



SPECIAL EDITION OCTOBER 7: ONE YEAR LATER

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This special edition of the *AIR* commemorates one year since the Hamas campaign of mass-murder, rape, torture and kidnapping in southern Israel on October 7, 2023 – reviewing the story of this past year of war, and how that shattering day has changed Israel and the Jewish people.

We lead with a perspective on what Israelis are thinking and feeling today from Ilan Evyatar, while Ahron Shapiro reviews what some of Israel's top strategic experts have concluded based on the past year of war. Jonathan Schanzer examines the current state of the war in Gaza and what must now be done to wrap it up, while Charlotte Lawson reports on current Israeli political controversies and divisions regarding the proposed hostages-for-ceasefire deal with Hamas. Plus, Colin Rubenstein explains what much of the world still fails to understand about the current war, even after a year of fighting.

In addition, don't miss former Human Rights Watch employee Danielle Haas' exploration of the ideological anti-Zionism and corruption which now dominates the NGO world; Herb Keinon on the implications of the remarkable "exploding Hezbollah paggers" story; and Neomi Neumann's analysis of the IDF's current efforts to confront Iranian-Hamas efforts to turn the West Bank into another Gaza.

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

Tzvi Fleischer

ON THE COVER

A man takes a photo of murder victims strewn across a road following a mass-infiltration by Hamas gunmen from the Gaza Strip, in the Sderot area, southern Israel, October 7, 2023

(Image: REUTERS/Ammar Awad/ AAP)



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Print Post Approved – 100007869www.aijac.org.au**FROM THE EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN**
COLIN RUBENSTEIN**AFTER A YEAR OF WAR**

It is one year since Hamas' bloodthirsty invasion of southern Israel, which killed almost 1,200 Israelis and saw more than 200 hostages abducted to Gaza. Yet the international community appears further than ever from understanding what this war is all about.

Hamas launched the war knowing Israel would have no choice but to conduct a major campaign to destroy Hamas' ability to threaten it in future.

The day after Hamas attacked, Hezbollah initiated its own bombardment against Israel from Lebanon. Other Iranian proxies, such as the Houthis in Yemen and Iraqi Shi'a militias, were similarly recruited into the war effort. Finally, in April, Teheran removed its mask and attacked Israel directly in a long-range missile and drone barrage thwarted with the participation of the US and its regional allies. Hamas had hoped for even more from the Iranian axis, but nevertheless clearly is not fighting alone.

What does Hamas want? Just over two weeks after the attack, Ghazi Hamad from Hamas' Political Bureau told Lebanese television that "we must remove [Israel] because it constitutes a security, military and political catastrophe to the Arab and Islamic nation."

Hamad's failure to cite Palestinian liberation or nationalism as a goal was no accident. Hamas is not seeking Palestinian statehood, demanding an end to the "occupation" of the West Bank, or reacting to Israeli policies. It may occasionally allude to such grievances, but as Hamad made clear, Hamas' behaviour is driven by beliefs about Israel's existence as an insult and danger to Islam.

Hamad also vowed that Hamas would re-enact October 7 "again and again", regardless of how many Palestinian civilians are killed in the process, until Israel is annihilated.

In flagrant violation of international law, Hamas has been using all of Gaza's civilians as human shields and hospitals, schools and even humanitarian tent camps as command-and-control centres and staging points for rocket launches, sniper nests and ambushes.

Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar has declared that the civilian losses made inevitable by Hamas tactics are necessary sacrifices. Meanwhile, from the safety of a television studio in Lebanon, Hamad insisted, "We are a people of martyrs."

Iran has spent decades and billions of dollars creating a network of terror proxies surrounding Israel and is quite open that it seeks the Jewish state's complete destruction. Furthermore, its leaders today believe they are winning.

How can they be, when Hamas' military capability is so heavily degraded and most of the West agrees, at least in principle, that Hamas must not be allowed to rebuild its military capability or continue its rule over Gaza?

As Israeli military strategist Major General (res.) Gershon Hacoen has written during the war, the Iranians, Hamas and other jihadist groups are following the logic of *muqawama* (resistance), which "amounts to a different cultural view of the phenomenon of war itself. In the West, war is seen as a deviation from a stable order... managed with the aim of restoring a state of peace... Within the framework of *muqawama*, fighting is oriented towards maintaining and preserving a continuous momentum of friction and struggle" – forever, if necessary.

According to Hacoen, *muqawama* features two faith-based principles. First, the believer must take some sort of action to further Islamic dominance and end perceived insults to Islam. Second, the believer must acknowledge the limitations of current realities, and act with patience (*sabr*, in Arabic), accepting sacrifice and loss without abandoning the eternal struggle.



These beliefs explain how Hamas, Iran’s mullahs, and other Islamist extremist groups can be so cavalier about the parlous wellbeing of the Palestinian people as long as they can exploit the people’s suffering to further their extremist worldview.

Hamas’ willingness to sacrifice Gaza’s civilians by fighting in a manner guaranteed to put them in harm’s way has in fact proven to be a powerful tool in its arsenal.

The IDF can point to having achieved the best ratio of combatant to non-combatant deaths in the history of modern urban warfare. Military historians can agree it has made unprecedented efforts to try to evacuate civilians from areas likely to come under attack. Contrived global panic over the supposed bloodbath certain to be caused by the IDF’s entry into Hamas’ last stronghold of Rafah can be comprehensively disproven by what actually happened. Yet Israel’s war effort is constantly vilified and denounced because Hamas made sure it would occur under conditions that would guarantee substantial civilian deaths, no matter what tactics the IDF used. Plus, Hamas controls the office that has been providing flawed casualty figures to the UN and a largely credulous media throughout the war.

Meanwhile, in Ramallah, the corrupt, bankrupt and foreign aid-dependent Palestinian Authority, which rewards terrorists with life-long stipends, has been trying to hitch a free ride on Hamas’ coattails.

Earlier this year, in violation of the Oslo Accords that gave the Palestinian government its legitimacy, it lobbied for and received upgraded status at the UN, where it now uses its new privileges for lawfare against Israel. It has now sponsored a wildly extreme General Assembly resolution

“A year in, Israel’s war in Gaza appears to be drawing to a close. However, the Iranian axis’ war of annihilation against Israel – driven by the *muqawama* doctrine – has only just begun”

that not only demands that Israel ends its ‘unlawful presence’ in all of Gaza and the West Bank within one year, but calls for a global arms embargo against Israel, global boycotts on almost all Israeli companies and Israeli reparation payments to the Palestinians. It also declares Israel an “apartheid state”, setting up an “an international commission of inquiry” to effectively dismantle it as a Jewish homeland.

In other words, Hamas’ unspeakable actions on October 7 are becoming the catalyst for an attempt in the international community to impose via coercion all the extremist demands of the Palestinian leadership, without any requirement they

agree to live in peace with Israel. Yet shamefully Australia abstained, rather than opposing this resolution.

A year in, Israel’s war in Gaza appears to be drawing to a close. However, the Iranian axis’ war of annihilation against Israel – driven by the *muqawama* doctrine – has only just begun.

Disappointingly, here in Australia our Government has, far too often over the past year, accepted a Hamas-framed narrative about real-time war events, effectively rewarded the Palestinians for Hamas’ murderous terrorism, and treated Iran with kid gloves, while using our long-standing democratic partner Israel as a political punching bag even as it engages in the fight of its life.

Hopefully it is still not too late for the Albanese Government to join the morally principled Peter Dutton-led Opposition, open its eyes to see through the cloud of obfuscation that has been masking Iran’s terrible gamble, and recognise that this is an ongoing civilisational fight that not only Israel, but the entire West, cannot afford to lose. AIR

“” WORD FOR WORD

“Hamas as a military formation no longer exists. Hamas is engaged in guerrilla warfare and we are still fighting Hamas terrorists and pursuing Hamas leadership.”

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant (Times of Israel, Sept. 10).

“Today, in the West Bank, within the 1948 borders, and in the diaspora, the escalation of this conflict is required. Today... we have seen some successful early signs of martyrdom operations. We want to go back to the martyrdom operations.”

Former Hamas political leader Khaled Mashal calling for renewed suicide bombings (MEMRI, Aug. 28).

“The only step that will stop Israeli arrogance, Israeli banditry, and Israeli state terrorism is the alliance of Islamic countries.”

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Reuters, Sept. 8).

“Hamas did change some of the terms of the exchange, and that has made it more difficult for us to get there... We still believe that, even [with] the new amendments that Hamas has made, that it’s still worth an effort to try to see if we can’t get back into a ceasefire negotiation.”

