, but shies away from outright condemnation of Hamas and attributing the current situation to them. It would be nice to see him condemn Hamas and acknowledge the war could be stopped if the hostages were released and they surrendered."

Holocaust Centre of NZ chair Deborah Hart said the centre has good relationships with members of the Government, and some ACT and National Party MPs have attended its events.

"But there are searingly deep issues that we are dealing with, especially around antisemitism in schools, and we would welcome the opportunity to talk with the Government about these issues."

A survey of Jewish parents conducted by the centre late last year revealed high levels of antisemitism in schools, with 50% of respondents saying their children had been subjected to antisemitism at school since October 7.

Under the previous government, the centre received funding to work on a toolkit to prevent violent extremism in schools, Hart said.

"The toolkit will be ready by the end of the year and will need to be distributed to schools. That will be a huge task, and we are hoping the Government will extend that funding."

The centre – like all Jewish institutions – is also concerned about security, and it looks to the Government to provide protection for it and its events, she said.

"Police data shows there has been a 583% rise in hate crimes against Jewish people in New Zealand, and they are five times more likely than the next group to suffer a hate crime. So the security concerns the community has are real."

Also, the centre would like to see the new Government advance New Zealand's relationship with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance from observer to full member, Hart added.



BEHIND THE NEWS

ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

Several rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel on each of April 3-4, April 7-8 and April 13. All were either intercepted by Iron Dome or fell in open areas. Approximately 9,000 rockets have entered Israel from Gaza since October 7.

On April 10, Israel killed three sons of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, all of them Hamas operatives. On April 5, the IDF found and returned the body of Israel hostage Elad Katzir, murdered by PIJ in captivity.

On April 13, the body of 14-year-old shepherd Binyamin Achimair was discovered in the West Bank. His murder by terrorists sparked settler riots through Palestinian villages in the area, resulting in at least one Palestinian death, several injuries and extensive property damage.

IRAN ATTACKS ISRAEL DIRECTLY

On April 14, Iran launched approximately 170 drones, 30 cruise missiles and 120 ballistic missiles at Israel, mostly from its own territory for the first time. The Iranians said the attack was in response to an Israeli strike in Syria that killed multiple senior Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) officers on April 1, including its commander in Syria, in a building next to Iran's Damascus Embassy which Iran claimed was part of its diplomatic compound.

Reports says approximately 50% of the ballistic missiles malfunctioned. 99% of the projectiles launched at Israel were intercepted by Israel or its partners. Some missiles hit Nevatim Airbase, causing light damage, and shrapnel injured a young Bedouin girl.

ISRAEL'S FINDINGS ON AID WORKER KILLINGS

An IDF commission led by retired IDF Major-General Yoav Har-Even has attributed the accidental killing in Gaza of seven aid workers from World Central Kitchen (WCK), including Australian Zomi Frankcom, in an Israeli drone strike on April 1, to a breakdown in communication and mistaken identification, as well as violations of IDF open-fire regulations.

The commission found that the IDF unit which opened fire believed the aid workers had stayed with their aid trucks in a warehouse, and the cars driven out from the warehouse contained only Hamas operatives. The WCK markings on the vehicles could not be picked up by the drone's infrared sensors during the night-time strike. Attempts by the Israelis and then WCK to contact the aid workers by phone were unsuccessful.

IDF Chief of Staff Herzl Halevi dismissed the two senior officers responsible for ordering the attack and formally reprimanded the brigade, division, and Southern Command commanders. The Military Advocate General is reportedly considering a criminal investigation.

IDF COMPLETES SUCCESSFUL SHIFA HOSPITAL OPERATION

On April 1, the IDF ended a two-week long operation at Gaza's Shifa Hospital, which saw intense firefights with terrorists barricaded in hospital buildings. In all, IDF forces killed or detained several senior commanders from Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and killed 200 terrorist operatives and arrested 500 others in the hospital compound.

An IDF spokesperson said, "Hamas ruined and destroyed the Shifa Hospi-

tal after using it as a military headquarters – there are more terrorists in the hospital than patients or medical staff." Captured PIJ and Hamas operatives reportedly admitted to using Gaza hospitals for terrorist activities because "they have internet and electricity 24/7," and are considered "safe places".

ISRAEL ANNOUNCES GREATLY INCREASED GAZA AID



Aid trucks entering Gaza (Image: X/ COGAT)

On April 10, Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant announced plans to "flood" Gaza with a massive increase in aid, aiming to increase the number of aid trucks entering daily from about 200 to 500. He announced a five-part initiative, includes opening Ashdod port to increase entry of goods and streamline security checks (this subsequently began on April 17); opening up a new northern crossing (which subsequently opened on April 12) to provide aid directly to northern Gaza; increased aid entry from Jordan via two routes; establishing a coordination and deconfliction mechanism to work more closely with international organisations; and several other major projects, including working with the US on an artificial island for importing maritime aid.

There was a sharp increase in the rate of entry of aid trucks into Gaza in the week of April 7 to April 13, with 1,866 such trucks entering.

US ABSTAINS ON UN CEASEFIRE RESOLUTION, HAMAS REFUSES ALL OFFERS

Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu criticised the United States for abstaining on a UN Security Council resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza on March 25, allowing it to pass. The US had vetoed previous ceasefire resolutions. While the resolution also demanded the immediate release of all Israeli hostages, it did not make the ceasefire conditional on hostage releases.

Meanwhile, Hamas has continued to reject US-mediated ceasefire offers. The latest proposal, presented on April 7, was for a six-week ceasefire in Gaza, with Hamas releasing 40 of the more than 100 hostages being held in Gaza in exchange for 900 Palestinians held in Israeli prisons, and a return of many Gazans to northern Gaza. Hamas rejected the plan on April 10, and later proposed Israel should instead completely end the war and withdraw from Gaza before any hostages were released, and release between 30 and 50 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for each hostage.

Hamas also denied it has 40 living hostages in the categories suggested in the proposal – women, children, men over 50 and individuals with chronic illnesses.

IRAN FLOODING WEST BANK WITH ARMS

News reports say Iranian agents are working to flood the West Bank with vast quantities of increasingly sophisticated arms, using criminal elements and militants to smuggle weapons from Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Egypt's Sinai desert.

In addition, an Iranian proxy in Iraq, the Hezbollah battalions, announced on April 6 that it is working to arm and prepare 12,000 fighters inside Jordan, while Teheran has been

helping to fuel large demonstrations against Israel in Amman in recent weeks.

LEBANON CONFLICT UPDATE

On April 16, two Hezbollah drones exploded in Israel's north, lightly wounding two people, and an Israeli drone killed Hezbollah Coastal Region Commander Ismail Yousef Baz. On April 17, a Hezbollah drone wounded 14 soldiers and 4 civilians. Hezbollah launched 40 rockets and two drones into Israel on April 13 and 14. On March 29, Israel killed Ali Abed Akhsan Naim, the deputy commander of Hezbollah's rocket and missile unit, while two commanders of the elite Radwan force were killed on March 30 and April 8.

More than 3,000 projectiles have been fired at Israel from Lebanon since October 7. Hezbollah has suffered approximately 300 casualties while seven Israeli civilians and

11 soldiers have been killed in the exchanges.

TURKEY AND INDONESIA TAKE DIFFERENT PATHS

In early April, Turkey, which has openly backed Hamas throughout the recent Gaza war, announced restrictions on the export to Israel of 54 products, including many used in Israel's construction industry.

By contrast, reports say Indonesia has committed to eventual normalisation of relations with Israel. A letter from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Secretary-General, former Australian Finance Minister Mathias Cormann, informed Indonesia that if it wished to join that organisation, it would need to have diplomatic relations with all members, including Israel. Cormann informed Israel in late March that Indonesia has now pledged to do so before its ascension to the OECD is finalised in two to three years' time.

STRANGER THAN FICTION

TWO LIVES TO LIVE

The Holy Land is often regarded as a place of ancient miracles but, as the strange story of Mustafa Ayyash shows, there are modern miracles as well.

On December 14, 2023, the UN Human Rights Office in the Occupied Palestinian Territories issued a press release condemning the number of journalists Israel was allegedly killing in Gaza. The sole example cited was Ayyash, described as the "founder and Director of the Gaza Now News Agency." That agency is in reality a pro-Hamas propaganda front.

The UN Office must have been stunned to find out that following his tragic death, Ayyash was somehow resurrected. The fact he was already tweeting from beyond the grave should have been a hint, but the clincher came when he was arrested in Austria in late March on charges of funding Hamas, after having

been named on a US Treasury counter-terrorism list.

Perhaps Hamas felt forced to develop the ability to bring its people back to life to compete with a nefarious Israeli scheme revealed on Hezbollah's television channel *Al-Manar* on March 18.

Lebanese researcher Hani Suleiman explained that in 2000, the Jewish Agency supposedly collected babies abandoned in Brazil and flew plane loads of them to Tel Aviv each month so they could replenish the depleted numbers in the IDF.

He elaborated that Brazil is based on three phenomena – "football, drugs and illicit sexual relations." The last resulted in unwanted babies, who were abandoned on the beaches of Rio de Janeiro, he said.

These are ironic claims to air on the media outlet of a terrorist group dependent on drug trafficking for much of its finances, including around Brazil.

Suleiman also claimed Israeli rabbis were up in arms because these children were not Jewish, but the army overruled them.

COVER STORY

IRAN OPENS FIRE

IS IT RESPONSE TIME?

Ilan Evyatar

In March 2022, the United States convened top military officials from Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain in the resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula to coordinate aerial defences. Among those present were the Israeli and Saudi chiefs of staff.

It was a move that followed Israel's absorption into the area of responsibility of the US Army's Central Command, CENTCOM, which has its forward headquarters in Qatar. The idea behind moving Israel from EUCOM (the US European Command) was to pool the resources of Israel and the Gulf states under an American umbrella to identify aerial and missile threats emanating from Iran and its proxies.

Several countries in the region operate US systems and some are even believed to employ Israeli systems.

At a Pentagon briefing later that month, General Kenneth McKenzie (see p. 15), the head of CENTCOM and the top American commander in the Middle East, said: "The task in the theatre is really how do you knit those together so you create more than the simple sum of the component parts... So everybody sees the same thing; everybody gets early warning; everybody can be prepared to react very quickly to a potential Iranian attack."

Just over two years to the day later, those countries did exactly that when on the night between April 13 and 14 Iran launched perhaps the biggest combined drone and missile attack in the region's history (more than 330 drones, cruise missiles and ballistic missiles) and the so-called Middle East Air Defense Alliance passed its first major test.

The main intended target was apparently the Nevatim Air Base in southern Israel, from where Israeli F-35 fighter

jets are believed to have conducted the April 1 strike that killed Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commander in Syria General Mohammad Reza Zahedi and several other senior IRGC Quds Force officers. The strike hit a building in Damascus next to the Iranian Embassy that Teheran claims served as its consulate and therefore was sovereign Iranian territory. It was this claim that led Teheran to respond for the first time directly against Israel from its soil after a decades-long shadow war in which Israel, according to foreign sources, has repeatedly used cyberwarfare, sabotage and assassinations to target facilities and personnel involved in Iran's nuclear program and has openly taken military action against Iranian forces entrenched in Syria.

Radars based across the region provided intelligence and early warning and the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia employed fighter jets and missile defence systems to help Israel down all 170 drones fired at it before they even crossed into its territory. Most of the 30 cruise missiles fired at Israel were downed by Israeli fighter jets outside of Israel's borders and 130 ballistic missiles fired by Iran were downed by Israel's Arrow aerial defence systems. The latter's use against the ballistic missiles was its first major operational test. The success rate of 99% in thwarting the attack is unprecedented in the history of aerial defence, as is perhaps the coalition that took part in the operation.

If Nevatim had been destroyed rather than sustaining minimal damage, and if the attack had caused numerous casualties beyond the serious injuries to one seven-year-old Bedouin girl, Israel would have been forced to launch a massive retaliation.

Instead, it and the coalition's success leaves Israel with

"The success rate of 99% in thwarting the attack is unprecedented in the history of aerial defence, as is perhaps the coalition that took part in the operation"



Dramatic scenes in the skies over Israel in the early morning of April 14 (Images: X/Twitter)

other options.

It has already become clear that, despite allies urging Israel to let the unsuccessful attack “go through to the keeper,” Israel will respond “clearly and decisively” as senior Israeli diplomatic sources told Israel’s *Channel 12*. Those sources added that the Israeli response would clarify that Israel would not “move on” from Iran’s attack and that Israel would not allow the Iranians to create a new equilibrium vis-a-vis Israel. At the time of writing however, the nature of Israel’s planned response remained unclear, and the region and the world remained on tenterhooks.

So what might that response look like? Will Israel respond to Iran’s intent, or to the damage caused? Will it coordinate its response with its partners in that defensive coalition, or will it opt, as some hawkish figures in Israel are urging, for a “devastating” military response to restore Israel’s deterrence and “put Iran in its place?”

From a military-operational standpoint, Israel has numerous options. These include strikes on Iranian military targets using fighter jets and armed drones capable of carrying missiles, surface-to-surface missiles, submarine launched missiles, and special forces raids. It can also deploy cyber-attacks to disrupt Iranian infrastructure and covert operations against Iranian facilities and personnel, both options that it is said to have employed successfully in the past. It could also hit targets outside of Iran to show the Islamic Republic that it has failed in establishing the deterrence it was seeking to impose with its attack that was publicly presented as punishment for the Damascus assassination.

Those calling for a direct military response note the failure of Israel’s strategy of containment and active de-

fence against Hamas, which relied on the success of the Iron Dome in limiting the damage of Gaza rockets, but came crashing down with the October 7 massacre.

Moreover, some Israeli leaders see this as an opportunity to initiate a long-discussed attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities. Large-scale direct military action however, especially a major operation against the nuclear program, will almost inevitably lead to all-out war with both Iran and Hezbollah. Israel has of course been engaged in an ongoing battle of attrition with Hezbollah, but below the threshold of full-scale

war, since Hamas launched its invasion of the Gaza border area on October 7.

With Israel still involved in Gaza, an all-out war in the north would severely stretch the country’s resources. Defence spending has already soared as a result of six months of fighting with Hezbollah and Hamas, widening Israel’s budget deficit. The one night of aerial defence against Iran on April 14 is estimated to have cost in the region of 4 billion shekels (A\$1.66 billion). To put this in perspective, Israel’s defence budget prior to October 7 was 60 billion shekels (A\$24.84 billion). A protracted war with Iran and Hezbollah would be ruinous for Israel’s economy.

The United States, Britain, France and other Israeli allies have also made it clear that they are opposed to anything more than a very limited Israeli retaliation: “Take the win”, said President Joe Biden to Israel, adding that the US would not take part in any counteroffensive, while UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and French President Emmanuel Macron, although condemning Iran’s “reckless” actions, have called on Israel to avoid further escalation.

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FOUR EXPERTS: HOW SHOULD ISRAEL RESPOND TO IRAN?

Yanon Shalom Yitach

Iran's aerial attack on Israel in the early morning of April 14 – launched from Iranian soil – seems to have changed the game between the two countries, after years of attacks played out via Iran's proxy forces in the region. How should Israel respond? Four experts give their takes:

Maj.-Gen. (Res.) Yaakov Amidror – “To Rafah or Teheran”

“We need to respond – and there are two good options: Either we take advantage of the attack yesterday in order to attack Iran, or to come to an agreement with the United States to enter Rafah, and eliminate Hamas there and in the central camps such as Deir al-Balah. Now is the time to use our international credit.

“There's no priority between [the two objectives]. In theory, they could happen at the same time. In practice, Israel is a small country and would have a hard time managing it. We also can't forget that we don't want to go to war with Lebanon. If we don't go to Iran, it may be possible to work together with the Americans on the Lebanese front.”

Brig.-Gen. (Res.) Jacob Nagel – “A significant response against Iran on Iranian soil”

“The defence systems have intercepted more than 90% of the threats, but this fact should not reduce the price to be paid in the slightest. We need a significant response against Iran on Iranian soil, in at least three different ways:

“We need to attack the infrastructures that attacked us – the industries that built the drones and the warehouses. We also need to use this one-time opportunity to attack Iranian infrastructure – not to affect the price of oil, but to show that we can

also attack gas, oil, and in addition, attack nuclear facilities and government institutions.

“The mistake we are making is drawing an equivalence between the attack and the damage.”

Brig.-Gen. (Res.) Yossi Kuperwasser – “We must not be complacent, but we must find the appropriate response”

“Israel needs to respond – the Iranians say they are changing the rules of the game; even according to these new rules, we need to be the dominant factor, to show them that there is a price to be paid. On the other hand, we need to remember that we want to focus on completing the mission in Gaza and maintaining good relations with the American Administration. We must not be complacent – but we need to find the appropriate response.

“The decision of how to respond will have to be made from a strategic point of view vis-à-vis the Iranian axis and the nuclear program. Iran is trying to attack us with hundreds of weapons overnight, the last thing we need is for a country like that to have nuclear weapons.

“The whole world must mobilise for decisive action to thwart the Iranian nuclear program, to dismantle the axis it has built, and to replace the [Islamic Republic] regime.”

Former Shin Bet chief Yaakov Peri – “Israel must respond”

“I think Israel has no choice but to respond, it must respond, to maintain its position as perhaps the most serious power in the Middle East and before Iran. As for how and when – according to Israel's convenience. I don't want to go into the nature of the response, but I don't think it's worth putting Israeli personnel at risk. We need to attack using technological and other means, and Israel has the capabilities to do that.”

AIR

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But if Israel's allies are opposed to retaliation, this also provides a different sort of opportunity for Jerusalem.

The regional pendulum has swung again: if the Gaza war placed the primary focus back on a Palestinian state,



The Israeli Air Force: One of several military tools that can be employed in the expected response to the Iranian attack (Image: Flickr)

the Iranian attack has shifted attention back to the Islamic Republic's threat to Israel and the building of a regional coalition against Iran.

President Macron said that the focus should be on “isolating Iran, convincing countries in the region that Iran is a danger, increasing sanctions, reinforcing pressure over nuclear activities” in Iran.

Such a statement would once have been music to Israeli PM Netanyahu's ears.

But now he has a difficult needle to thread. He needs to balance Israel's need to maintain its deterrence, the restraint he is being called on to show by Israel's allies, and the chance to increase the diplomatic and economic pressure on Iran to halt its racing nuclear program. He also needs to find a response that will make Iran feel real pain for its actions but will not provoke an all-out escalation – unless, that is, he opts to gamble that escalation will force the US's hand and lead it to come to Israel's defence again.

Inside Israel, most pundits expect a significant Israeli response, but there is no consensus at all with respect to what it is likely to look like or when will it occur.

AIR

Ilan Evyatar is a former editor-in-chief of the Jerusalem Report. He is co-author, with Yonah Jeremy Bob, of Target Tehran: How Israel Is Using Sabotage, Cyberwarfare, Assassination – and Secret Diplomacy – to Stop a Nuclear Iran and Create a New Middle East (Simon & Schuster, 2023).



“Despite Iran’s militant posturing, they are ultimately playing a weak hand”: General McKenzie (Image: X/Twitter)

IRAN’S ATTACK WAS A SHOW OF WEAKNESS

Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr.

On April 14, Iran launched a ballistic missile, drone and cruise missile attack on Israel from its own soil. The attack was without subterfuge and of a scale well beyond any that preceded it. The strike was indiscriminate in targeting and designed to cause casualties. Belated Iranian protests notwithstanding, this was a “maximum effort”. The Israeli response, aided by the US, the UK, France and nations in the region, was largely successful. Iran has demonstrated that it is willing to do anything to further its campaign against Israel’s existence.

There’s some history here. On Sept. 14, 2019, drones launched from bases in western Iran struck oil refineries operated by Saudi Aramco at Abqaiq and Khurais, Saudi Arabia. The damage to global oil production was significant. The Iranians denied culpability, and the profiles their drones used made it easy to avoid the reality of a state-on-state attack. On Jan. 8, 2020, Iranian ballistic missiles, also launched from bases in western Iran, struck Al Asad air base in Iraq. This was a response to the Jan. 3 US strike that killed Gen. Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad. No US troops at the base were killed, and heavy casualties were averted only because commanders on the ground anticipated the attack and repositioned forces accordingly. Iran claimed responsibility for this assault. Both these attacks seemed to represent a major escalation, a crossing of the Rubicon into the territory of attributable state-on-state attacks.

Why has Iran now undertaken what can only be characterised as a desperate attack – one that exposed the weaknesses of its much-touted missiles and drones? The reason is clear. For the past several months, Israel and Iran have engaged in a low-level “dialogue of targets”. Israeli strikes have taken out Iranian targets in Syria, Lebanon and occasionally Iran itself. Iran’s response has been ham-fisted. In the shadow war, Israel has outfought Iran.

The April 1 Israeli strike against Iranian planners in Da-

ascus was the culmination of Teheran’s embarrassment. Taking a page from Russian strategic doctrine, the Iranians tried to escalate to de-escalate, taking a very aggressive action to raise the stakes dramatically. The intention is to cow the opponent into changing its behaviour by convincing it that it is at heightened risk. The key to this kind of tactic is actual leverage – a genuine capability that puts the opponent at grave risk.

That hasn’t happened, because it’s apparent that the Iranians are playing a weak hand. For years the ballistic missile, drone and cruise missile force has been at the heart of Iran’s strategic deterrence – more important in practical terms than its nuclear program. The attack on April 14 was poorly executed and a strategic miscalculation. The vulnerability of Iran’s force has been exposed, and the regime is gravely weakened as a result. Israel has been strengthened

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by a stunning display of military competence, a striking contrast with that seen on October 7.

Another factor is that Lebanese Hezbollah's involvement was minimal, limited to tactical rocketing into the Golan Heights. This is of enormous strategic significance. The scenario Israeli planners feared most was the "dual axis" missile and drone attack, in which thousands of missiles from Lebanon joined the attackers from Iran. Lebanese Hezbollah is as dedicated as Iran to the destruction of Israel, but it realises Israel's ability to wound it badly if it enters the fray. So far Hezbollah has chosen to sit on the sidelines. That made the Iranian attack a manageable problem for Israeli defenders.

For the US, the successful defence of Israel validates years of work to create an integrated air and missile defence, an effort that brought together many nations that all recognise the threat of Iran. It also vindicates the decision to move Israel from European Command into Central Command, which covers the rest of the region. The seamless coordination and mutual support this enabled was evident under demanding circumstances.

Iran's overriding strategic priority is protecting the theocratic regime. Fundamental to this was a conventional missile and drone force that could overpower its neighbours. This failure shakes the regime's stability. In conducting this latest attack, it has shed the last check on its ambitions. Iran will attack any regional nation anywhere, without pretence or deniability. The downside for Iran's targets is that once a nation has conducted an attack of this nature, it is politically easier to do it again.

What's next? The initiative has shifted to the Israelis. The gap between Israeli competence and Iranian aspirations is clear, even to the Iranians, despite their attempts to put a brave face on their failure. Israel's neighbours will certainly see the effectiveness of its defence. Israel could unleash a violent and decisive counterstrike against Iran.

Some are calling for Israel to destroy the Iranian nuclear enterprise. Now isn't the time for that. What's needed is a carefully calibrated response on a scale that reinforces Israeli technical mastery. That would reset deterrence. Informed observers, whatever their sympathies, all know who won this engagement. The hard part, as always, is translating battlefield success into lasting policy advantage and an opportunity for peace. That's the task for Israel.

AIR

Gen. McKenzie, a retired US Marine general, served as commander of US Central Command, 2019-22. He is Executive Director of the Global and National Security Institute at the University of South Florida and author of The Melting Point: High Command and War in the 21st Century, forthcoming in June.
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THE COALITION OF THE MALEVOLENT

Eliot A. Cohen

My wife, the photo archivist, likes to point out that all photo stills are a double crop – a crop in time (we do not know what happened before or after) and a crop in place (we do not know what was outside the photographer's frame). So, too, are pulses of violence, like Iran's recent salvo of 320 drones and cruise and ballistic missiles aimed at Israel. To understand what we are observing, we have to push out beyond the frame of what we at first see.

The attack on April 14 was not a mere response to the Israeli strike in Damascus on April 1 that killed two Iranian generals and five other officers in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Rather, it represents an inflection point in a semi-covert war that has been going on for years. That conflict has included attacks on shipping by both sides, the bombing of Jewish and Israeli civilian targets, the launch of rockets across Israel's northern border, and the occasional assassination of key figures, such as Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, the godfather of the Iranian nuclear program.

Israel's sardonic war humourists have been cracking jokes about the first direct flight from Teheran to Jerusalem since 1979, but as tends to happen, the joke has a kernel of insight: Unflinching hostility toward Israel is part of the Islamic Republic's DNA. That hostility, moreover, is inextricably linked to its hostility toward the United States: One is the lesser Satan, the other the great. Reconciliation with either is ideologically impossible; hostility toward both, and the belief that the two are intertwined, is unshakeable.

But there is a departure here. Iran's semi-covert war has used Hezbollah in Lebanon (and elsewhere in the world), Iraqi militias, and Yemen's Houthis to attack and kill its enemies. That inhibition has begun to dissolve. Firing more than 300 guided weapons, and claiming responsibility for doing so, is an overt declaration that Iran is willing to wage war in the sunlight and not just the shadows.

This, in turn, is part of a larger pattern of Iranian belligerence: It includes the use of Iraqi militias to attack American bases, and the arming and assistance of Houthi militias in their attacks on civilian shipping in the Red Sea and beyond. It forces the question: Why has Iran begun to act more blatantly, less cautiously, and at greater ranges than ever before?

One answer may be the seemingly irrevocable march of that country to the possession of nuclear weapons, a march that was briefly slowed by the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 (which was followed by a pause in the Iranian program) and the ill-fated and time-limited Joint Com-



Iran is today prepared to openly employ its missiles because it sees itself part of a wider global coalition that includes Russia and China (Image: X/Twitter)

prehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) negotiated in 2015, abandoned by the Trump Administration and unsuccessfully attempted to be revived by the Biden Administration.

A second and deeper answer, however, is Iran's entry into a coalition – not an alliance – with Russia, China, and North Korea. Iran now plays an important role in Russia's war in Ukraine. Iranian drones fly every night at Ukrainian cities, revealing and stressing Ukrainian air defences to pave the way for Russian cruise and ballistic missiles. Iran has reportedly helped with the construction of Russian factories to manufacture the drones, presumably in exchange for Russian assistance on other fronts.