US National Security Communications Adviser John Kirby (White House, Sept. 10).

“Please allow me, brothers and sisters, to... ask Allah to have mercy on those tens and thousands of martyrs who were killed by the Israeli oppression and genocide... The latest massacre... was the crime against the leader martyr Ismail Haniyeh... We are implementing Sharia [law]; we seek victory or martyrdom... The Palestinian people are not just defending Palestine... we are at the forefront of defending the Arab and Islamic nations against... the aspirations of the Zionist movement seeking to control the entire region.”

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in a speech before Turkish parliament (JNS, Aug. 15).





SCRIBBLINGS

Tzvi Fleischer

WHAT AILS JOURNALISM?

The overwhelming majority of Australian Jews would agree that the last year has seen some truly shocking reporting and “analysis” coming out of elements of the local media. Immediately after October 7, there were numerous journalistic efforts to explain that there was a “context” to Hamas’ campaign of mass murder and rape that made it understandable. Since then, media misconduct and blatant unprofessionalism have been a constant problem – recall the al-Ahli hospital lies, media defences of the doxxing of Jewish creatives and other examples of overt antisemitism by the anti-Israel protest movement, and the megaphone offered to the ugly and extremist campus protests by many outlets, alongside many other incidents.

Matti Friedman, a reporter and editor in the Jerusalem bureau of the Associated Press (AP) news agency from 2006 to 2011, has just written something that goes a long way towards explaining what is causing such shoddy journalism.

Previously, Friedman has written on a number of occasions about the ways in which he witnessed the news from Israel being slanted by editors with an agenda at AP. He cites numerous examples, but perhaps the most dramatic is that all Associated Press reporters were ordered not to cover – at all – the peace offer proposed to PA President Mahmoud Abbas by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in 2008. This offer – which Abbas later said he rejected “out of hand” even though it promised the Palestinians a state on land equivalent to all of the West Bank and Gaza with a capital in Jerusalem – simply did not fit the narrative about Israel and the Palestinians his editors wanted to convey. So, readers were not to be told about it.

Friedman’s new essay in the US-based *Free Press*, titled “When We Started to Lie”, offers important insights into what drives many of today’s journalists and editors when they make decisions like that one – and similar decisions we have seen since October 7.

Here is his description of how journalism has been transformed:

Starting out as a journalist, I knew the fundamental question to ask when reporting a story. It was: What is going on?

When I left the AP after nearly six years, I’d learned that the question was different. It was: Who does this serve?

You may think that a news story is meant to serve readers, by conveying reality. I thought so. What I found, however, was that the story was more often meant to serve

the ideological allies of the people in the press. If your ideology dictates that Israeli Jews are symbols of racism and colonialism, and Palestinians symbols of third-world innocence, then a story that makes Israelis seem constructive and Palestinians obstructive must be avoided even if it’s true, because it serves the wrong people.

And Friedman has some valuable insights in his essay about how this process has worked in practice:

By selectively emphasizing some facts and not others, by erasing historical and regional context, and by reversing cause and effect, the story portrayed Israel as a country whose motivations could only be malevolent, and one responsible not only for its own actions but also for provoking the actions of its enemies. The activist-journalists, I found, were backed up by an affiliated world of progressive NGOs and academics who we referred to as experts, creating a thought loop nearly impervious to external information...

Journalists devoted to asking first of any story “Who does this serve” seems exactly right to me in explaining what is afflicting journalism, and indeed, far too much of Western society these days (for instance, social media). Many people today appear to judge everything in terms of, “Does this fact, or event, or story or meme or picture or utterance help my ‘cause’?” And if it doesn’t, it must be spun so it does support that cause, or else discredited, or else marginalised as unimportant or, better still, never acknowledged as existing at all.

Moreover, when a journalist or intellectual asks about some event or data point “Who does this serve?”, they usually seem to consult a hierarchy of values based on “levels of power and oppression” which is supposed to tell them who a “good” anti-racist and compassionate person should be seeking to make the news serve.

According to theories of structural racism and sexism, which both academia and, more recently, popular culture have been emphasising, anti-racism and compassion means always serving women above men, LGBTIQ+ people above straight people, people of colour above white people, developing world people above people from wealthy countries, disabled people over non-disabled people, etc. And for historical reasons, this hierarchy also places Jews near the very bottom of this value hierarchy – and Palestinians near the very top.

Needless to say, I think this tendency to approach every event in terms of “Who does this serve?” – especially but not exclusively in journalism – is terrible for the Jewish people. But as Friedman further notes, it is also terrible for democracy, where our political “institutions have sunk into the Manichaean fantasy world” ideological activists have helped create, while “huge swaths of the public know what they’re supposed to support, but lack the tools to grasp what’s going on.”



MORE FATAH FOLLIES

Last month, I collected some examples of officials from the supposedly moderate Palestinian Authority, controlled by Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party, engaging in violent and often antisemitic rhetoric demanding Israel's violent destruction little different from what Hamas says. Here are a couple more examples from just the last month:

Fatah Revolutionary Council member Bayan Al-Tabib said on official Fatah radio on Sept. 4: *"We will not surrender to this criminal occupier (i.e., Israel) nor to the criminal US that supports this cancerous entity... We are closer than ever to freedom and getting rid of this criminal occupation, this thieving cancerous entity. Its days are numbered..."*

An official PA-TV interview with Lebanese journalist Kamal Zebian on Sept. 3 saw him engage in blatant Holocaust denial, with the connivance of the program host: *"The Zionist entity was founded under the banner of the Holocaust – that Zionist lie... There is no such thing as the Holocaust... some Jews or Zionists might have been burned, but not in those numbers... They exploited the Holocaust in order to create a guilt complex for the Germans first of all, and for the Europeans as well, in order to reach the goal they had been planning for."*

AIR



Allen Selis

ONE YEAR IS STILL TOO SOON

Just thinking about the looming October 7 memorials and ceremonies leaves me overcome with nausea and revulsion. Just what do I want to do on October 7? Where do I want to be? How will I pass this day? I begged my wife, "Please, please, I can't handle a ceremony. I don't want to be in some public gathering with sad music and speeches. Please, let's go volunteer somewhere. Let's do something for our country. But no memorial ceremonies, please."

Why?

Remember Gilbert Gottfried? He's the comedian who melted down his career and professional reputation by making a joke about terror attacks at the Friar Club just two weeks after 9/11 in 2001. It was too soon. Way too soon. Too soon for catharsis. Too soon for closure. And too soon to have any perspective about what the 9/11 attacks really meant or how they would change America.

I feel the same way about the upcoming October 7 memorials. And I want nothing to do with them. I know that the purpose of these memorials is to allow us to mourn. But for God's sake, I've done enough national mourning over the last year to fit ten lifetimes. I'm also wary (and raging furious) about anyone who dares use this tragedy for their own political purposes.

More importantly, *haShabbat haShehorah* ("Shabbat of darkness") kicked off a war that we are still fighting. This war for the long-term survival of the State of Israel is far from over and its outcome is far from clear. We are in the midst of a multi-generational battle with an enemy who sits patiently, plans into the future, and has a focused goal: the extermination of Israelis and the erasure of Israel. I can't justify investing energy in a ceremony when we're still burying soldiers and civilians who continue to fall at the hands of terrorists every week, without fail.

Finally, and most importantly, I believe that commemorations must involve making purposeful statements that emerge from reflection on history. Without that kind of *parshanut* or nuanced interpretation, without making meaning of things, these ceremonies are at best empty, otherwise offensive, and at worst dangerous. Just what meaning are we to make, what lessons are we to learn, from Hamas' genocidal attack... followed by waves of Hezbollah's rockets... funded with Iran's gleeful support... and championed by a delusional global Left? What does this tell us about the Jewish people's place in the modern world? Has anyone put these pieces together in a real way that does not involve a retreat into previously held political agendas or preconfigured strategic beliefs?

Personally, I've been watching my inner world crumble for the past year. Politicians I once trusted are suspect. Others whom I once shunned at least merit an honest hearing. I routinely scan and profile everyone I pass on the street looking for knives or odd backpacks or jackets out of season. I cry sometimes at odd times for no reason. Or for good reason. And death no longer feels like a stranger. I feel anger and outrage and distrust, and this now feels normal.

I dare anyone to come up with a ceremony that puts all that into words. I forbid anyone to push me to that place with the pretence of decorum and a well-placed song. I curse anyone who dares to take advantage of my outrage and anger and pain for some agenda. Any agenda.