It is this bigger geopolitical shift that makes the Iranian attack on Israel so significant. The major players in the Russia-China-Iran-North Korea coalition are increasingly willing to use open violence (against Ukraine, Israel, and the Philippines), and to threaten much worse, including the use of nuclear weapons. They are united by a growing belief that their moment is coming, when a divided and indecisive West, richer but flabbier, will not fight.

In response, as is so often the case, the Western states turn to technological and tactical solutions. In the short term, they work. The Israelis, assisted by the United States, Great Britain, France, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, shot down almost every single projectile heading their way. It is an amazing feat, and will undoubtedly create a great deal of demand for Israeli anti-missile technology. In the same way, American and European warships have been shooting down most Houthi (actually, Iranian) missiles flying at merchant

ships attempting to approach the Suez Canal.

But anti-missile defence is, in the long run, a mug's game. If every defensive missile you fire, together with all of the systems that cue and direct it, costs an order of magnitude more than the incoming missile, even the richest countries are going to bankrupt themselves. Such systems are not currently mass produced, although that may change. Furthermore, the new era of missile and drone warfare is still at an early stage. As the drone war over the fields of Ukraine shows, the numbers, sophistication, and quantity of such systems grow fast under the spur of actual conflict. The game becomes one of measure and countermeasure, and in any case, no defence is 100%

effective in the long run. And so, sooner or later, ships will sink, apartment buildings will explode, civilians will die.

In such exchanges the attacker wins, because of the larger effects. Shippers will avoid certain routes, companies will hesitate about doing business in a war zone, and tourists and corporate executives will stay away from

airports where the sirens go off periodically. That is the larger strategy at work here, and make no mistake: The Iranian purpose is, as has been repeatedly and unambiguously stated, the extermination of the Israeli state, an objective shared by Hamas, and possibly by the crowds shouting "From the river to the sea" on the streets of New York or London.

In itself this is not new; it was, in the middle of the previous century, the objective of Egypt and Syria, but that was through a single climactic battle or two. This is something much more protracted.

The aim here is also something a lot bigger than the struggle to destroy Israel. The target of the Russia-China-

"It is [the] bigger geopolitical shift that makes the Iranian attack on Israel so significant. The major players in the Russia-China-Iran-North Korea coalition are increasingly willing to use open violence (against Ukraine, Israel, and the Philippines), and to threaten much worse"

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Iran-North Korea coalition is the overthrow not of a “rules-based international order” – a phrase that misleads more than it informs, because there have always been rules of some kind – but of the American-led world order, which is an artifact of the past 75 years. The coalition’s frame, as it were, is a large one, in which the United States and its allies represent one frangible whole that, if tapped hard in several places, will disintegrate.

It is in this frame, then, that the United States and its allies have to consider next steps. The Iran versus Israel campaign is just one campaign in a much larger conflict. In the mid-1930s, it was a mistake to treat the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, the Spanish Civil War, the German reoccupation of the Rhineland, and Japan’s launching of war in China in 1937 as a set of unique and unconnected events. Rather, they represented one big problem. American leaders will err if they similarly attempt to compartmentalise each of their challenges today: the Ukraine war, Chinese aggression in the South China Sea, the Middle Eastern conflict.

That a coalition of the West and its partners were willing to act in countering the Iranian missile barrage is a promising sign. Still, until Iran pays a visible and heavy price for its behaviour in attacking not only Israel directly but its Arab neighbours and global shipping through its proxies, the problem will only get worse.

If ever there was a time for strong American statecraft backed by military muscle, this is it. But even as the United States berates its allies for failing to spend enough, its own defence spending as a percentage of gross domestic product is declining to levels not seen since the halcyon days of 1999, down to 2.7%. That does not begin to give the politicians the big stick they need if their soft words are to carry conviction.

Until the United States gets serious about what it needs to do to preserve the order it helped create and sustain,

benefiting itself and others enormously in the process, many more missiles will fly at the cities of democratic allies. It is cold comfort that others will pay the price in blood long before Americans do – but sooner or later, we will as well.

AIR

Eliot Cohen is a contributing writer at the Atlantic. He is the Arleigh Burke Chair in Strategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and the author of The Hollow Crown: Shakespeare on How Leaders Rise, Rule, and Fall. © The Atlantic (www.theatlantic.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

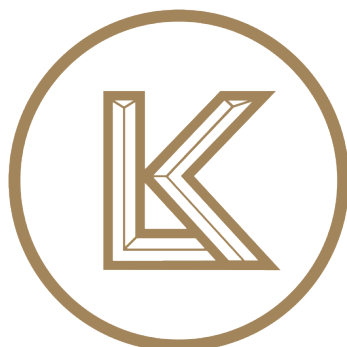
WHY ISRAEL SHOULDN'T ‘TAKE THE WIN’

Walter Russell Mead

“Take the win”, President Biden reportedly advised Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu after Iran’s unprecedented missile and drone attacks against Israel on April 14 sputtered shambolically to an ignominious end.

As the world waits on tenterhooks for Israel’s response, two things seemed clear. It would be political suicide for Mr Netanyahu to take the President’s advice, and it would be national suicide for any Israeli prime minister to do so. Mr Biden is primarily worried about his re-election, a cause he conveniently if sincerely conflates with the survival of democracy in the US and of freedom in the world. Israel is worried about something more tangible – the survival of the world’s only Jewish state.

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Netanyahu and his team (top) and Biden and his team (bottom) have significantly different priorities following the Iranian attack (Images: GPO/Whitehouse.gov/Flickr)

Mr Biden is a lot smarter about the Middle East today than he was in January 2021, when he was still spouting inanities about isolating Saudi Arabia and pursuing the will o' the wisp of détente with Iran. Today the President understands that he can't simply shake hands with Iran and walk away from the Middle East. If the US hopes to step back from a front-line role in the region, it must foster an alliance that can check Iran's unrelenting and fanatical drive for hegemony. That is why Team Biden dramatically reversed its early policy of making Saudi Arabia a "pariah" and, borrowing some of the core concepts of Donald Trump's Abraham Accords, made the promotion of an Israel-Saudi alliance a cornerstone of its regional strategy.

This was an intelligent move, as far as it went. Until and unless Iran's insatiable ambitions can be curbed, nothing but tumult and terrorism awaits the weary people of a region whose fossil fuel riches remain critical to the smooth functioning of the world economy. From an American point of view, assembling a group of American allies to take our place on the front lines at a time when we need to focus more closely on the Indo-Pacific is common sense.

What the President appears not yet to understand is that Iran has become so powerful, and America's reputation as a source of sound policy and reliable support so weak, that only resolute American backing of our allies can turn the tide.

This problem has been decades in the making. George W. Bush's mismanagement in Iraq removed the one regional power capable of containing Iran on its own – without building an effective replacement. Barack Obama's feckless Syria policy gave Iran and its new best friend, Russia, a commanding position in the heart of the Middle East. Mr Trump's support for the Abraham Accords and tough policies toward Iran pointed in the right direction, but were mostly a case of too little, too late, and too erratic. Mr Biden's support for Israel is appreciated in Arab capitals as well as in Jerusalem, but his vacillations with Iran have further strengthened the ayatollahs and undercut America's much-diminished prestige.

National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan's poorly timed *Foreign Affairs* article last October, hailing what he thought was the greatest regional stability in decades, was the cherry on the sundae of perceived intellectual incompetence by American policymakers in the region.

From an Arab point of view, there are two things that make Israel valuable at a time of diminished confidence in the US. First, Israel sees the common fight against Iran as part of its own fight for survival. It will be a reliable ally because it has no choice. Second, Israel offers the mix of strength and relentlessness without which Iran cannot be stopped. At a time when liberal opinion in the US was elegantly wringing its hands about Israeli ruthlessness in Gaza destroying any possibility of Arab-Israeli cooperation, Jordan and Saudi Arabia leapt to Israel's defence against the Iranian attacks. The fastest way for Israel to lose friends in the Middle East would be to start thinking like American liberal foreign-policy hands.

This isn't an ideal situation by any standard, and one may hope that better times will bring nobler views, but people fighting for their survival against an utterly amoral opponent will do what they must. Americans eager to critique what they see as the immorality of the region's governments should reflect on the part our own poor choices have played in the deterioration of Middle Eastern security to its current abysmal state.

Meanwhile, Mr Biden will continue trying to save the world by getting re-elected and will evaluate developments abroad by their projected effect on Wisconsin and Michigan. Mr Netanyahu will have to steer a course between the disastrous alternatives of alienating Mr Biden by ignoring his preferences or endangering Israel by taking his advice.

AIR

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Demented or just diabolical

Inside the mind of Yayha Sinwar

Judith Miller

The Palestinian in the clinic at one of Israel's highest security prisons near Beersheba had a persistent pain in the back of his neck. He trembled and had trouble walking. Yuval Bitton, then a 28-year-old dentist just a year out of medical school, suspected that his patient might be suffering from a CVA, an ischemic cerebrovascular accident, resulting from a life-threatening brain tumour. "He needs to be hospitalised, immediately," Bitton advised the prison doctors.

Dr Bitton's diagnosis was quickly confirmed at the Soroka Medical Centre in Beersheba. The surgery took hours. The prisoner survived. When he returned to the prison, he thanked Bitton and the rest of the prison medical staff for having saved his life – in excellent Hebrew.

The year was 2004. The patient was Yahya Sinwar, the Palestinian who in 2017 would become the leader of Hamas in Gaza and subsequently the mastermind of the October 7 attack in southern Israel in which 1,200 mostly Israeli civilians died and 240 were taken hostage.

Bitton described the fateful incident and what he said were "hundreds of hours" of conversations with Sinwar in prison in the ensuing years when I met him last week in a peaceful garden in a Tel Aviv suburb, a world away from the Israeli prisons in which the Hamas leader was held for 22 years prior to his release in 2011.

"Even then, he looked and carried himself like a leader," Bitton recalled. "He was thin, tough, and very extreme." There was tension in jail between the militant Islamists of Gaza and those from the West Bank, which was ruled by the Palestinian Authority initially headed by Yasser Arafat and then by his successor, Mahmoud Abbas. Sinwar viewed even the most militant members of the Palestinian Authority as soft and undisciplined. Above all, they were traitors to Islam for having agreed to share with the Jews holy land that God had given exclusively to Muslims.

Sinwar and his lieutenants, Tawfik Abu Naim and Rawhi Mushtaha, now all senior Hamas figures, were "like an army" inside the prison, Bitton recalled. An Islamic band of

brothers, they enforced rules, gave orders, and held secret elections for Hamas' "majlis", its ruling council inside the prison. They communicated with one another and with fellow militants outside the jail through messages and tiny plastic cell phones smuggled into the jail by visitors – lawyers, wives, babies. The contraband was concealed in diapers, in women's bras, and in their vaginas.

"In those days, we didn't routinely or thoroughly search women or babies or even surveil conversations between lawyers and their clients," Bitton said, recalling these early examples of suicidal democracy. "We were so naive."

Sinwar studied his enemy assiduously. He read Israeli newspapers, took classes in Jewish history through the prison's "open university", and spoke to Bitton about Hamas' goals – the expulsion of all Jews from Palestine,



Yayha Sinwar: The "Butcher of Khan Yunis" who became the mastermind of October 7 (Image: Shutterstock)

the duty to implement God's laws as given to Muhammad on all sacred Muslim soil. Numerous efforts to recruit him in prison failed. "The struggle continued inside the prison," Bitton said. Sinwar was not married then, and he had few visitors. "Hamas and the struggle were his life."

Sinwar's life has been shaped by the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Born in 1962 in the Khan Younis refugee camp in Egyptian-ruled Gaza, he got his bachelor's degree in Arabic studies from the Islamic University of Gaza, which was founded in 1978 by two men who a decade later would create Hamas. He grew close to one of them – Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, Hamas' co-founder and spiritual guide – and rose quickly in the Hamas ranks.

Having initially been arrested in 1982 for what Israel termed subversive activities, he was rearrested in 1985. Released again, he and Mushtaha founded *Munazzamat al Jihad w'al-Dawa* (MAJD), an organisation responsible for rooting out Palestinian collaborators with Israel and other rival factions. Sinwar excelled at his job, earning himself the nickname "Butcher of Khan Yunis." In 1988, he was arrested again for planning the abduction and killing of

two Israeli soldiers and the murder of four Palestinians he considered collaborators. According to Israeli press accounts, he had acknowledged during his interrogation having strangled two of the Palestinians, inadvertently killing another during his interrogation, and shooting the fourth who had tried to escape. He was said to have led investigators to the orchard where the bodies were buried. In 1989, Israel sentenced him to four life sentences.

Under normal circumstances, a man with such a violent resume would not have been released. But after Israeli Staff Sergeant (then-Corporal) Gilad Shalit was kidnapped in 2006, negotiations with Hamas inside and outside of prisons began. Bitton himself was involved in the talks with Sinwar and other Hamas negotiators. Brokered by German and Egyptian mediators and signed in Cairo in 2011, the deal agreed to Shalit's return in exchange for the phased release of 1,027 Israeli-held prisoners, including some 315 Palestinians who were serving life sentences for having been convicted of the worst crimes. Among them were Sinwar and his two lieutenants.