Ceremony is impossible. Don't... just don't... pretend that we have enough distance from these events to know what they mean. It will take us years, if not decades.

My wife agreed that this year we'll go somewhere in the south where her cousin runs a volunteer project. They offer food and therapeutic workshops for soldiers and residents of *Otef Aza* (the Gaza envelope region). Or we'll sit quietly in a field in Be'eri. Or we'll do something else. Anything else.

But no ceremonies, please. It's too soon.

AIR

Dr Allen Selis is the founder of the educational technology startup STEM Crafters. Allen is passionate about great teaching, sceptical about "Startup Nation" hype, and invests personal time and energy in children's learning on a daily basis. © Times of Israel (www.timesofisrael.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.





ASIA WATCH

Michael Shannon

CHANGING TIDES

Pope Francis was warmly welcomed in his early September visit to Indonesia, a (80%) Muslim majority nation where religious harmony has long remained more an aspiration than a settled reality; and although the tide of overt Islamist extremism has receded in recent years, the well-springs of another surge remain in place.

In an address to some 300 politicians and religious leaders at Jakarta's Merdeka Presidential Palace, the 87-year-old Pope said the Catholic Church would increase its efforts toward inter-religious dialogue in hopes of helping tamp down extremism, which he said distorted people's religious beliefs through "deception and violence".

Indonesia's two largest Islamic organisations, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama – with a combined membership of more than 150 million – expressed hope that the papal visit would promote interfaith harmony, while media coverage – considering that less than 3% of the 280 million population is Catholic – was extensive, featuring nearly all of the Pope's public events. Even a government request that TV channels not interrupt the papal mass by playing the usual evening call to prayer – replacing it instead with a text notice on the screen – failed to provoke much controversy.

The change in atmospherics is striking compared to several years ago, when confected outrage to perceived slights against Islam derailed the political career of the Chinese Christian governor of Jakarta, Basuki "Ahok" Purnama, amidst mass street protests in 2016-17; the self-styled Islamic vigilantes of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) would harass and vandalise with impunity; and groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia agitated in large numbers for the imposition of sharia law.

It was at this juncture that President Joko Widodo, known as Jokowi, pushed back. Long needled by rivals and opponents with accusations that he is insufficiently Islamic, Jokowi responded not with performative acts of piety but by banning Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia and the FPI on the grounds that their disruptive, anti-democratic ideology is fundamentally in conflict with Indonesia's founding pluralist credo of Pancasila.

While some expressed misgivings about encroachments upon civil liberties, these moves helped shift momentum as divisive religious politics fell out of favour – Jokowi comfortably secured re-election in 2019 and his erstwhile rival Prabowo was elected this year on an unambiguously nationalist platform.

Another marker of change came this year with the pub-

lic disbanding of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). The announcement came in a video released on June 30 featuring 16 senior JI figures who stated that the group would be formally dissolved. They also pledged their allegiance to the Indonesian state.

In a prepared statement, Abu Rusdan, a senior leader of the group, said that JI now stands "ready to actively contribute to Indonesia's progress and dignity."

JI was established by Indonesian clerics Abu Bakar Bashir and Abdullah Sungkar in the 1990s with the explicit aim of creating an Islamic state throughout Southeast Asia. It was most active in the early to mid-2000s, when the group, which had received training and funding in Afghanistan, committed several deadly attacks in Indonesia including the 2002 Bali Bombing which killed 202 people.

The Indonesian government cracked down on JI after the first Bali bombings, arresting and imprisoning many of its leaders. The group was officially banned in 2008, but it continued to operate underground, recruiting members, raising funds and conducting military training. Its last violent attack in Indonesia occurred in 2009.

More recently, Indonesia has faced threats from other extremist groups, including those affiliated with the Islamic State group such as Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD). There has also been a trend of smaller-scale attacks, often targeting security personnel.

While the announcement of JI's disbandment presents as a positive development, a closer look reveals a more complex reality. Questions remain about the future of its network of Islamic boarding schools – estimated to be around 100 across Indonesia – which have long served as ideological incubators, teaching a literalist, puritan version of Islam, while also identifying potential recruits for future roles within the organisation.

In their declaration, JI leaders pledged to overhaul the syllabus of the group's schools to align with mainstream Islamic teachings, although some observers describe this as a strategic concession after years of pressure from Indonesian authorities, who have arrested dozens of JI members in recent years.

Sidney Jones, a senior adviser to the Jakarta-based Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, described the disbandment as "the culmination of a long move toward ending JI's existence as a covert organisation and operating openly in the interests of Islamic outreach and education."

However, she also acknowledged the potential for splinter factions. "Surely some in JI will see it as a betrayal," she told *BenarNews*.

The history of extremist groups in Indonesia is marked by transformation and reemergence. Even JI founder Abu Bakar Bashir defected a decade ago from being pro-al-Qaeda to being pro-Islamic State, along with large numbers of acolytes. As such, many younger militants who are prepared to use violence are likely to defect to other groups.



Miriam Bell

WHAT OCTOBER 7 EXPOSED IN NZ

It's been one year since the horrors of October 7, and in that time New Zealand's small Jewish community has been changed irrevocably. A long-held sense of security has been severely shaken.

At the time of the Hamas terror attacks on Israel, New Zealand was nearing the end of a testy election campaign, while the election which took place a week later resulted in six weeks of negotiations before a new coalition government was formed.

This created something of a limbo, whereby those nominally in power, or coming into power, were reluctant to state a position on anything significant – including October 7 and its aftermath.

While the two largest political parties, National and Labour, condemned the Hamas attacks, they said little else. That silence had an impact, and many civil leaders and organisations followed suit. Surprisingly few overtly expressed sympathy for Israel or the Jewish community.

But others rushed into the breach. Long-time anti-Israel campaigner John Minto claimed within days that Israel had brought October 7 onto itself, and he was not alone. This trend has continued ever since.

Perhaps the most notable early example of where this could lead was the debacle which unfolded at the Auckland War Memorial Museum the week after the attacks.

In common with many landmarks around the world, the museum lit up its exterior in blue and white in solidarity with Israel. As at other such events, pro-Palestinian protestors, spouting antisemitic rhetoric, turned up.

But, uniquely, the next day the Museum's Chief Executive issued an apology for "the distress and hurt caused to members of our community" by the lights.

The Jewish community was appalled, with NZ Jewish Council spokesperson Juliet Moses describing it as a "betrayal". But the Museum, which is home to a Holocaust gallery, would not acknowledge the hurt felt by the Jewish community.

It led to the Holocaust Remembrance Day commemorations traditionally held at the Museum being hosted elsewhere. And while the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand has been working with the Museum to find a way forward, to date no solution has been reached.

Once Israel embarked on its military campaign in Gaza, the environment grew worse. The Green Party and Te Pati Maori party have been actively anti-Israel,

and regularly accuse Israel of colonialism, apartheid and genocide.

Green Party MP Chloe Swarbrick, who is now its co-leader, has appeared at pro-Palestinian rallies and led chants of "from the river to the sea."

On top of ongoing pro-Palestinian demonstrations, Palestinian flags and signage have become common features at other political protests, including marches on environmental and Maori rights issues.

Anti-Israel and anti-Zionist graffiti and stickers are commonplace, synagogues have been defaced and forced to close for security reasons and Jewish community leaders have been abused.

Halal Kiwi, an app and website, created a "boycott list" of 300 brands and businesses that it claimed were supporters of Israel or had connections to "Zionism".

Mindful Money, a charity promoting ethical investment, has been calling on fund managers to divest from companies "enabling illegal Israeli settlements in Palestine and weapons used in Gaza."

Recently, a complaint over an artwork by a Jewish artist featured in a Multicultural Services Trust's "celebration of diversity" led to controversy and the work, along with a Palestinian artwork, being removed.

Meanwhile, antisemitism has skyrocketed. At a recent Holocaust Centre briefing, the board's Chair, Deb Hart, reported 80% of respondents to a survey run by the Centre in July said their children had suffered antisemitic episodes in their schools.

Additionally, even before October 7, police crime statistics showed a 530% increase in the targeting of Jews in 2022-2023, and that Jewish New Zealanders were 160 times more likely to be the victim of a hate crime than Maori New Zealanders, Hart said.

That has led her to call on the Government to appoint a special envoy to combat antisemitism.

Since October 7, Rob Berg, from the Jewish National Fund NZ, has organised regular vigils and marches for the hostages. He said that when reflecting on the last year two things came to mind.

The first was that the levels of antisemitism seen in New Zealand, as well as globally, has been a surprise. "It's like a sleeping poisonous snake has been awoken," he said.

"Being at an anti-Israel rally in Wellington earlier this year to observe what was being said, felt like I was at a Nazi rally with people just repeating slogans from the speakers without giving any thought to what they actually meant – or maybe I am being naive and they knew exactly what they were saying."

But a second, more positive observation was that October 7 had brought the Jewish and Israeli communities closer than he had seen in the past. "October 7 has unified us more than ever before," he said.



BEHIND THE NEWS

ROCKET AND TERROR REPORT

At least 19 rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel from Aug. 13 to Sept. 14. As of Sept. 18, Israel had suffered 348 casualties in ground operations in Gaza.

There have been multiple attempted and successful terrorist attacks emanating from or in the West Bank since mid-August. On Aug. 18, a civilian security guard was killed in a hammer attack near Kedumim. The same day, an alleged suicide bomber injured a civilian in Tel Aviv. Hamas claimed the attack, as well as twin car bombings on Aug. 30 near Gush Etzion that injured three soldiers. A shooting on Sept. 1 near Hebron killed three police officers. On Sept. 8, a Jordanian truck driver shot dead three Israeli workers at the Allenby Crossing before being killed. On Sept. 12, a soldier was killed near Givat Asaf in a truck ramming.

MURDERED HOSTAGES' TORTUROUS FINAL MONTHS

The families of the six murdered hostages whose bodies were recovered from a Hamas tunnel in Rafah at the end of August – Hersh Goldberg-Polin, Ori Danino, Eden Yerushalmi, Almog Sarusi, Alexander Lobanov and Carmel Gat – have revealed that their loved ones were starved and severely mistreated during their 330-day captivity, before being executed just hours before IDF soldiers reached them. The six endured months in a tiny tunnel with no air vents, minimal food, and no showers or sanitation, in an area so small that only two could lie down at a time. Eden Yerushalmi weighed a mere 36 kilograms at her death. Forensic analysis also revealed that the four male hostages had struggled with their

captors, trying to defend Eden and Carmel, before being murdered.

A few days previously saw the successful rescue of Qaid Farhan al-Qadi, a Bedouin Israeli abducted by Hamas. Al-Qadi, a 52-year-old father of 11, said he was shot by the terrorists on October 7 for refusing to “tell them where the Israeli Jews were.”

MAJOR OPERATION IN THE WEST BANK



“Operation Summer Camps” (Image: IDF)

On Aug. 28, the IDF launched a major pre-emptive counterterrorism campaign in the cities of the northern West Bank dubbed “Operation Summer Camps”, said to be largest such operation since 2002. The stated goals of “Summer Camps” were the dismantling of terrorist battalions established, co-ordinated and armed by Iran; destruction of infrastructure, including laboratories used to create explosives; and seizure of weapons and wanted terrorists. As of Sept. 17, the ongoing operation had killed 25 terrorist operatives via airstrikes and exchanges of fire, some being commanders of terrorist networks, and led to the arrest of hundreds more (For more, see p. 24).

NEW ESTIMATE: 6,000 PALESTINIAN INVADERS ON OCTOBER 7

New Israeli security agency assessments now estimate that around 6,000

Gazans breached the Israel border last October 7, double the previously estimated number. The invaders included 3,800 members of Hamas’ elite Nukhba unit, and 2,200 Gaza civilians or members of other terror groups.

In addition, an estimated 1,000 terrorists in Gaza fired 4,300 rockets into Israel on that day, also a notably higher number than previously believed.

POLIO VACCINATION CAMPAIGN IN GAZA

The World Health Organisation (WHO) reported on Sept. 13 that more than 560,000 Gazan children under the age of ten had successfully been given the first of two doses of the polio vaccine. The vaccination campaign relied on agreed daily eight-hour pauses in fighting between Israel and Hamas in specified areas. The campaign to vaccinate some 640,000 children in Gaza began on Sept. 1, following confirmation by WHO in August that a baby had been partially paralysed by the type 2 polio virus, the first such case in the territory in 25 years. A second round of vaccinations is scheduled for mid-October.

HEZBOLLAH ESCALATES ATTACKS ON ISRAEL

From Oct. 8 to mid-September, there have been 3,002 attacks on Israel from the north, largely but not solely by Hezbollah. They have mainly involved rockets, anti-tank missiles and drones, and most attacks featured multiple projectiles in a single attack. These attacks have escalated recently, with 560 rockets fired from Lebanon into Israel in the first half of September alone. Some recent attacks have also been aimed at cities and towns not previously targeted.

On Aug. 25, Israel disrupted a

massive, planned Hezbollah attack, intended to be in retaliation for the Israeli killing of Hezbollah military leader Fuad Shukur on July 30, by preemptively striking and neutralising roughly two-thirds of the thousands of projectiles that the terrorist group planned to launch from southern Lebanon. However, Hezbollah did still manage to fire about 250 missiles and drones, doing little damage.

On Sept. 17, at least 11 people were killed and nearly 3,000 were wounded in Lebanon when thousands of pagets used by Hezbollah operatives exploded almost simultaneously. Those injured included Iran's Ambassador to Lebanon. On Sept. 18, an additional wave of explosions reportedly involving walkie-talkies used by Hezbollah operatives killed at least 20 people and injured more than 450. Israel has not acknowledged responsibility for either series of attacks.

ISRAELI OPERATION TARGETS SYRIAN MISSILE FACTORY

What was initially reported as an IDF airstrike on Sept. 8 in Syria targeting weapons facilities was subsequently alleged to have involved a major ground assault by Israeli special forces on a large underground missile production factory. The site in Syria, known as CERS, is near the Lebanon border some 200 kilometres from Israel, and is part of the country's military hi-tech weapons industry, including making precision missiles used by Hezbollah. The weapons facility was reportedly destroyed.

IRAN SHIPPING BALLISTIC MISSILES TO RUSSIA

On Sept. 10, the US officially confirmed that Iran had begun sending hundreds of Fath-360 close-range ballistic missiles to Russia for use against Ukraine. The deal for such a transfer was first reported in October 2022, but for unknown reasons, actual

shipments of ballistic missiles were not confirmed until now.

In response, the US imposed sanctions on multiple individuals and entities involved in the transaction, while the UK, France and Germany cancelled their bilateral air services agreements with Iran and are working to sanction Iran Air – which allegedly has been helping ship arms to Russia – as well as other individuals and entities.

HOUTHIS ATTACKS THREATEN ENVIRONMENTAL CATASTROPHE

On Aug. 21, Yemen's Houthi rebels attacked the Greek-flagged oil tanker *Delta Sounion* as it passed through the Red Sea, forcing its crew to abandon the ship. The tanker, holding 150,000 metric tons of oil, posed a spill risk four times larger than the infamous Exxon Valdez disaster (35,000 metric

tons) in 1989. European Naval Force photos showed fire still raging on the tanker drifting near Yemen for more than three weeks before it was finally successfully towed out of the area on Sept. 15.

Since November 2023, the Houthis have targeted more than 70 vessels, including multiple oil tankers, threatening environmental catastrophe.

On Sept. 2, two more crude-oil carrying tankers were targeted: the Panama-flagged *Blue Lagoon 1* and the Saudi Arabian vessel *Amjad*.

SWITZERLAND TO END UNRWA FUNDING

Swiss parliamentarians voted on Sept. 9 to stop funding to UNRWA because of its ties to terrorism. The decision passed by a vote of 99 to 88 but still needs the approval of the Swiss Senate and would likely only affect next year's funding.



STRANGER THAN FICTION

SURELY YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS

Sometimes people make a claim so bizarre it's hard to believe they expect anyone to believe it.

When the IDF rescued Israeli Bedouin hostage Qaid Farhan al-Qadi from Gaza, Hamas claimed it released him because he's Muslim. Apparently, Hamas took 326 days to realise that, and the terrorists still haven't worked out the other two Bedouins they're still holding are also Muslims.

After Israel killed its military chief Fuad Shukur, Hezbollah planned a massive retaliatory Aug. 25 attack involving hundreds of missiles and drones, with the aim of destroying major Israeli military bases and intelligence headquarters. Israeli pre-emptive air raids destroyed thousands of Hezbollah missiles and launchers less than an hour before the attack was due to be launched, so Hezbollah only fired around 300 missiles, damaging some houses and a chicken coop. Yet Hezbollah

claimed the operation was completely successful, and Israel was covering up the damage to the bases and huge casualties.