Hamas' leaders considered Israel's willingness to release more than 1,000 Palestinians for a single Israeli soldier a victory. Most of the prisoners were ecstatic about their release. But Sinwar denounced the trade. "He was furious, even though he was among those scheduled to be released," Bitton recalled. He told me that releasing Shalit for a thousand Palestinian prisoners was "not enough". All of the Palestinians in Israeli jails had to be released. He sent messages to Hamas' leaders in exile urging them to reject the deal. But he was overruled by Saleh al-Arouri, a senior Hamas leader and the founding commander of its military wing, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassem Brigades (Israel assassinated al-Arouri in Beirut on Jan. 2, 2024).

"Sinwar didn't care how many Palestinians would die for their cause," Bitton recalled. For Sinwar, "there was no flexibility, no room for compromise."

While some Hamas leaders were political, Sinwar thought only about military operations and war. "He was always crystal clear: The struggle against the Jewish state must continue, no matter what he had to do." If it meant agreeing to close the tunnels between Egypt and Gaza and arresting jihadists suspected by Cairo to enhance security coordination with Egypt, a main supply route to Gaza, that was fine. If it meant trying to reconcile with the Palestinian Authority, which Hamas

had violently ousted from Gaza in 2007, by temporarily renouncing violence to pursue "peaceful, popular resistance" to Israeli occupation, which he also did in 2018, so be it. If it meant appearing on Israeli TV to call for a truce with Hamas, in Hebrew, he volunteered. His objective never wavered, though: Do whatever must be done to fight another day and free all Palestinians from jail. Sinwar believed that Israel's prisons were "a grave for us. A mill to grind our will, determination, and bodies," he said after his own release.

Having spent hours listening to Sinwar, Bitton had vigorously opposed his release, he disclosed. "I knew he was trouble, and that he would create even more trouble for us outside," he told me. But he, too, was overruled by higher authorities – in this case, the Shabak, Israel's domestic

intelligence service, then headed by Yuval Diskin. "I wasn't the head of Shabak," he said somewhat ruefully. "I was just the head of intelligence in a prison."

Days after his release, Sinwar publicly blasted the deal he had opposed in jail. He also urged Palestinians to kidnap more soldiers to secure the release of his Islamic brothers in jail. "He told me that he had an Islamic duty to ensure that no Islamic fighter would be left behind," Bitton recalls.

Bitton ultimately paid a personal price for the decision to let Sinwar go free. His 38-year-old nephew Tamir was wounded, kidnapped, and killed by the Hamas terrorists Sinwar sent to southern Gaza on October 7. "I knew when I saw the photo of Tamir

that he wouldn't make it," he said. "There was too much blood."

Three weeks after October 7, Sinwar once again proposed that all Palestinians in Israeli jails be released in exchange for the hostages Hamas had kidnapped during its killing spree and barbaric assault. Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's rejection was fast and furious. Sinwar, Netanyahu said, was a "dead man walking", vowing to kill Israel's No. 1 target in its massive offensive. Israel offered a bounty of \$400,000 for information about his location. But Sinwar has so far escaped Israel's wrath.

Last November, the Israeli Defence Forces claimed to have trapped the Hamas commander in an underground bunker after surrounding Gaza City. He escaped. Later, Israeli officials claimed he was in a tunnel in Khan Yunis. Social media carried photos at the time of a shadowy figure fleeing into a tunnel with his children and the wife he had married after his release from jail. Again, he escaped.

The Israelis now say he is moving constantly within the



A photo captured by Israeli forces apparently showing Sinwar escaping through a tunnel (Image: IDF/screenshot)


tunnel network in Rafah, Gaza's southernmost city where 1.2 million Palestinians have fled for safety. His presence there, and Israel's assertion that four Hamas battalions remain there ready to fight, are part of the justification Israel has offered for its planned land offensive in Rafah, Gaza's main supply area on the Egyptian border. Israel's military claims to have destroyed or damaged 19 of Hamas' 24 bat-

“Egyptian intelligence officials who have received Sinwar’s messages think he has “lost touch with reality.” Yet the success of Sinwar’s bloody October 7 offensive and his presence on (or under) the ground in Gaza gives him credibility and authority”

United Nations estimates, now stands at over 33,000 Palestinians. Israel estimates that it has killed approximately 13,000 Hamas fighters.

Safe in Qatar and Turkey, Hamas' leadership outside Gaza took a different view: They concluded that Israel was crushing the group and seizing ever more ground, despite increasing pressure from the West for Israel to agree to a cease-fire. Yet according to the *Journal*, Sinwar assured his confederates that despite Israel's tactical successes, Hamas' four remaining battalions in Rafah were fully prepared to withstand a likely ground assault, and that Israel would ultimately yield to Hamas' demands.

According to the *Journal*, Egyptian intelligence officials who have received Sinwar's messages think he has “lost touch with reality.” Yet the success of Sinwar's bloody October 7 offensive and his presence on (or under) the ground in Gaza gives him credibility and authority that Hamas' external leadership lacks. Practically speaking, the fighting will end when Sinwar says it does, so his assessment of Hamas' strategic position and of Israeli psychology is the one that matters.

Whether Sinwar has become demented or merely diabolical, Bitton said, the Hamas leader's hard-line stance does not surprise him. In his desire to rid Palestine of Jews for good, Sinwar has been nothing if not consistent. 

Judith Miller is a former New York Times Cairo bureau chief and investigative reporter. She is also the author of the memoir The Story: A Reporter's Journey. This article is reprinted from Tablet Magazine, at tabletmag.com, the online magazine of Jewish news, ideas, and culture. © Tablet Magazine, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

SINWAR AND THE HAMAS LEADERSHIP ABROAD

Khaled Abu Toameh

The Egyptians and Qataris have been negotiating with Hamas leaders in Qatar and Lebanon in a bid to reach an agreement that would result in a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and the release of the Israeli hostages held by the Iran-backed terror group. The Hamas team is led by Khalil al-Hayya and Ismail Haniyeh, both based in Qatar.

Al-Hayya is a member of Hamas' Politburo and deputy head of Hamas' Regional Politburo in the Gaza Strip, which Yahya Sinwar heads. Al-Hayya left the Gaza Strip in 2021, shortly after he was appointed as Hamas' liaison to Arab and Islamic countries.

In February 2017, Sinwar was secretly elected Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, taking over from Ismail Haniyeh, who is the current chairman of Hamas' Politburo. Haniyeh, too, left the Gaza Strip five years ago and has since been living in Qatar.

In recent years, several other senior Hamas officials have also left the Gaza Strip. Most have settled in Qatar, Lebanon, or Turkey.



Yahya Sinwar and his brother Mohammed, who has long been his irreplaceable right-hand man (Image: X/Twitter)

According to Palestinian sources in the Gaza Strip, the Hamas leaders who chose to leave the coastal enclave did so after falling out with Sinwar and his brother, Mohammed, a commander of Hamas' armed wing, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. “The Sinwar brothers carried out a silent coup against the veteran political leadership of Hamas,” the sources said. “Yahya and Mohammed did not tolerate any competition and ruled the Gaza Strip as if it were their private fiefdom.”

Since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war in October 2023, the Sinwar brothers, the masterminds of the Hamas invasion of Israel, have gone into hiding to avoid being captured or assassinated by Israeli security forces. The two, who have not been seen in public in the past six

months, are believed to be hiding in the southern Gaza Strip, surrounded by a handful of close and trusted aides and bodyguards.

Prior to the war, relations between the Sinwar brothers and the Hamas leadership abroad were said to be tense. The Sinwar brothers, with the help of Hamas military commanders Mohammed Deif and Marwan Issa, acted as if they were a separate group from Hamas, often refusing to accept dictates from Haniyeh and other senior Hamas officials in Qatar and Lebanon.

As part of an attempt to tighten their grip on the Gaza Strip, the Sinwar brothers opened direct channels with Iran and its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. In return, the Iranians rewarded the Gaza-based Hamas leaders with financial and military aid.

The Hamas leaders abroad, though dismayed by the open challenge to their authority by the Sinwar brothers, chose not to engage in an open confrontation with the Gaza-based leaders. From their offices in Doha and Beirut, Haniyeh and the other Hamas leaders silently watched as the Sinwar brothers pushed them to the sidelines and commandeered the terror group's armed wing.

Some Palestinians in the Gaza Strip claim that the October 7 assault on Israel caught the Hamas leaders abroad by surprise. "This shows that Sinwar and his brother don't trust the Hamas political leaders in Qatar and Lebanon," said a Palestinian political analyst in the Gaza Strip. "In light of the rupture between the Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip and the Hamas leadership abroad, it's safe to assume that there is almost no direct contact between the Sinwar brothers and Ismail Haniyeh and Khalil al-Hayya."

In the aftermath of the Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip, the disconnect between the Sinwar brothers and the Hamas leadership abroad has only deepened. It's not clear how messages are being directly communicated, if at all, between the Hamas leaders abroad, who are negotiating with the Egyptians and Qataris, and the incommu-



The Hamas leadership abroad led by Ismail Haniyeh (above) have elected to avoid open confrontation with the Sinwar brothers, despite their defiance of Hamas' political leadership (Image: X/Twitter)

nicado Gaza-based Hamas leaders.

According to an Arab diplomatic source, Yahya Sinwar recently sent an urgent message from his hideout to the Egyptians to the effect that any deal brokered by Haniyeh would be turned down by the Gaza-based leadership and Hamas' military wing. As a result, Haniyeh was forced to call off a planned visit to the Egyptian capital, Cairo.

The tensions between Hamas' "tunnel leadership" in the Gaza Strip and the terror group's leaders in Doha and Beirut are the main reason why the negotiations over a ceasefire and the release of the hostages remain stalled. The Sinwar brothers, together with the commanders of Hamas' armed wing, are worried that the group's leaders abroad are prepared to make what

they regard as unacceptable concessions to Israel as a result of immense pressure from Qatar and Egypt.

As far as the Sinwar brothers are concerned, the only thing that matters now is their personal survival and retaining control of the Gaza Strip. Apparently, they are concerned that the Hamas leaders abroad would be happy to see them either killed or forced into exile, probably to Algeria, Yemen, or Lebanon.

Given the mistrust (and disconnect) between the Gaza-based Hamas leadership and the terror group's leaders abroad, one can only wonder whether the Qataris and Egyptians are not wasting their time negotiating with representatives who do not represent the Sinwar brothers and the shambles of what remains of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades.

AIR

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“The tensions between Hamas’ ‘tunnel leadership’ in the Gaza Strip and the terror group’s leaders in Doha and Beirut are the main reason why the negotiations over a ceasefire and the release of the hostages remain stalled”

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TRAGIC ERRORS, “DISTINCTION” AND THE LAWS OF WAR

Geoffrey S. Corn

Single incidents of error in battle can and often do have a defining effect on how the public perceives the legitimacy of a war. Americans old enough to remember the name My Lai, or Abu Ghraib, will no doubt understand this. It is a manifestation of the reality of what might best be characterised as *mistake magnification*: when the world expects perfection from a professional armed force, mistakes become profoundly impactful on the perception of legitimacy.

This phenomenon is playing out at this moment in relation to the unquestionably tragic attack that left seven international aid workers dead in Gaza on April 1. Indeed, many commentators have suggested this might be a tipping point that leads to irresistible pressure on Israel to terminate its combat operations in Gaza. For his part, Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu acknowledged the deaths were the result of a mistaken attack decision, but also noted that such mistakes “happen in war”.

Yes, they do, and anyone who needs a reminder that even the most technologically advanced, robustly equipped, and highly trained military is susceptible to such mistakes need only recall the 2015 US attack that devas-

“The extent to which the world seems to ignore the impact of Hamas’ illicit tactics on such tragedies is both perplexing and disappointing”

tated a Doctors Without Borders hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan. After assisting that organisation review the US Central Command investigation into that incident, I came away convinced the attack was not the result of any illicit intent by the US military person-

nel involved, but instead a tragic error set in motion by a combination of mistakes, mishaps, and the inherent chaos of war.

When armed forces such as those of the United States or Israel are involved in such tragedies, public scrutiny and demand for credible and transparent investigations – and when justified by evidence, disciplinary action – is understandable. What is less understandable is what seems to be a unitary focus of condemnation on the side of the conflict that launched the attack, with almost no consideration of if and how the tactics of the enemy contributed to the mistake. While it is easy to recognise that an IDF attack decision was the immediate cause of the tragic deaths it produced, assessing responsibility is more complicated.

According to the most recent reports, the IDF personnel who ordered this attack relied on insufficient information to justify their decision, and several personnel have been relieved of duty and reprimanded. But this also indicates this attack was most likely launched against what these personnel assessed, albeit mistakenly, to be a valid enemy target.

The scrutiny on that attack decision is justified, and if it was either a deliberate effort to attack civilians (unlikely), or a reckless judgment as to the nature of the target (perhaps), it is deserving of disciplinary and maybe even criminal sanction (although proving such a case beyond a reasonable doubt would be challenging to say the least). But if the mistake was, considering all the circumstances of that moment, reasonable in the sense that other commanders may have made the same mistake under the same circumstances, then tragedy does not equal criminality.



Scene of a tragic error: One of the World Central Kitchen vehicles attacked on April 1 (Image: X/Twitter)

The extent to which the world seems to ignore the impact of Hamas’ illicit tactics on such tragedies is both perplexing and disappointing. It is no secret that the enemies the IDF confronts in Gaza constantly seek to complicate IDF attack decisions by failing to distinguish themselves from the civilian population and by using civilians to shield military assets. Their goal is obvious: gain tactical advantage by exploiting IDF commitment to the legal obligation to target only military personnel and objectives and to mitigate civilian risk. And when these tactics compel the IDF to conduct attacks that result in incidental harm to civilians and collateral damage to civilian property – or make a targeting mistake that results in civilians being killed – the illicit tactics produce a windfall in the strategic campaign to delegitimise and isolate Israel. The extent of this perverse benefit is apparent from the reaction to this latest tragedy.

Such tactics violate the most basic principle of the international laws of war that regulate hostilities: distinction. This principle prohibits deliberately attacking any person, place, or thing that is not reasonably assessed as a legitimate target (most notably enemy belligerent personnel).

But the principle is complemented and enhanced by rules that prohibit feigning civilian status to gain an advantage on an enemy by exploiting his respect for legal protection afforded civilians. And when such tactics result in killing or injuring an enemy, they violate the prohibition on perfidy, which is a war crime. The rule also obligates *all sides* to a conflict to refrain from placing their military assets in the midst of civilian objects.

These rules are intended to mitigate the risk of exactly what happened in Gaza with the deaths of the workers for World Central Kitchen. But it is self-evident that the protective effect of the rule that prohibits deliberately attacking civilians is significantly diluted when armed groups like Hamas engage in the illicit practice of pretending to be civilian and fail to distinguish themselves from actual civilians. In so doing, the enemy increases the risk of mistaken attack judgments that, under the circumstances, will often fall within the realm of reasonableness.

When a combatant is unable to tell the difference between enemy and civilian, the enemy may gain an advantage, but it is *always* the civilians who will pay the greatest price.

Demanding more insight into why a military as capable and competent as the IDF launched this attack is justified and important. Accountability for *unreasonable* attack judgements is essential to offset the detrimental impact of misconduct magnification. But this should not distort our understanding of how the pervasively illegal tactics employed by Hamas and other illicit organised armed groups dilute the protection the law struggles to achieve for civilians caught up in conflict. Only by demanding that *all sides* to a conflict respect international law will we have any hope of preventing such tragedies in the future. ADR

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RAFAH – SQUARING THE CIRCLE

James Jeffrey

The final major combat phase of the Gaza war, an Israeli attack on remaining organised Hamas forces in Rafah, is approaching. It was delayed due to the humanitarian crisis impacting the Gaza population and negotiations over a limited pause in fighting for release of Israeli hostages. But the “how” of the Israeli operation has produced a near breakdown between Washington and Jerusalem. The key questions in play are, first, is the Biden Administration’s preference to block any effective Rafah operation, or alternatively, to support an operation to defeat Hamas while limiting numbers of civilian deaths; second, will Israel accept American restraints?

The stakes are high. Final success against Hamas opens the door to governance of Gaza eventually by Palestinians themselves and possible peace with Israel, new life to Israeli-Palestinian relations and progress under the Abraham Accords with Arab states, and possibly durable deterrence of Iran. Success will also strengthen relations between the United States and Israel, critical for the latter’s survival, and for the former’s regional containment mission.

US concern about civilian casualties in the Gaza campaign has been growing, reaching a climax with the upcoming operation in Rafah, where more than one million displaced Gazan civilians are huddled. These strains between Washington and Jerusalem are now in the open, following the President’s State of the Union address on March 7, then Senator Chuck Schumer’s criticism of Prime Minister Netanyahu on March 14. They are reinforced by other disagreements with Netanyahu, including the Administration’s desire for the Palestinian Authority to eventually assume control of Gaza, as a first step towards a two-state solution.

Netanyahu and his coalition have long opposed such a role for the Palestinian Authority, seen as both ineffective and an obstacle to Israeli settler ambitions. After October 7, much of the Israeli public has come to support their Government’s plan, a vague joint governance of Gaza by the Israeli military and local “clean” officials, a plan few outside Israel think feasible. Washington has also been critical of Israeli foot-dragging on humanitarian assistance, although Israel has recently been doing better.

“The Israelis are generally applying the US military’s own successful model of heavy firepower and massive ground attack against the Islamic State in 2015-2019”



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A meeting between Israeli leaders and officials and their US counterparts to discuss Gaza; IDF forces inside Gaza (Images: IDF, Flickr)

But the most critical bilateral difference is the next steps against the remaining Hamas forces, holed up in Rafah. Israel seeks another full-scale operation similar to its prior clearance of some 80% of Gaza north of Rafah.

Netanyahu argues, with considerable validity and strong Israeli public support, that Israel must attack Rafah to defeat the last four battalions (roughly 4,000 troops) of organised Hamas forces and cut Hamas smuggling ties to Egypt. This would complete its war goals of dismantling Hamas as a serious threat and securing the release of hostages.

The US Administration appears horrified by the impact of a major Rafah offensive on civilians. Their situation is already dire, and a major operation could generate huge numbers of new civilian casualties and hinder already stressed humanitarian delivery. But Washington still insists it supports Israel's goal of dismantling Hamas and understands that larger peace in the region, including progress on the Israeli-Palestinian track and containment of Iran and its proxies, depends on elimination of the Hamas threat.

The Administration is thus trying to square the circle by

proposing alternative Rafah tactics, cutting off smuggling routes along the Egyptian border and more targeted Israeli attacks against Hamas, which would not generate massive civilian casualties or disrupt humanitarian deliveries.

Whether the two sides can agree on a Rafah way forward will depend first on the degree Prime Minister Netanyahu is willing to modify his military approach, but also on President Biden's willingness to support further fighting which inevitably will generate some civilian casualties, regardless of how careful Israel might be.

Following are the key considerations the two governments will face:

First is the political arena. The pressure on the President is mainly from the left wing of his Democratic Party in a dramatic presidential election year. Yet despite the horrific scenes of civilian casualties, roughly half of the American public supports Israel's war conduct.

While the Netanyahu Government is unpopular at home, most Israelis support defeating Hamas, even at the cost of delayed return of hostages. But Israelis also know that if the friction with the Biden Administration and Democratic Party is not smoothed over, Israel will become a political football between a pro-Israel Republican Party and an increasingly anti-Israeli Democratic Party, potentially fatally for its security.

On the diplomatic front, the two sides have room to manoeuvre. European and Arab states, while rhetorically critical of Israel and supportive of a permanent ceasefire now, understand that Hamas has to be defeated for Iran to be contained, and thus behind the scenes largely follow Washington's lead. Moreover, Iran and its proxies have been ineffective in relieving pressure on their ally Hamas in the face of Washington's military operations.

The key issue thus remains the tactics to finish Hamas. The Biden Administration and outside experts at times questioned whether the Israelis can even achieve their goal of "dismantling" Hamas' military power, here citing American counter-insurgency experiences. The Israelis, in response, acknowledge at least implicitly that they cannot destroy Hamas as an ideology and insurgent force, as they deal with it as such every day in the West Bank. Rather, their goal is more strategic, to remove Hamas as an offensive threat dominating Gaza and capable of new October 7 attacks, perhaps next time in

league with Hezbollah or Iran itself – an Israeli existential nightmare.

Furthermore, the Israelis are generally applying the US military’s own successful model of heavy firepower and massive ground attack against the Islamic State in 2015-2019. The Islamic State still counts thousands of fighters in the Iraqi and Syrian countryside, but no longer controls terrain or threatens those states.

In fact, the head of the West Point Urban Warfare Center John Spencer recently wrote that Israel has been following experience-proven tactics without generating historically unprecedented civilian casualties.

The Washington alternative reportedly includes Israeli control of the Egyptian border to stop smuggling of weapons, but also more “targeted” Israeli operations against Hamas in Rafah and detailed plans to protect civilians. Israel in fact could use less destructive ordinance with tighter controls and prioritise more the avoidance of civilian casualties. But that will still produce significant civilian casualties, as did US-led campaigns applying similar restraint against the Islamic State in Mosul and Raqqa, and will increase Israeli losses.

If Washington in proposing “targeted operations” means a dramatically different approach, e.g., special forces raiding similar to the American attack on Bin Laden, then Israel will likely conclude Washington is prioritising minimising civilian casualties over Israeli victory, however much Administration officials deny it.

In that case, Israel might defy President Biden, throwing the two countries’ critical relations into a deep crisis even if the Israeli offensive is successful. But if Israel accedes to an ineffective American approach, then Washington will own the Gaza Hamas problem and its dangerous spinoffs throughout the region.

To avoid either catastrophe, Israeli and US officials first should each compromise: Washington to support an operation in Rafah that will defeat Hamas and force it to negotiate a hostage release; Israel to accept restraints on timing, tactics and weapons use, and to implement a feasible civilian movement plan.

Better coordination on massively enhanced humanitar-

ian deliveries and serious cooperation on day-after Gaza security and governance are also essential. Finally, both must hold back on domestic political temptation to demoralise the other. Ultimately Americans and Israelis are in the same fight, and everyone should act accordingly. AIR

Ambassador James Jeffrey was Deputy National Security Advisor of the United States from 2007-2008. He also served as US ambassador to Iraq, Turkey and Albania, and as Special Presidential Envoy to the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS. He is currently the chair of the Middle East Program at the Wilson Center. © Jerusalem Strategic Tribune (jstribune.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

CEASEFIRE SIGNALLING IN THE SENATE

Jamie Hyams

Australia’s political response to the Israel-Hamas war has been dominated recently by the Government’s extraordinary decision to appoint a “special adviser” to oversee Israel’s independent investigation into the tragic accidental killing on April 1 of seven World Central Kitchen aid workers, including Australian Zomi Frankcom, in an Israeli drone attack – as well as by Foreign Minister Senator Penny Wong’s April 9 speech at ANU that suggested Australia may consider unilaterally recognising a Palestinian state.

Before that, however, in a significant development, the Senate passed a motion on March 26, moved by Senator Wong, calling for a Gaza ceasefire, the only time until now that the Parliament has carried such a motion. It immediately followed and referenced a UN Security Council resolution the previous day.

The UN motion, which called for an immediate ceasefire lasting the duration of Ramadan, was problematic; while it called for a ceasefire and the release of the hostages, it did not explicitly link the two. Senator Wong’s motion features the same shortcoming.

She moved:

“(a) that the humanitarian crisis in Gaza is catastrophic and hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are starving;

(b) that all parties to the conflict in Gaza comply with the United Nations Security Council’s (UNSC) demand in relation to ceasefire;

(c) that immediate action must be taken by Israel to comply with the UNSC’s demand that all barriers to the provision of humanitarian assistance at scale are removed;

(d) that Hamas comply with the UNSC’s demand for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, as well as

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Foreign Minister Senator Penny Wong and Greens Senator Jordan Steele-John (Screenshots)

ensuring humanitarian access to address their medical and other humanitarian needs. . . ”

The item actually started with Greens’ Foreign Affairs spokesperson Senator Jordan Steele-John moving a motion that “Israel’s non-compliance with the International Court of Justice is evident in the blocking of aid into Gaza and the Australian government must take action to compel. . . Israel to comply with orders of the ICJ and allow aid into all parts of Gaza at the scale needed.”

In speaking to his motion, Senator Steele-John said, “starvation, disease and dehydration continue. . . to be. . . the explicit policy of. . . Israel, wielded as a weapon of war. . . The Australian government must sanction the Prime Minister of. . . Israel and his war cabinet for the war crimes, crimes against humanity and, arguably, crimes of genocide which are the explicit policies of his cabinet and his government.”

Senator Wong then moved an amendment substituting her motion for Senator Steele-John’s. In speaking to it, she said, “Whether senators consider themselves a friend of Israelis or Palestinians or both, as I do, we should be able to come together in agreeing” on her motion.

Shadow Foreign Minister Simon Birmingham then moved his own amendment. As he explained in a statement released that night, his amendment sought to:

- *“incorporate the expectation that any immediate ceasefire incorporates the immediate and unconditional release of hostages;*
- *acknowledges that improving access to humanitarian assistance requires the cooperation of all parties, not just Israel;*
- *state that Hamas must lay down its arms and can have no*

role in the future governance of Gaza, . . .and

- *once again unconditionally condemn the heinous terror attacks of Hamas, while recognising Israel’s inherent right to defend itself.”*

In speaking to the motion, he noted that, “Hamas has been filmed and recorded looting and stealing humanitarian assistance,” and said it was important the Senate “reinforces its unconditional condemnation of Hamas for its heinous terrorist attacks and recognises Israel’s inherent right to defend itself.” He added that the suffering and loss of life were truly a result of “Hamas’s terrorist attacks, of Hamas using. . . people across Gaza as human shields.”

Greens Deputy Leader Senator Mehreen Faruqi accused the Government of “suspending UNRWA funding without a shred of evidence. . . arming Israel with military equipment to massacre Palestinians indiscriminately and bomb Gaza to dust.” She also accused Israel of genocidal slaughter, deliberately starving Palestinians and apartheid.

Fellow Greens Senator Janet Rice said the Greens demanded the Government “stop all military trade and cooperation with Israel. . . stop the transfer of information from Pine Gap that is supporting Israeli military operations. . . and. . . investigate for war crimes Australians who have served with the Israel Defense Forces in their genocidal war.”

“Greens Deputy Leader Senator Mehreen Faruqi accused the Government of ‘...arming Israel with military equipment to massacre Palestinians indiscriminately and bomb Gaza to dust.’”

Senator Birmingham’s amendment was defeated and Senator Wong’s motion was passed along party lines, with the Greens and Senators Lidia Thorpe and David Pocock voting with the Government and Senator Pauline Hanson voting with the Coalition. Other independents were absent.