Former SBS newsreader Mary Kostakidis on Sept. 6 accused the Zionist Federation of Australia (ZFA) of trying to "curb criticism of Israel". The ZFA had lodged a racial discrimination complaint against her for sharing a video showing Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah declaring Palestine from the river to the sea is for Palestinians only. Apparently, the esteemed journalist can't distinguish between "criticising Israel" and calling for the ethnic cleansing of all Israeli Jews.

In Parliament on Aug. 22, Greens Deputy Leader Senator Mehreen Faruqi accused Senator Jacqui Lambie of "attack[ing] and vilify[ing] Muslims." What was Lambie's crime? Senator Faruqi had moved a motion, easily defeated, demanding the production of all documents showing contact between Jewish groups and the Human Rights Commission relating to Commission staff. And Senator Lambie had simply asked how Faruqi would react to a similar motion targeting Muslim groups.

COVER STORY

OCTOBER 7 REVISITED

YEAR IN, YEAR OUT

Ilan Evyatar

On October 7, Israel will mark one year since the terrible events of that dark and bloody Saturday in which almost 1,200 Israelis, tourists and foreign workers were killed and more than 200 taken hostage as Hamas launched a brutal assault on Gaza border communities, military bases and a music festival.

Since that day, Israel has been irreversibly changed in numerous ways. October 7 was the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust, its one-day toll greater than all the killings and massacres of the five-year long Second Intifada (2000-2005). The massacre eroded Israel's certainty in itself; it took Israel back to 1948, back to the desperately anxious waiting period before the 1967 Six-Day War. In an instant, it smashed any aura of invincibility built on Israel's technological and military might and economic prowess. Once more, Israel today is a country that sees itself as fighting for its survival in a relentlessly hostile region. It also finds itself isolated internationally, with charges pending at the International Court of Justice where it is accused of genocide, and arrest warrants expected to be issued against senior Israeli military and political officials by the International Criminal Court, amid mass anti-Israel demonstrations worldwide.

Israeli historian and intellectual Micah Goodman has described October 7 as a "black hole" in the country's history – an event that threw time and space into chaos. For a short period, Israeli sovereignty in the western Negev was absent and Hamas was able to wreak havoc with little to check it. Israeli society has been shaken to its roots. The very essence of Zionism and Jewish self-determination – designed to prevent that kind of massacre of Jews – has been undermined.

The events of that day and the year that has followed remind all Israelis that, after more than 75 years, the country's presence as a sovereign, independent Jewish nation-state still cannot be taken for granted.

Furthermore, one year on, tens of thousands of people remain displaced from their homes, both in the north



The scenes from October 7 are images that Israelis can never forget (Screenshots)

and in the Gaza envelope, while more than 100 hostages, living and dead, remain in the hands of Hamas with their fate unclear. While Israeli society united at first under the slogan *Be-yachad nentatze'ach* – "Together, we will triumph" – the issue of the hostages and what price should be paid for their release has become increasingly divisive. Israelis are split over whether to make far-reaching concessions to Hamas that would end the war but secure their release, or whether to prioritise continuing the war to eliminate Hamas as a military and governing force.

At a political level too, the initial unity has dissipated. The unity government established a few days after October 7 has collapsed, and political tensions are on the rise. The

Hamas attack took place at a time when Israel was engaged in an internal political battle over a legislative package that one side called “judicial reforms” and the other a “judicial coup”, and which many commentators described as expressing a battle over Israel’s identity and future – liberal and secular versus conservative and religious.

In recent months, protests have again become increasingly political, mixing calls for a hostage deal with calls for early elections. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu currently trails badly in the polls. According to polling done in mid-September, were elections to be held now, the governing coalition would win 49 seats and the opposition bloc 66 seats – easily enough to form a majority in the 120-seat Knesset. If Naf-tali Bennett, Netanyahu’s one-time aide turned rival who served as prime minister from 2021-22, were to return to politics – as rumours suggest he intends to do – the turnaround would be even larger, with a Bennett-led bloc set to return to power with around 69 seats against 46 for the current governing coalition. However, unless the current governing coalition collapses, elections are not required until 2026.

The long-standing controversy in Israel over conscripting ultra-Orthodox (“Haredi”) young men has become ever more urgent as, post-October 7, it has become clear Israel requires a larger army to cope with all the threats it faces. The Supreme Court ended the blanket exemption for eligible Haredi men earlier this year. However, efforts to draft even a limited number of ultra-Orthodox men of conscription age who are not engaged in full time Torah study have failed miserably and been met by mass Haredi protests.

Yet any attempts to pass new legislation to regulate the military service – or exemption from military service – of ultra-Orthodox religious school students is likely to exacerbate tensions at a time when Israeli reservists are being called on to serve for double the usual number of reserve days, while mandatory service for full-time soldiers is being extended due to the current war effort. On the other hand, there is no more important issue than largely preserving the Haredi draft exemption for the two ultra-Orthodox parties which currently serve in the governing coalition, and whose votes are indispensable to keeping it in power.

Along with the hostages, the question of the north is perhaps the most pressing on Israel’s agenda. With the exception of eight kibbutzim that will require a major rebuild, many residents of the Gaza envelope have begun to return home, despite sporadic rocket fire from Gaza, as Hamas is no longer considered able to pose a major

threat to these communities. Yet while an end to hostilities in Gaza may lead to an end to the war of attrition with Hezbollah in the north, the displaced residents of the region say they will not return home unless Hezbollah forces are at least made to pull back beyond the Litani River, about 15-20 kilometres inside Lebanon, as required by UN Security Council Resolution 1701. Otherwise, Hezbollah’s elite Radwan force commandos stationed along the border constantly pose the threat of another October 7-style invasion of the Israeli border communities.

“The events of that day and the year that has followed remind all Israelis that, after more than 75 years, the country’s presence as a sovereign, independent Jewish nation-state still cannot be taken for granted”

Despite American and French mediation efforts, the chances that Hezbollah and Israel reach a diplomatic agreement in which Hezbollah will agree to withdraw its forces from the border do not appear high. As Israel heads into a second year of war with both Hamas and the wider Iranian-led “Axis of Resistance”, the security forces thus face the choice of whether to continue with a tit-for-tat response against Hezbollah – which would not enable the 60,000 or so northern residents evacuated from their communities to return home – or to launch a full-scale war to push Hezbollah back, which would likely be bloody and costly.

Elsewhere, on top of the limited daily attacks from Hezbollah that began on October 8, Israel is also engaged in low intensity wars on several other fronts, which constitute what the Iranian regime has termed a “ring of fire” designed to undermine and eventually destroy the Jewish state. It has come under attack from pro-Iranian proxies in Syria, Iraq and especially Yemen, where the Iranian-backed Houthis have all but shut down the Israeli port of Eilat by targeting shipping in the strategic Bab el-Mandeb Strait leading into the Red Sea. In the cities of the West Bank, Iran and Hezbollah are pumping in weapons and money across the Jordanian border to terror gangs, seeking to open yet another full front to attack Israel.

Over everything hangs the shadow of all-out war with Iran – which directly attacked Israel for the first time in

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mid-April – just as Teheran appears close to completing its nuclear weapons program.

Yet, despite all of the above, the past year has also witnessed Israeli society display remarkable resilience, solidarity and functional continuity. Israel's hi-tech sector continues to attract significant investment, and while the economy has slowed, growth remains in positive territory.

Nevertheless, it is clear Israeli society and Israel's economy face myriad unprecedented challenges in the year ahead – with either an all-out war or several ongoing and protracted wars of attrition against Iran's "ring of fire" looking likely.

As Israel marks the first anniversary of October 7, the future remains fraught. Maintaining social unity and resilience this year will be vitally important as Jerusalem makes decisions likely to reshape the Jewish state's future for years and perhaps generations to come. AIR

HAMAS ON THE ROPES?

Jonathan Schanzer

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) announced on September 12 that the southern army of Hamas in Gaza, called the Rafah Brigade, had been dismantled. The spokesman's office said 2,000 Hamas fighters had been

killed, and that 80% of the tunnels in the area had been destroyed. This comes just days after Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant declared that Hamas no longer existed as a military force in Gaza, and that it was time for Israel to head north because a war with Hezbollah in Lebanon is looming.

What to make of this?

There can be no doubt that Hamas is a spent force. The estimates of Hamas fighters killed during this war vary, but it's safe to say that the number stands at 18,000, and possibly even higher. That's roughly two-thirds of the fighting force Hamas boasted on October 7. Thousands more Hamasniks have been injured and will not be returning to the battlefield (many have received treatment in Turkey). Still more thousands have been captured during the fighting and are in Israeli custody, where interrogators are extracting intelligence that continues to help Israel neutralise Hamas across the Gaza Strip.