Following the vote, former Greens and now independent senator Lidia Thorpe made a statement, sending “a message of solidarity to the community organisers, individuals and groups—like Unionists for Palestine, Block the Dock, Sit-Intifada and Action 4 Rafah—who are standing up against an increasingly violent and aggressive police force to call for justice and an end to the genocide.”

While all of this was overshadowed by subsequent events, it was certainly a portent of what was to come.

AIR

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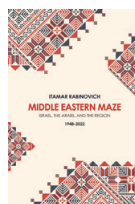
THE BIBLIO FILE

Navigating the diplomatic labyrinth

Middle Eastern Maze: Israel, the Arabs, and the Region 1948-2022

by *Itamar Rabinovich*

Brookings Institution Press, 2023, 376 pp., A\$64.98



Robert O. Freedman

This is a very rich book and well worth reading. It outlines the ups and downs of Israeli diplomacy with its Arab neighbours over the course of the past 70 years, with particular emphasis on Israeli-Syrian negotiations (in which the author took part) and on Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

First, unlike other books dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict, it emphasises the domestic political constraints on Israeli prime ministers, while not hesitating to point out the flaws in their policies. Second, while pointing out the mistakes made by both Syrian and Palestinian leaders, the book also helps the reader to understand the bargaining strategies these leaders used and the constraints, both domestic and international, they were operating under. Third, while it also discusses the role of American administrations in promoting peace-making efforts in the Middle East, the book very much subordinates that role to the motivations and actions of the Middle Eastern leaders themselves.

A final strength of the book is Chapter Ten, “The Web of Relationships” in which the author presents an encapsulated but very solid view of Israel’s relations with Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, the

Palestinians, the Israeli Arabs, and Iraq from 1948 to 2022.

As a participant-observer in Israel’s negotiations with Syria when he was Israel’s ambassador to the United States under Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Rabinovich goes into detail on the “hypothetical” agreement Rabin had suggested to Syrian leader Hafez Assad. Under this hypothetical, Rabin asked if Israel’s own demands were met – primarily security, but also normalisation on the Egyptian model – and a five-year period of implementation, would Assad be willing to make peace with Israel if Israel withdrew from the Golan Heights (p.35).

Assad’s reply was not what Rabin was looking for, as the Syrian leader demanded a six-month implementation period, opposed the term “normalisation” and demanded security for both sides “on an equal footing.” While Rabin’s negotiations with Assad did not meet with success (although, as Rabinovich notes, Assad pocketed Rabin’s “hypothetical” as an Israeli commitment to withdraw from the Golan), subsequent Israeli leaders, including PM Netanyahu, also tried to reach an agreement with Syria, their rationale being that it was easier to make peace with Syria than it was with the Palestinians with whom, especially after

the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000, their conflict was existential.

As far as the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks were concerned, Rabinovich gives an exhaustive evaluation of the 2000 Camp David II talks between Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and argues, citing Henry Kissinger, that the reason for the failure of the talks was the fact that the goals of the two sides were incompatible. Israel wanted a genuine peace that meant the end of conflict, but Arafat’s bottom line was that he could not accept Israel’s existence.

Mahmoud Abbas’ rejection of the very generous peace offer made by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in 2008, which included an end to the conflict, and the Palestinian leader’s refusal to respond to US Secretary of State John Kerry’s peace plan in 2014, would appear to support Kissinger’s theory. Rabinovich also argues that the fact that Hafez Assad had rebuffed President Bill Clinton’s gambit in March 2000 on a Syrian-Israeli peace agreement, and had done so with impunity, was not lost on Arafat, and emboldened him to do the same thing at Camp David II.

Rabinovich could have been a bit more critical of both US and Israeli beliefs that Hafez and Bashar Assad, in return for the Golan, could be pried away from their alliance with Iran and Hezbollah. This was a long-lasting alliance going back to 1982, and one on which they depended for security.

Minor disagreements aside, I would strongly recommend this book. At a time when there has been a lot of ahistorical nonsense on college campuses since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, this book should serve as a useful source for those who wish to genuinely understand the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict as it has developed since 1948.

AIR

Dr Robert O. Freedman is an Adjunct Professor in Political Science at Johns Hopkins University. © Middle East Quarterly (www.meforum.org/middle-east-quarterly), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.



Redeeming the Hostages

What price is too high?

Seth Mandel

Ron Arad and Yishai Aviram found themselves hurtling toward the earth after ejecting from their F-4 Israeli jet, dodging bullets as they floated in the air over southern Lebanon. An Israeli rescue helicopter got close enough for Aviram, and only Aviram, to make an escape right out of the movies – he grabbed the outside of the chopper and held on for dear life while it flew home. This was October 16, 1986, and it was the last time Arad would be seen by a fellow Israeli, alive or dead.

Arad’s capture by Lebanese militants that night, the failed negotiations for his release that followed, and his subsequent disappearance, have haunted the Jewish state ever since.

Yet what has haunted Israel as much as its failed efforts to exchange prisoners with its enemies are its successful ones. Indeed, Arad’s capture came in the wake of a prisoner swap that would lead directly to the birth of Hamas and the planning and execution of the first Palestinian intifada.

And the structure of that 1985 deal – in which three captured IDF soldiers were traded for a thousand convicted terrorists in Israeli prisons, including 80 tied to murders – set a precedent that has handcuffed Israeli leaders ever since.

As of this writing, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu is negotiating for the release of Israelis taken hostage by Hamas during its October 7 rampage.



Israeli PM Netanyahu with Gilad Shalit following the lop-sided 2011 prisoner swap deal that led to his freedom (Image: Isranet)

It would be the third such high-profile deal overseen by Netanyahu in the years of his premierships. The first came in 2011. It was the deal that brought home Gilad Shalit, probably the most famous captive to come back alive, after five years in captivity. The baby-faced corporal’s return was practically a national holiday in Israel. But for Israelis today, the most salient detail of the Shalit trade might be the sobering fact that one of the men released from prison in return for

Shalit’s freedom was Yahya Sinwar.

Sinwar is the operational leader of Hamas and the mastermind behind October 7, the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust. The massacre took place almost exactly 12 years after Shalit’s homecoming to the waiting arms of the same prime minister who now finds himself negotiating with Sinwar for the return of some 100 Israeli hostages – a number that includes children and the elderly.

And it confronts Israeli society with the question that weighs on its citizens every single time there is a ghost of a chance to redeem a Jew taken captive: At what price?

This is not an academic question. Israel is a Jewish state, guided not only by its religion’s laws, norms, and traditions, but shaped by the Jewish community’s experiences over millennia. And our history has much to say about redeeming captives.

In the Book of Jeremiah, we read: “Those destined for the plague, to the plague; those destined for the sword, to the sword; those destined for famine, to famine; those destined for captivity, to captivity.” For Jeremiah, each fate is worse than the one that preceded it. Therefore, captivity is the worst fate. The Talmud’s sages tell us it contains all the death and suffering of the other categories.

The great medieval Jewish scholar Maimonides’ great work, *Mishneh Torah* (1180), tells us “there is no greater mitzvah than the redemption of captives.” The *Shulchan Aruch*, the towering 16th-century code of law that remains the Jewish version of a law code, codifies that principle. But it adds one more: “Captives are not to be ransomed at an unreasonable cost, for the safety of society; otherwise, the enemies would exert every effort to capture victims.”

Thus the tension at the centre of Israel’s current predicament: We must prioritise the redemption of captives, but there is a cost that is too high.

Throughout history, that question was a literal one. Jews, just like anyone





Returning to terrorism? 80% of released Palestinian prisoners go back to their old ways (Image: Isranet)

else, could be taken hostage by pirates or other ransom-seekers. The injunction against overpaying was to discourage hostage-takers from specifically targeting Jews, with the understanding that Jewish captives would fetch a higher price because their faith demanded it; such targeting would place Jews in disproportionate danger.

Now, in an age when terrorists don't ask for money but for the release of other terrorists, by what metric do we determine what is too dear a price?

There is also a pragmatic reason for Israel's commitment to redeeming captives. It is a source of legitimacy for the IDF. As a nation with full conscription, the basic deal Israelis make with their government is this: We give you our sons and daughters, and then you give them back. The common expression in Israel is that its soldiers are "everyone's children." This is more than a mere sentimental point; it is a crucial source of military and social cohesion.

Still, it is undeniable that the Israeli negotiating strategy over the years has led to a massive increase in the price Israel is willing to pay – and to the unforeseen consequences of Israeli deaths and casualties caused by the aftermath of the deals.

In 1978, the IDF began a military campaign to push the Palestine Liberation Organisation out of southern Lebanon, whence it was launching

deadly attacks on Israeli civilians. After the operation, five Israeli soldiers – Avraham Amram and four others – were caught by Palestinian terrorists. As they began negotiations for the soldiers' release, the Israelis hoped to keep any prisoner swap to one of two parameters. The first: offer one Israeli for one jailed terrorist. The second: be willing, if necessary, to trade all the Palestinians captured *in this operation* for the Israelis taken in the same time frame. This would have mimicked a prisoners-of-war exchange between nation-states.

The Palestinian terrorists, led by Ahmed Jibril, who broke away from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine to form his own group, rejected this framework entirely. In the end, the Israelis eventually capitulated, trading 76 prisoners for Amram and the bodies of the others.

Jibril had learned an important lesson. Four years later, a team of Fatah terrorists captured eight Israeli soldiers in Lebanon. At some point as they were marching the hostages to a place they could be held, the Fatah men asked Jibril's group for help. Jibril agreed and took two of the IDF soldiers for himself.

In return for Fatah's six, Israel released all detainees in a Lebanese wartime prison camp, which the IDF had been looking to dismantle anyway, as well as 100 Palestinians in Israeli jails.

Next it was Jibril's turn. He held the two he'd taken from Fatah plus a third. As negotiations with Jibril picked up in 1984, Israel was going through an important change in its security strategy. Since its founding, Israel had, at least unofficially, made military decisions based on civilian security. If either troops or civilians *had* to be put in danger, it would always be the soldiers. But that precept was shifting. The shift was evident in the decision in 1985 to reduce the size of the zone of IDF occupation in southern Lebanon. This made life safer for Israeli soldiers – but it also increased the level of danger for citizens in northern Israel by allowing the enemy to come closer to Israel's border.

Explaining the Israeli mindset, long-time government official Moshe Arens wrote in his memoirs, published in 2018:

In Israel, a small country with compulsory military service, most adults have children or grandchildren doing military service. A soldier who has fallen is to them a child lost, a feeling also shared by their friends and neighbors. When the picture of a fallen soldier is published it is almost as if the whole country shares in the grief of the bereaved family. Thus the loss of a soldier may well touch many more of Israel's citizens than does the loss of a civilian to enemy action.

The nation's concern for the lives of its children serving in the IDF is the reason why successive Israeli governments have staged unilateral withdrawals, have hesitated to bring military operations to a decisive victory, or have failed to take preemptive military action that might ensure the safety of Israel's civilian population.

The conundrum Israel faced and faces – that its enemies may need to be confronted in a way that the society simply cannot stomach, given the dangers posed to the young men

and women who serve as its chief line of protection – was something Ahmed Jibril exploited brilliantly. In May 1985, he got Israel to agree to an unprecedented trade: Jibril would return the three IDF soldiers held by his group, and in return Israel would free 1,150 prisoners from its jails, some of whom would be chosen by Jibril himself.

Yitzhak Rabin, then the defence minister, explained the deal before the Knesset: “I see this as a supreme moral responsibility which a government, a defence minister, the state of Israel, owes each of them. This is our humane, moral obligation to the fate of an Israeli, and certainly to the fate of an IDF soldier sent into battle at our command.”

But the cost was steep. Among those released were Kozo Okamoto, the Japanese Red Army terrorist who had led a massacre of 26 people at Ben-Gurion airport (known as Lod at the time) in 1972. More consequential was Ahmed Yassin, who would found and lead Hamas at the outset of the first intifada two years later.

Also freed was Ziad Nakhleh, the current leader of Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the group’s military-wing commander during the first intifada.

Jibril himself was credited with one of the attacks that triggered that intifada, in which – in another historical echo – fighters under his command killed several Israeli soldiers after crossing from Lebanon on hang gliders. (Hamas used the vehicle’s more technologically advanced progeny, the motorised paraglider, during its October 7 attacks.)

A 2004 swap saw Israel bring home one live captive, the businessman Elhanan Tannenbaum, who had been taken by Hezbollah in 2001, in return for 435 prisoners. Former Mossad chief Meir Dagan said that one of those released in that deal, Luay Saadi, went on to set up a terror cell that killed 30 Israelis.

In general, Dagan said, recidivism by freed terrorists was high – proba-

bly 45%. According to an organisation that advocates for victims of terror, 80% of terrorists released since the Jibril deal went back to their old ways. (Not all, it has to be said, gained their liberty in hostage swaps.)


Dagan left office in January 2011. That October, Israel would complete its deal for Gilad Shalit. In June 2006, Shalit’s tank crew was ambushed by Hamas terrorists on the Israeli side of the border with Gaza. Shalit was taken back to the Strip. Two subsequent Israeli rescue operations in Gaza failed. In 2011, Netanyahu agreed to release 1,027 prisoners in Israeli jails for Shalit. Four years later, the *Times of Israel* reported that between April 2014 and July 2015, six Israelis had been murdered by prisoners released in the Shalit deal. And then came October 7, 2023.