Running out of living leaders: Hamas political head Ismail Haniyeh (left), and military commander Mohammed Deif, both killed in July (Image: X/ Twitter)

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The leadership of Hamas is also in shambles. The Israelis took out the high-profile military/political leader Saleh Arouri in Lebanon in January. Then they eliminated deputy military commander Marwan Issa in March. After that, the Israelis took out elusive military commander Mohammed Deif. And finally, on July 31, they pulled off the brazen killing of political chief Ismail Haniyeh in the heart of Teheran. There are few recognisable Hamas leaders left. But the only one who matters now is Yahya Sinwar, the mastermind of the October 7 attacks, who recently consolidated power and is endeavouring to lead Hamas from deep within the Gaza tunnels as the Israelis hunt him.

Recent reports suggest that morale is abysmal within the remaining ranks. Hundreds of mid-level commanders have been killed. Gaza's infrastructure has been hammered, and Israeli engineers are slowly but surely destroying the subterranean labyrinth that is currently the only place the remaining fighters can hide.

Despite all this good news – and it is unmistakably good news – four obvious challenges remain before Israel can fully pivot out of Gaza.


First, there is no way the Israeli public will allow for

a withdrawal from Gaza without recovering the hostages. Despite calls from the hostage families and major segments of Israeli society to end the war, they know that ending it will not be possible without a ceasefire deal. Hamas and its patrons in Teheran are still not signalling a willingness to ink such a deal. Sinwar and the ayatollahs would prefer to subject Israel to a war of attrition, with Iranian proxies attacking it from multiple fronts.

Second, Israel must deal with the Philadelphi Corridor, the thin patch of dirt that runs astride the Gaza-Egypt border. It's less than 15 kilometres-long, but beneath it lie dozens of tunnels that snake into Egypt. The Sinai Peninsula appears to have served as the logistical hub for these subterranean supply lines. Currently, the IDF assesses that none of these tunnels is active. But should Israel fail to tackle the existing problem now, the return of Hamas would be guaranteed. The Israelis must insist upon an underground wall and sensor system similar to the one it has around the Israeli-Gaza border. That was just about the only system that worked on October 7. But the Egyptians have yet to cede that there is a problem, let alone allow for such a system to be built. That means it's time for Washington to step in and apply pressure. So far, the Biden Administration is nowhere to be found.

The third challenge is the low-level insurgency that is expected to continue well after the hard fighting is done. Hamas fighters or wannabes in track suits are sure to come out of the woodwork and target the IDF forces that will remain in Gaza. Those irregulars will need to be dealt with while post-war construction plans are made.

And finally, there is the post-war period. Regardless of who steps in to help fill the administrative void (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, several European countries and the United States are among those rumoured to be open to such a role), the IDF will not and cannot allow other forces to handle security in Gaza. In light of the failure to protect the southern communities on October 7, there is an unwavering determination across the security establishment to stand guard and protect against future attacks. Indeed, they insist upon it, and they must.

The hope now is that the IDF footprint needed in Gaza will diminish significantly over time. Israelis would welcome the opportunity to begin to put the last 12 months in the rear view. But they all know that this long war is far from over. Iran continues to direct its proxies to attack the Jewish state. More immediately, a war with Hezbollah in Lebanon threatens. It's unclear when that battle will unfold, but it promises to be far more taxing than the tough and brave slog Israel appears ready to conclude. 

Jonathan Schanzer is Senior Vice President for Research at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a nonpartisan think tank in Washington, DC © Commentary magazine (commentary.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

A STRATEGIC GAME CHANGER

Ahron Shapiro

Top Israeli experts weigh in on how Israel's defence strategy must change post-October 7

On October 6, 2023, the sun set on major elements of Israel's multifaceted national security concept – often termed in Israel the *conceptzia* – that had formed the foundation for the state's defence since its creation.

Certain basic principles had, for at least the past 50 years, provided the basic relative stability that was essential to the Jewish state's economic growth, regional diplomatic achievements and quality of life.

Washington Institute Fellow Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Assaf Orion wrote recently in *Foreign Affairs* that “this unwritten security concept was built on three pillars: deterrence, early warning, and decisive victory. (Subsequently added to these were two additional pillars: protection/defence and the imperative of seeking support of a major power.)”

Orion continued: “Deterrence meant using Israel's formidable record of victories (and enemy defeats) to dissuade any antagonist from attacking the country. Early warning enabled the quick call-up of reserve forces, thus allowing Israel's large pool of citizen-soldiers to continue contributing to the economy and society until mobilised for active duty. On the military level, it also gave the IDF the capability to quickly surge its order of battle. Decisive victory sought to remove any existing threat and further bolster deterrence.”

However, in the past year, Israel's most potent enemy – the Iran-led axis – has used Israel's own concepts against it, with some alarmingly effective results.

Hamas' massacre and hostage-taking spree and temporary occupation of a significant swath of southwestern Israel on October 7 ignited a gruelling war, both on and below ground, in the heavily militarised and tunnel-infested

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Over-reliance on technology to provide “early warning” and belief in deterrence led to the IDF being taken by surprise on October 7 (Image: Anas Mohammed/ Shutterstock)

urban landscape of Gaza. Hamas’ surprise attack also led to the activation of an Iranian “ring of fire” surrounding Israel through Iran’s regional proxies. While spearheaded by Lebanon’s Hezbollah – whose rockets and drones have caused the ongoing evacuation of more than 60,000 people from northern Israel – proxy efforts also included attacks by Yemen’s Houthis, Iraq’s Kataib Hezbollah, and others.

Finally, on April 14, Iran brought its shadow war with Israel out into the open, directly attacking Israel with hundreds of long-range ballistic and cruise missiles and drones. Thwarting this attack involved not only Israel’s full range of interception technology, but also the military cooperation of the US and its regional allies.

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The new strategic reality with which Israel is faced has catalysed fundamental changes in the way Israel defends itself. This article will look at several of those likely changes, as suggested by some of Israel’s most respected strategic thinkers, a year after October 7 and its aftermath showed the old *conceptzia* was no longer fit for purpose.

LESS RELIANCE ON DETERRENCE AND INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS

Brigadier General (Res.) Yossi Kuperwasser, former head of the Research Division in Military Intelligence, discussed Israel’s intelligence failure on October 7 in a radio interview in August.

According to him, “[Intelligence chiefs] were aware of the existence of the threat and ignored it; the concept [that the enemy was deterred] was given precedence over the information [collected by the intelligence agencies], and this has happened more than once.

“Every minute that the ‘concept’ is not disproved makes you believe more and more in the concept,” Kuperwasser continued.

“When new information arrives that should disprove the concept, you are not prepared to discard everything you understood about reality and say that it is incorrect. In our case, there was a dual ‘concept’ – regarding Hamas [as deterred] and regarding ourselves [as prepared] – and thus, even when people came to meetings criticising [these beliefs], they were ignored.

“What is needed is a change in organisational culture, not just a change in personnel,” he concluded.

The harsh lesson from the intelligence failure on October 7 has been widely internalised: Israel’s defence can rely neither on early warning based upon intelligence estimates, nor on deterrence alone – it must be calculated first and foremost based on the enemy’s offensive capabilities at any given moment. In between wars, the IDF must be proactively degrading those enemy capabilities.

This is the key argument of the March 2024 paper “Preventative defence through operational versatility, as a response to the threat of Iran’s religious terror armies,” published by the IDF’s Dado Centre for Interdisciplinary Military Studies.

Co-written by top intelligence and military strategists Col. (Res.) Dr Ofer Guterman, Dr Haim Asa and Col. (Res.) Ran Eisenberg, the paper argues that “the October 7th War reveals the gap in relevance between the Israeli security concept and the threat posed by Iran’s network of religious terrorist armies.”

The strategists propose a capability denial approach, which, in contrast to Israel’s anti-missile defence systems, is not designed to avoid escalation and war, but would rather focus on keeping the threat from the enemy below a tolerable threshold.

The authors explained, “the concept of deterrence is

losing relevance [against the Iranian axis], though not entirely. Since these entities hold a dogmatic ideology of destroying Israel and their commitment to state constraints is weak and partial, it is difficult to create a sense of political, diplomatic, economic, or other threat against them. This is true both regarding deterrence against specific offensive initiatives and at the deeper level... it is not correct to assume that these enemies will become disillusioned due to battlefield losses and abandon their desire to destroy the State of Israel.”