On Jan. 30, 2024, Netanyahu spoke at a pre-military academy and said, “We will not remove the IDF from the Gaza Strip and we will not release thousands of terrorists. None of this will happen. What will happen? Absolute victory!” Meanwhile, press reports indicated that Israel and Hamas were creeping closer to a hostage deal – and if there is one, there will surely be Palestinian terrorists freed because of it.

In a 1986 essay written just at the beginning of his meteoric political rise, Netanyahu – who had made his name in part as the head of an organ-

isation called the Jonathan Institute, dedicated to the study of international terrorism – asserted that terrorist hostage-taking can be stopped with a policy of “refusal to yield and a readiness to apply force.” To the terrorist, this proposes “a simple exchange: your life for the lives of the hostages.” He acknowledged that a rescue operation isn’t always possible. Nevertheless, “governments must persist in refusing to capitulate. This is both a moral obligation to other potential hostages and, in the long view, the only pragmatic posture.”

What Netanyahu said may have been true then, and it may be true now – but it turns out that a democratic society that cherishes its children is unable to make its calculations on safety and risk with pragmatism as its guide. It’s easier to write such an essay when you’re not in power.

The ultimate dilemma for Israel is this: It is religiously and morally obliged to do everything it can to rescue Jews held hostage. At the same time, it is religiously and morally and politically obliged to defend the Jewish state as a whole. This is an irreconcilable dilemma, because its enemies are there to take advantage of the contradiction every time. 

Seth Mandel is senior editor of Commentary magazine. © Commentary (commentary.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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NOTED AND QUOTED

THE MONTH IN MEDIA

NO AID AT ALL

The tragic deaths of Australian aid worker Zomi Frankcom and six World Central Kitchen (WCK) colleagues in an Israel Defence Forces (IDF) drone strike in Gaza on the night of April 1 saw Israel face a barrage of both justified and unjustified criticism.

The *Australian Financial Review* (April 6) warned Israel that its “standing in the world... rests on a self-image of an accountable democracy... Putin might feel free to terrorise Ukrainians, nobody... expects anything better. Israel does not have that luxury.”

In the same edition, ABC chief political correspondent Laura Tingle wrote, “there is something disturbing about the fact that it has taken the killing of foreign nationals... rather than the killing of countless Palestinians, to apparently tip governments over into straight outrage.” Maybe that’s because the media rushed to portray the incident as an act of deliberate murder, rather than a terrible accident.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* (April 6) said the “indiscriminate” killings had “erased empathy around the world, and for the first time the support of Israel’s most reliable ally, the United States, has been jeopardised.”

EXTREME CLAIMS

Terrorism analyst Clive Williams in the *Canberra Times* (April 5), used the aid workers’ deaths as an opportunity to attempt to discredit Israel’s war against Hamas, including dismissing the “Israeli position on civilian casualties... that Hamas is to blame because Hamas is hiding among civilians and under medical facilities. That’s undoubtedly true – but hiding among civilians is what insurgents and terrorists normally do.”

Contrary to Williams’ insinuations, international law regards the use of human shields as a war crime, and so long as armies do what is feasible to minimise civilian casualties, they are legally entitled to do what is necessary to fight against terrorists.

On April 7, *Canberra Times* columnist Mark Kenny wrote dramatically, “Aid workers. Unarmed non-combatants endangering their own lives to save others, deliberately targeted and killed. The rocket attack which killed Zomi Frankcom and fellow humanitarian aid workers was coldly, relentlessly thorough.” Kenny’s false claim that Israel was in “defiance of a preliminary finding by the International Court of Justice of a plausible risk of genocide and an order on Israel to cease its military operation,” was challenged by AIJAC’s Jamie Hyams in a letter the *Canberra Times* published on April 9.

Mercury columnist Greg Barns (April 8), wrote “no one is buying the Israeli Defence Forces line that it was simply a ‘misidentification’ because the convoy... was clearly marked.”

QUALIFIED CRITICISM

In the *Nine Newspapers* (April 5), analyst Rodger Shanahan repeated many of the same criticisms heard elsewhere about the aid worker deaths but also noted that “in the years leading up to the conflict, little was said about Hamas’ practice of putting [Palestinian] lives at risk by militarising civilian areas as it built its tunnel systems. And there is also misinformation aplenty in the contested social media landscape – it is not that long ago that many willingly swallowed the fraudulent claim that an Israeli airstrike killed hundreds sheltering in the al-Ahli Hospital.”

News Corp columnist Joe Hildebrand (April 5) said, “I have no doubt Israel did not intend to target aid workers when it killed Frankcom and her colleagues,” and that it is subject to a “double standard”, but added “Israel... cannot decry base ruthlessness while at the same time deploying base recklessness.”

JUDGE AND JURY

ABC presenters were unafraid to simply dismiss Israeli explanations for the deaths.

Interviewing IDF spokesperson Lt. Col Peter Lerner, *ABC TV* “7.30” presenter Sarah Ferguson (April 8) concluded by saying “I’m not accepting your view that it’s a mistake.”

Likewise, on *ABC Radio National* (RN) “Drive” (April 4), host Andy Park said Israel’s “excuses are frankly beginning to wear thin.”

ON ACTIVIST DUTY

Australian columnist Chris Mitchell (April 8) criticised the ABC’s coverage of the aid incident, saying, “Questioning Israeli government spokesman Avi Hyman, [RN “Breakfast” host Sally] Sara insisted Gazans were racked by famine. She would not accept that the IDF, on the ground, disputes this, nor Mr Hyman’s correct view that arguments about famine are in fact future projections. Her next interviewee, Jeremy Konyndyk, president of Refugees International, at the end of the 17-minute segment actually confirmed the famine numbers were in fact future projections.”

CRIMES AGAINST SANITY

More extreme claims included allegations Israel deliberately killed



the aid workers as part of its plan to starve Gazans.

On *ABC RN* “Drive” (April 4), human rights lawyer Regina Weiss said, “not only was it an intentional attack on civilians, but we can go further and say this was a war crime of intentionally using starvation as a method of warfare.”

On *ABC RN* “Late Night Live” (April 8), Crikey’s Bernard Keane said “there have been credible, independent international bodies that have

accused Israel of using starvation as a weapon of war. And here was, um, an organisation, uh, primarily engaged in food aid being targeted... seemingly deliberately by the IDF.”

In the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* (April 9), UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Counterterrorism Ben Saul claimed that Israel has “flouted multiple binding orders of the International Court of Justice to allow more aid and the demand of the UN Security Council to cease fire to

facilitate aid. The starvation of civilians is a war crime.”

Israel has placed no restriction on the amount of aid that can enter Gaza, and amounts have been increasing dramatically in recent weeks.

VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

On *ABC TV* “Breakfast” (April 5), visiting AIJAC guest and veteran Israeli commentator Ehud Ya’ari explained the WCK incident happened



IN PARLIAMENT

Prime Minister **Anthony Albanese** (ALP, Grayndler) and Acting Foreign Minister Senator Katy Gallagher (ALP, ACT) joint statement – April 14 – “Australia condemns Iran’s attacks on Israel... This escalation is a grave threat to the security of Israel and the entire region... Australia continues to support regional security, including that of Israel.”

Foreign Minister Senator **Penny Wong** (ALP, SA) speech – April 9 – “Israel... must make major and immediate changes to... protect civilians, journalists and aid workers... We are now thirty years on from the Oslo Accords that put Palestinian statehood at the end of a process. The failures of this approach by all parties over decades – as well as the Netanyahu Government’s refusal to even engage on the question of a Palestinian state – have caused widespread frustration. So the international community is now considering the question of Palestinian statehood as a way of building momentum towards a two-state solution.”

Senator Wong media release – April 8 – “Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin (Rtd) will serve as Special Adviser to the Australian Government on Israel’s response to the [IDF] strikes which killed Zomi Frankcom, and six of her... colleagues... The Special Adviser will provide advice... regarding any further representations or actions that could be taken to ensure a full and transparent investigation and to hold those responsible to account.”

Anthony Albanese television interview – April 3 – “To have aid workers... assisting... the people of Gaza... killed in this way is completely unacceptable. The targeting of these people is just a tragedy.”

Shadow Education Minister **Sarah Henderson** (Lib., Vic.) media release – April 12 – “We have seen no action... against the terrible wave of antisemitism at some university campuses which has left many Jewish students and academics fearful for their safety.”

Senator **Janet Rice** (Greens, Vic.) valedictory speech – March 26 – “The starving of the population [in Gaza] is genocide not self-defence, and it is shameful that this Senate still has a motion on the books that says we stand with Israel.”

Senator **Penny Allman-Payne** (Greens, Qld) – March 25 – “The actions of the United States in supporting the Israeli government... while we see war crime after war crime... risks destabilising Australia.”

Senator **Claire Chandler** (Lib., Tas.) – March 25 – “In December... the coalition called on the government to impose more targeted sanctions against high-ranking Hamas officials... in supporting Israel’s campaign to disable Hamas and prevent it from committing such atrocities again.”

Tony Zappia (ALP, Makin) – March 25 – “Whilst the Hamas leadership and the Israeli Prime Minister fight for military ascendancy and their own political survival, innocent Israeli and Palestinian people are dying.”

Senator **David Shoebridge** (Greens, NSW) moving a motion to end all military trade with Israel – March 25 – “this government is content... to send weapons... to Israel to literally fuel the genocide, and... welcomes signing new contracts... for equipment that is literally being tested on the Palestinian people.” (Only the Greens and Senator **Lidia Thorpe** supported the motion.)

Max Chandler-Mather (Greens, Griffith) moving the same motion in the House – March 25 – “Palestinians... suffer under the worst famine since World War II.”

Elizabeth Watson-Brown (Greens, Ryan) seconding the motion – “Israel... continues targeting civilians in hospitals... Today, more than 100,000 people have been murdered or are injured or missing.” (Only the Greens supported the motion.)

Greens Deputy Leader Senator **Mehreen Faruqi** (NSW) – March 21 – “Minister, what will it take for the Labor government to withdraw its support for the apartheid and genocidal state of Israel?”

Maria Vamvakinou (ALP, Calwell) – March 20 – “... A war that is arguably the deadliest conflict of the 21st century... The Israeli army... rages against a civilian population that it besieges, kills, displaces and starves.”

Graham Perrett (ALP, Moreton) – March 19 – “The people of Gaza are... living with daily bombings, deaths and starvation, mainly because of Israel’s refusal to let enough food into Gaza... How could anyone perpetrate such an act of barbarism on children?”

at night and that this is “a very complex area, very difficult for military operation, because Hamas has immersed itself intentionally for years within the civilian population. And we have mistakes in a war like this, which is unprecedented in such densely urban area with 600km of tunnels.”

COUNTERBALANCE

In the Hobart *Mercury* (April 12), AIJAC’s Allon Lee dispelled some of the myths surrounding the incident.

He corrected claims the Israelis must have seen the logo of World Central Kitchen on the vehicles, by noting it happened at night and “the only way Israeli forces could see the vehicles was via drones that used thermal imaging, not visual light.”

Lee explained that “an independent Israeli investigation led by a retired general concluded that the killings were ‘a grave mistake’ stemming from miscommunication and misidentification, namely a genuine belief by local commanders that Hamas fighters – who had been seen going into a depot with the aid convoy – and not aid workers, were in the vehicles in question.”

Nonetheless, “the investigation found the decision to fire on the convoy was taken in clear violation of standing orders. Two senior officers involved were fired,” he wrote.

He also quashed the deliberate starvation theory, noting that before the incident, there were 6,000 successful and safe IDF “coordination events” with aid organisations, with nothing similar to the WCK convoy tragedy ever happening before.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Writing in the *Australian* (March 25), analyst Paul Monk panned claims that Gaza is about to face the world’s worse famine.

Monk said the United Nations has predicted “1.1 million people in Gaza are facing famine and possible starva-

tion between now and May due to the war.”

But, Monk noted, the World Food Program has reported that 4.35 million people in Haiti are facing extreme hunger, with 1.4 million on the brink of starvation.

He also questioned a UN official’s claim that “this is the highest number of people ever recorded as facing catastrophic hunger.”

Monk wrote, “there have been terrible famines in the past century that killed millions... such as in Stalin’s USSR, Mao’s China or Mengistu’s Ethiopia.”

CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR

Many commentators welcomed the Government’s decision to appoint former defence force chief Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin as Special Adviser to scrutinise Israel’s investigation into the incident.

This included Ben Saul, who told *ABC RN* “Breakfast” (April 8), “I think it’s an important step because there is a very long history of Israel giving essentially impunity to its own forces where allegations of violations have occurred.”

But in the *Australian* (April 9), analysts Anthony Bergin and Michael Shoebridge challenged the Government’s decision, writing, “Australia is not coming to this issue with clean hands or credibility,” warning that “we’re creating a serious risk of setting a precedent that could come back to bite us.”

The pair cited the failure of “our government and military[’s]... handling [of] allegations into war crimes by ADF personnel in Afghanistan. These allegations date back to conduct between 2005 and 2016 – beginning almost two decades ago – and there have still been no legal proceedings to test the evidence in court or hold anyone responsible.”

In the *Daily Telegraph* and *Courier Mail* (April 10), AIJAC Visiting Fel-

low Greg Rose called the decision to appoint a Special Adviser “unprecedented” and a “diplomatic insult”.