Meanwhile, speaking at a March 2024 conference on Israel’s security, Maj. Gen. (res.) Gershon Hacohen, former commander of the IDF’s Ground Forces, pushed for the IDF to go back to basics and not leave the country’s defences reliant on intelligence.

“Defence, by its nature, [should] not [be] dependent on [early] warning,” Hacohen said. “The whole idea is to be able to ensure protection even when there is no warning... It is arrogance to think that we will always have a warning. Therefore, the starting point of the idea of defence says: ‘Prepare for the unknown and the unexpected.’ When the unexpected happens – that’s why you have reserves. [But] on October 7, the IDF had no reserves on the ground.

“After the Yom Kippur War, [the IDF’s largest regular-service armour] Division 36 was on half-hour standby for 20 years,” Hacohen continued.

“Today, due to cost-benefit calculations, the IDF has dismantled the regular divisions into various areas of military tasks. In every event where it was necessary to gather a force larger than a brigade for an offensive mission on the ground, it took three to four days to assemble the force.”

Hacohen also called for better armed and better trained residents in border communities, and the revival of “Nahal” garrisons – units that combined military service with agriculture on Israel’s frontiers.

A BIGGER ARMY

Despite the vast increase in defence spending such a move would require, likely revisions to the IDF’s defence



Military experts say the IDF needs at least 15 additional combat battalions if it is to cope with the multi-front threat it currently faces (Image: Jose Hernandez/Shutterstock)

posture will also necessitate a larger standing army and larger reserve forces.

According to Orion, “Israel’s military leaders say that the IDF needs 15 additional battalions, or about 10,000 soldiers, to be able to address current and pending missions, including the ability to carry out simultaneous offensives on several fronts. As of now, IDF land forces that are deployed in Gaza will be needed in Lebanon if the war expands, and already hard-pressed reservists will be required to shoulder an even heavier burden.”

Meanwhile, the open-ended low-intensity fighting with Hezbollah on the northern front has made it difficult for the war-fatigued IDF to maintain its sharpness in the event of an all-out war with Lebanon. As former Israeli National Security Council head Yaakov Amidror recently commented to the *Wall Street Journal*, “The longer the time, the more problematic it is to maintain the support and the readiness” of the fighting forces.

On top of all this, the IDF has been stressing the importance of creating some distance between Israel and its enemies to leave more time to detect and react to enemy incursion attempts.

Thus, during its war with Hamas, the IDF Engineering Corps has cleared a 1km buffer strip between Gaza and Israel in anticipation of Israel’s post-war security needs. Likewise, in US-brokered negotiations with Lebanon, Israel is demanding the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1701, which barred Hezbollah from deploying south of the Litani River – about 15 to 25 kilometres inside Lebanon. If such talks fail, it is very likely that the IDF will eventually be called upon to achieve the same outcome through military means.

Lastly, in what is shaping up to become a war of attrition with Iran and its proxies, Orion adds that “Israel can no longer rely on raw military strength alone. It must use all the various tools of national power as well as the help of allies and partners – perhaps even of a coalition of forces” like the one that was used to thwart Iran’s direct attack on Israel in April.

Now, more than ever, Israel will look to its chief ally and patron the United States to project power in the region to deter Iran and provide Israel with the weapons it needs to sustain a long war.

However, Orion says, “in the medium and longer terms, [Israel] will need to significantly [boost] its defense industries” and ability to produce its own ammunition and other key expendables.

THE WEST BANK AND THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE

Two months before a Jordanian terrorist killed three Israeli workers at the Allenby Bridge



crossing in the Jordan Valley on Sept. 8, veteran journalist and Washington Institute Fellow Ehud Yaari warned in a policy analysis paper that Iran was smuggling weapons and drugs into Jordan *en masse*. Teheran, he said, hopes to bring Israel's eastern front in the West Bank and along the Jordanian border into the multi-front war and complete the "ring of fire". As part of this effort, he noted, Hamas was "flooding the [West Bank] with weapons and money" in order to seed new terror cells, including even cells unaffiliated with Hamas or any other organised terror group.

Meanwhile, an increasing number of attempts at terror attacks, both in the West Bank and Israel itself, in addition to the experience of October 7, has only reinforced the

"One of the great conceptual lessons of October 7 was not directly about defence at all, but how a breakdown in social cohesion can endanger the country"

importance of maintaining security control in the West Bank and preserving IDF freedom of operation there.

"There is a need to revisit the essential need for territorial depth," Hacoheh wrote in a column for *Israel Hayom*. "From the early days after the War of Independence, it was agreed within the security system that it is not possible to defend the State of Israel from the narrow coastal strip from Kfar Saba to Highway 6 [which runs along the West Bank border only 15km from the coast – Israel's narrowest point]."

"Given the capabilities of the new war, territorial depth is required many times over. It necessitates Israeli control over the Jordan Valley as the eastern security border and over essential areas in Judea and Samaria," Hacoheh wrote.

Dr Michael Milshtein, head of the Palestinian Studies Forum at the Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University and a long-time proponent of a negotiated political solution with the Palestinians, wrote in his weekly column for *Yedioth Ahronoth* earlier this year that the widespread support among Palestinians for the attack on October 7 convinced many Israelis that the conflict with the Palestinians is not about "occupation", but instead based upon a deeper hatred. Moreover, they now have good reason to fear that full Palestinian statehood is likely to lead, not to conflict resolution, but instead to a severe security threat.

"The intense and violent impulses revealed by Palestinians towards Israelis on October 7, and the equally significant lack of criticism and widespread denial in the face of the brutal massacres, and even claims that they did not occur at all, led many Israelis to wonder whether this is truly a result of the occupation and economic disparities, or rather a deep-seated hatred rooted in the collective Palestinian consciousness," Milshtein wrote.

Milshtein further commented on the contradiction fac-

ing Israel vis-a-vis the Palestinians and, while not offering any complete answers as to how to reconcile them, did offer at least some suggestions of where the route forward might lie.

"In Israeli collective consciousness, the war has planted two seemingly contradictory conclusions," he wrote. "On one hand, the understanding that cultural differences will not allow for stable [Israeli-Palestinian] coexistence within a single entity, that is, in the framework of 'one state'. On the other hand, the assumption that Palestinian independence poses an existential threat to Israel, as it has been proven that the extensive freedom the Gazans gained after the disengagement from Gaza in 2005 was primarily used to escalate violent struggle rather than for self-development."

Milshtein continued, "In this framework, it will be required to examine how to advance, on one hand, a broad physical separation between the two communities, but on the other hand, to prevent existential threats embodied in full Palestinian independence. All this, while disengaging from... waiting for the Palestinians, who currently lack leadership with the will or ability to make compromises."

ISRAELI SOCIAL COHESION: A NECESSITY FOR SURVIVAL

Finally, one of the great conceptual lessons of October 7 was not directly about defence at all, but how a breakdown in social cohesion can endanger the country, with highly visible Israeli internal divisions inviting war from enemies dedicated to Israel's destruction.

Dr Micah Goodman, a leading Israeli thinker, wrote in his most recent book, *The Eighth Day* (published earlier this year), that for Israel today, "cohesion is not an ideal to live for; it is a necessity for survival. Up to October 7, national disputes were perceived and experienced, at least by part of the public, as negative and troubling events. Similar to traffic jams or inflation, they were nuisances that needed to be dealt with but could be lived with. After October 7, the cost of severe internal conflict must be re-evaluated entirely. A national dispute is not like traffic jams or inflation; it is like a devastating earthquake, a deadly epidemic, or an existential war."

Goodman writes that the "right" and "left" camps that have divided Israeli politics for decades are obsolete relics of the Oslo era and are no longer relevant today, when the prospects for a negotiated two-state peace with the Palestinians is not on the horizon in the foreseeable future.

In reality, he says, most Israelis are in the centre of the political bell curve and could potentially reorganise themselves into the country's largest political party while marginalising the extremists and strengthening the country if they can only give up the party "brands" they currently identify with but that often no longer represent their values.

“The apocalypse of October 7th calls on Israel to update itself,” Goodman concluded. “The disaster, one of whose major lessons is the need to act with broad agreements, pushes... pragmatic Israelis toward each other, creating an opportunity to free Israel from the political market failure that paralyzes it.”