Professor Rose wrote, “Several other countries’ civilian nationals have been accidentally harmed by past Australian Defence Forces operations – including those of Afghanistan and Indonesia. Can they now demand their own special advisors’ access to and oversight of ADF investigation and disciplinary processes? And would we let them?”

On the *Australian* website (April 9), AIJAC’s Colin Rubenstein said that world leaders who call for an immediate ceasefire because of the deaths risked falling straight into Hamas’ trap.

“Everyone seems to be forgetting Israel has repeatedly offered Hamas a six-week ceasefire deal, along with numerous other concessions” and Hamas has refused, “demanding Israel instead completely withdraw from Gaza and effectively allow Hamas to continue ruling the area in exchange for any hostage release,” he wrote.

UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS

Media interest in the aid worker deaths was overtaken by Foreign Minister Penny Wong’s speech on April 9 suggesting the Government might recognise a Palestinian state.

On *Nine’s* “Today Show” (April 11), host Karl Stefanovic asked Australian PM Anthony Albanese what would be done about Hamas because “separating Hamas and a Palestinian state... it’s just about impossible, isn’t it?”

On *ABC RN* “Breakfast” (April 11), head of the General Delegation of Palestine to Australia Izzat Abdulhadi said, “Hamas is a part of the Palestinian people. Hamas is a philosophy. Hamas is an idea.”

Earlier, on *ABC RN* “Saturday Extra” (March 23), Israeli peace activist Gershon Baskin said, “it’s time” for Australia, “which has talked about a two-state solution for 30 years, to

recognise the other of the two states as well. That would help us eliminate Hamas as a political factor that threatens Israel and threatens the region.” But he didn’t explain how this would actually work.

PIERCING ANALYSIS

Instead of recognising a Palestinian state, *Daily Telegraph* columnist Piers Akerman (April 7) said the Government should “demand that Qatar stop hosting key Hamas leaders” and as “a principal funder of Hamas, pressure the terrorists to immediately release the remaining 134 hostages.”

Akerman accused the Government of “playing the emotional card, as is the ABC with its relentless prosecution of heart-rending pleas from aid organisations for a unilateral ceasefire with no demands on Hamas to release its captives or stop using Gazans as human shields.”

HOSPITAL MILITARY OPERATION

On *ABC RN* “Breakfast” (March 22), Israeli journalist Akiva Eldar explained that the IDF returned to Gaza’s main hospital al-Shifa to root out hundreds of Hamas fighters who were there and had taken patients hostage.

Eldar also explained the high Palestinian death toll during the war: “I blame Hamas for sacrificing tens of thousands of people, children and women, for nothing... they know... Israel is not going anywhere. And at the end of the day... we will have to reach a political solution, final settlement of a two-state solution, which Hamas is not willing to consider, as well as Prime Minister Netanyahu.”

ACTING OUT

The *Adelaide Advertiser* (March 22) criticised vociferously anti-Israel Jewish actor Miriam Margolyes, who said at a public event that too many Jews

lack compassion towards Palestinians suffering in Gaza during the Hamas-Israel war, which meant that “Hitler had won”.

The paper said Margolyes “doesn’t have a strong grasp on history” and that the war began with Hamas’ “barbaric attack” on October 7, which left Israel “no other option than to defend itself.”

RISKY BUSINESS

ABC Middle East correspondent Allyson Horn’s report on “Foreign Correspondent” (March 14) and an accompanying online article focused on the rise in gun ownership in Israel post-October 7 and how Israeli Arabs have fared.

Horn’s online article said lawyer Adi Mansour of the radical Adalah Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel is more fearful since October 7 of being shot by Israeli Jews.

However, Israeli Arabs are statistically far more likely to be killed by other Arabs. In 2023, 241 of the 299 non-terrorist murders committed in Israel involved only Arabs. Since October 7, there have been very few reports of violence between Arabs and Jews inside Israel.

FREE THE AGENCY

Nine Newspapers’ columnist Waleed Aly (March 22) questioned the Australian Government’s decision to suspend its funding to the controversial organisation UNRWA, which it subsequently reversed.

Aly said that given the Government’s assertion UNRWA does life-saving work that no one else can, it “seems near-certain that Palestinian civilian deaths turned out to be the more acceptable risk” than continuing funding for an organisation accused of having a small number of staff members who were alleged to have helped carry out Hamas’ October 7 massacre.

The *Australian’s* Paul Kelly (March

20) said the Government should have heeded former Australian ambassador to Israel and current Liberal NSW Senator Dave Sharma, who had warned that “UNRWA has been infiltrated and co-opted by Hamas. Many of its employees are members of Hamas. Its schools and hospitals are repurposed by Hamas as military facilities. Its aid is diverted to support Hamas military aims. These are ingrained structural features of the UNRWA in Gaza, not anomalies.”

A MODERN MIRACLE

On *ABC RN* “Religion & Ethics Report” (March 27) Palestinian Christian priest William Shomali discussed the plight of Christians in the Middle East, who have “suffered a lot in the last decades from wars, from instability.”

However, “there is one optimistic point,” he said, citing Israel and Palestine, as a place where “our numbers are not decreasing.”

In fact, the Christian population is only increasing in Israel. After the Palestinian Authority was established in 1994, Christian numbers there plummeted.

BY SAIKAL

Writing in the *Nine Newspapers* (April 2), academic Amin Saikal claimed that the Biden Administration’s decision to abstain and not veto a UN Security Council resolution on March 25 marked “an unprecedented rift in US-Israeli relations and comes amid Washington’s growing frustration with Netanyahu’s conduct of the Gaza war.”

Although the resolution called for a cease fire until the end of Ramadan and for the release of hostages in Gaza, as White House National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby explained, “it’s a nonbinding resolution. So, there’s no impact at all on... Israel’s ability to continue to go after Hamas... it does not represent a change at all in our policy.”

Allon Lee

BEYOND ALL RECOGNITION?

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong’s April 9 speech hinting that Australia might recognise a Palestinian state before a peace deal is reached received a mixed response.

Some commentators were unwilling to credit the speech as significant.

In the *Canberra Times*, Mark Kenny (April 11) said, “Flipping a paradigm to instead drive peace via Palestinian statehood is hardly brave at all.”

Writing in the *Australian Financial Review* (April 12), ABC chief political correspondent Laura Tingle said recognition “shouldn’t have actually been that controversial... A two-state solution and recognition of Palestine are, after all, official Labor Party policy.”

In the same vein, Australian Palestine Advocacy Network President Nasser Mashni told *Sky News* (April 10) the Government should just recognise a Palestinian state as per Labor’s platform, and placing conditions on doing so “reeks of some sort of colonialism.”

Other voices expressed doubts for different reasons.

On *ABC Radio* “World Today” (Oct. 10), former Australian Ambassador Bob Bowker said Hamas’ October 7 massacre had “set... back the Palestinian cause for decades” and Australia should instead focus on its own national interests.

Meanwhile, on *ABC Radio* “PM” (April 10), former Australian diplomat Ian Parmeter said a two-state peace was contingent on no Hamas involvement, but “we really don’t know whether [that’s] even feasible... And if it can’t be, that’s going to be a big problem.”

In the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* (April 12), journalist David Leser argued Israeli settlements have made creating a Palestinian state an impossibility.

Many commentators said recognition would be seen as a reward for Hamas’ October 7 massacre.

Tim Blair in the *Daily Telegraph* (April 10) said the announcement should “forever be known” as “Penny Wong’s Hamas appeasement speech” and “may stand as Australia’s greatest diplomatic disgrace.”

The *Australian’s* Foreign Editor Greg Sheridan (April 10) stressed that Israelis will want a guarantee that a Palestinian state will not become a base for “continuing attacks on Israel like October 7. Yet no Palestinian leadership could, or even would, offer such a guarantee today or in the conceivable future.”

Nine Newspapers’ international editor Peter Hartcher (April 11) scoffed that “There was no proposal. There was no plan. [Wong] spoke of a concept with all the substance of a cloud and left it floating as lonely as one.”

In the same edition, Hartcher’s colleague David Crowe wrote Wong had made statehood conditional on “Hamas... a terrorist organisation... not be[ing] part of a Palestinian state... the Palestinian Authority needed to be reformed

to make statehood possible... and she was crystal clear that the Palestinian state must not pose any security threat to Israel. Will those conditions ever be met?”

Crowe doubted Hamas could be quarantined, noting “Hamas

gained control of Gaza because it had popular support – and it appears to retain that support to this day.”

The next day, Nine Newspapers’ Matthew Knott incorrectly claimed that the two-state solution has “languish[ed]... since Bill Clinton failed to broker a historic breakthrough at the Camp David summit in 2000.” After an offer at Taba in early 2001, 2008 saw current Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas reject an Israeli offer to create a Palestinian state that was better than the 2000 offer. Six years later Abbas pulled the plug on negotiations, but only after the Obama Administration had tried hard to mediate a two-state “framework for peace” which Israeli PM Netanyahu had implicitly endorsed.

In the *Age* (April 12), AIJAC’s Colin Rubenstein welcomed Wong’s comments that Hamas could have no role in Gaza but noted that “Many Palestinians would undoubtedly see such recognition as a major national achievement enabled by Hamas’ barbaric mass violence.” Rubenstein also said recognition would provide a “disincentive for the Palestinian Authority to undertake the reforms... it needs before it could become the nucleus of a Palestinian state.”

In the *Canberra Times* (April 17), AIJAC’s Ahron Shapiro quoted Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas’ own words disavowing recognition as a stepping stone to peacemaking.

“He wrote in the *New York Times* that ‘Palestine’s admission to the United Nations [as a member state] would pave the way for the internationalization of the conflict.’ What really mattered to him was finding more international forums in which to campaign against Israel. He went on to fantasise how overnight ‘Palestine would be negotiating from the position of one United Nations member whose territory is militarily occupied by another.’ Notice he didn’t say ‘negotiating peace’,” Shapiro wrote.

“Tim Blair in the *Daily Telegraph* (April 10) said the announcement should ‘forever be known’ as ‘Penny Wong’s Hamas appeasement speech’”

THE LAST WORD

Rabbi Ralph Genende

THE INIQUITY OF *SCHADENFREUDE*

On the night of Saturday April 13, the skies over Jerusalem lit up in a surreal scene like something out of Star Wars. Yet this was no movie, but the barrage of missiles and drones launched from Iran being intercepted. At that time a friend of mine was driving out of Jerusalem towards his home in Tel Aviv. As he drove past several Arab villages, he noticed flares above them. His first thought these were part of the Iranian barrage, but quickly realised they were in fact fireworks in celebration of the onslaught on Israel.

Indeed, across the Arab world there were scenes of jubilation. This is of course nothing new – the celebration of the murderous behaviour of *shahids* (“martyrs”) by the Palestinian Authority, the handing out of lollies and partying at the at the downfall and slaughter of Jews is not unfamiliar. In fact, it’s an element of Jewish history from the Crusades and pogroms to the Shoah and Hebron in 1929. In Australia after October 7, there were similar celebrations supporting Hamas’ massacre.

American author Dara Horn has written how shortly after the October 7 attacks, a Cornell professor publicly proclaimed the barbarity “exhilarating” and “energising”, while a Columbia professor called it “awesome” and an “achievement”.

Thinking about these reactions as we approach the Passover holiday, I wondered whether it is a natural response of human beings to hate those who oppose them and to take pleasure in their suffering or downfall. The German word for it is *schadenfreude*, the experience of joy at the failures of another – a type of feeling good when others feel bad. The Japanese say, “The misfortunes of others taste like honey.”

While this may be understandable in some social situations, it is surely inadequate and deeply disturbing in the context of the deep-seated hatred directed at Israel and Jews, and the toxic antisemitism that we are currently experiencing across

the world. It speaks of an entrenched hatred of Judaism, the kind David Nirenberg (author of *Anti-Judaism*) identifies as a failing inherent in Western cultures – including ancient civilisations, classic Christianity, Islam and post-religious societies.

This hatred has little to do with actual Judaism, and a lot to do with whatever evil these non-Jewish cultures aspire to overcome. Horn calls it a deep neural groove in

Western thought which forces Jews into the defensive mode of constantly proving they are *not* evil, and even that they have a right to exist.

I find the celebrations of Jewish suffering utterly dehumanising and depressing. I like to think that we draw our sanity and morality from the book of Proverbs (24:17): If your enemy fails don’t exalt, if they trip and stumble don’t gloat.

At *Pesach* time, Jews are reminded that we didn’t lose our moral compass in Egypt despite the brutality of our enemies. Our sages embedded in the *seder* the reminder not to rejoice at the downfall of our enemies, to let the wine drip out at the mention of each plague, because our cup of celebration can’t be full to the brim if redemption was brought about as the result of the destruction of other human beings.

They also reminded us that only the people of Israel – recently-released slaves, downtrodden and suffering – were allowed to express their joy at the drowning of the Egyptian enemy in the Red Sea. When the angels wished to join in, God admonishes them saying, “The work of my hands is perishing, and you sing praises to me?”

Judaism has always recognised the brokenness of our world, the tragic necessity of war and the imperative to defend ourselves in the face of malign enemies. It calls on us to be the champions of love and justice in an unloving, unjust world. In its ethos and its liturgy, Judaism continues to pray that our enemies will recognise the poverty of their humanity when they rejoice over our suffering, and for empathy and compassion to vanquish antipathy and brutality.



The anti-Israel *schadenfreude* which followed the Iranian attack on Israel represents the disturbing side of human nature (Image: X/Twitter)



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