AIR

THE HOSTAGES, THE PROTESTERS AND THE PM

Charlotte Lawson

TEL AVIV, Israel—Citizens took to the streets of Israeli cities on Saturday, September 7 to mark 11 months since October 7, in what organisers described as the war’s largest demonstrations in support of hostage families to date. Hundreds of thousands of people gathered on Begin Street in Tel Aviv to send what they hoped would be a clear message to Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu: Reach a deal to bring the abductees home, even if it means making military sacrifices in Gaza.

Yet the decision isn’t Netanyahu’s alone and few Israelis, even among the protesters, think the Government should agree to a deal at any cost. Amid disagreements over where to draw the line, many fear the war has reached an inflection point at which a choice must be made: Save the kidnapped Israelis or continue the war against Hamas. Meanwhile, distrust of Netanyahu’s motives abounds, with critics accusing him of making eleventh-hour demands to sabotage the ceasefire-for-hostage-release talks.

“We expect the Government to do everything it can. Putting up more obstacles to a deal is not doing everything you can. It looks like the Government has already given up on the hostages,” said Molly Dori, a resident of the nearby city of Herzliya who attended the Tel Aviv demonstrations. “It’s horrible. We cannot stand it. That’s why we are protesting. We come here every week.”

And many of the demonstrators have been personally touched by the ongoing hostage crisis. Such is the case for Orly Chen, whose nephew, Israeli American Itay Chen, was killed and taken into Gaza by Hamas terrorists on Oc-

tober 7. “We’re still fighting to bring him back home for the proper burial that he deserves. He can’t be left there,” Chen said.

The belief that Netanyahu is undermining negotiations can be attributed at least in part to vows by his coalition partners to topple the Government if a previously floated hostage deal is struck. Whether the ultranationalist party leaders would follow through on the threats remains uncertain, but many Israelis now believe the Prime Minister is prioritising his political fate over that of the approximately 100 abductees, living and deceased, who remain in Gaza.

For many, Hamas’ execution of six hostages in late August brought a new sense of urgency to the cause for which they have advocated since the beginning of the war. The group of murdered Israelis included Carmel Gat, whose cousin Shay Dickmann blamed the PM for thwarting a July deal from coming to fruition in a tearful speech. “Netanyahu said no”, she claimed of the agreement that almost came to pass.



Hundreds of thousands of demonstrators seeking the return of hostages from Gaza protested in Tel Aviv on September 7, 2024 (Image: Charlotte Lawson)

“Seeing how he’s managed the process in recent weeks, combined with the fresh trauma, is what galvanised people to the streets,” Tel Aviv-based political analyst Dahlia Scheindlin said. “All surveys show that a clear majority – even more than those who are critical of the Government, even more than those who support a hostage deal – believe that Netanyahu was taking his own political future into account in his

decision-making.”

“If elections were held today, Netanyahu would not be able to form a government,” Scheindlin added. In a recent poll by Israel’s *Channel 12*, 69% of respondents said Netanyahu shouldn’t run in the next election, compared to

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An anti-government protester in Tel Aviv carries a poster featuring Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu behind bars on September 7, 2024 (Image: Charlotte Lawson)

just 22% who said he should. Even among coalition voters, more respondents – 46% – said Netanyahu should resign than said he should run again.

Yet Netanyahu, who has led the Likud Party for more than two decades and is serving his third stint as prime minister, has been able to recover some of his pre-war support. After polling dismally for the first six months following October 7, the Prime Minister’s approval rating began its steady recovery in April, following a thwarted Iranian aerial attack.

“Netanyahu has managed to strengthen his public support, not to the extent that he feels secure in his position – there is not a consensus that he is the right wartime leader – but if we look at the centre-right and centre-left, we don’t see any figure that is comparable to him in terms of his public standing,” said Tamar Hermann, head of the Israel Democracy Institute’s Viterbi Family Centre for Public Opinion and Policy Research. Mass demonstrations calling for Netanyahu’s resignation, she added, have allowed him to rally support from people who think he’s been unfairly blamed for the failure of hostage deal negotiations.

And indeed, Hamas has shown little interest in reaching an agreement. The terror group recently rejected an American-backed bridging proposal that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Netanyahu supported. US officials have reportedly begun to doubt Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar’s eagerness to reach a deal, but American mediators are nevertheless pushing ahead with negotiations. US President Joe Biden recently said that “just a couple more issues” remain unresolved.

Public messaging from the Israeli side has been less encouraging for those who want a deal. On Sept. 5, Netanyahu made one of his most pessimistic forecasts yet. “There’s not a deal in the making,” he told *Fox News*. “Unfortunately, it’s not close.”

While Hamas has insisted on a full Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, Netanyahu insists that the military

must continue to hold the Philadelphi corridor – a 13 kilometre stretch of land between Egypt and Gaza – to prevent the terror group from rearming and smuggling fighters in and out of Gaza. Failing to do so, some analysts argue, would pose a grave threat to Israeli soldiers should the country need to resume fighting in the future.

On the other hand, Netanyahu’s own Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant, has pushed the Government to drop the demand if it means reaching a deal. A security cabinet meeting in late August reportedly devolved into a shouting match between the two Likud Party members after Netanyahu doubled down on his desire to hold Philadelphi despite Gallant’s insistence that the military can retake the corridor if needed.

Two days later, the Israel Defence Force discovered the six murdered hostages, leading to a wave of public outrage that has persisted since. At the demonstration in Tel Aviv on Sept. 7, protester Eyal Vald shared Gallant’s conviction that Israel should vacate Philadelphi to get its people home. “The Philadelphi corridor is very important, but right now the lives of the kidnapped are much more important. We can always go back and take over the corridor. Right now, what’s important is bringing them back,” he said.

Vald also accused Netanyahu of caving to the “extremists” in his coalition, referring to Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich of the Religious Zionism Party and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir of the Otzma Yehudit party, who oppose any deal that permanently ends fighting in Gaza before Hamas is destroyed.

Others see the lack of progress in negotiations as wholly unrelated to intra-Israeli politics, pointing to Hamas and Israel’s fundamentally opposing war aims. Jerusalem has consistently vowed to topple Hamas as a military and governing entity in Gaza – a goal endorsed by most Israelis. Hamas, meanwhile, wants to reconstitute post-war and squeeze as many concessions out of Israel as it can in the process.

But Israeli demonstrators don’t see it as their job to get Hamas to the table. “I am not a citizen of Gaza. I am a citizen of the state of Israel. It’s not my responsibility to care or to think what Hamas wants or needs. I only hold my Prime Minister accountable,” Jerusalem resident Karen Saar said at the Sept. 7 protests, where she carried a poster that read, “Executed by Hamas. Abandoned by Netanyahu.”

“Netanyahu didn’t pull the trigger, Hamas pulled the trigger. And he didn’t abduct the hostages, Hamas did,” Saar added. “But he’s the Prime Minister of Israel, so he’s responsible for bringing them back.”

AIR

Charlotte Lawson is a reporter at the Dispatch and currently based in Tel Aviv, Israel. Reprinted from the Dispatch (thedispatch.com). © The Dispatch, reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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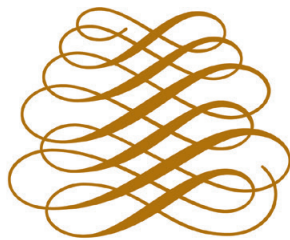
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Philadelphi Story

How a tiny strip of land has become so controversial

Louis Keene

The future of the Philadelphi corridor – a 13-kilometre strip of land along Gaza’s border with Egypt – has emerged as a sticking point in Israel’s ceasefire negotiations with Hamas. Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has insisted that Israel maintaining control over the corridor is central to its national security. But Hamas has made clear that any deal to release the hostages is conditioned on full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza – which includes Philadelphi.

In the meantime, outrage over the discovery in late August that Hamas had executed six Israeli hostages nearly 11 months after their abduction led to the largest protests against Netanyahu since October 7, and to open dissent within his war cabinet. The mother of Almog Sarusi, one of the six hostages, said at his funeral that he had been “sacrificed on the altar” of the Philadelphi Corridor.

Until a few months ago, that corridor was Gaza’s only bridge to the outside world not under Israeli control. Here is its backstory.

HOW PHILADELPHI CAME TO BE

Only a few hundred metres wide and barren of construction beyond fences on either side, the corridor was established when Israel disengaged from the Gaza Strip in

2005, withdrawing both soldiers and settlers who had occupied the area since the 1967 war. Under an addendum to the Camp David accords – the 1978 peace treaty between Israel and Egypt – known as the Philadelphi Protocol, it was to serve as a buffer between Gaza and Egypt.

The name “Philadelphi” was what the road along the border was called on Israeli military code maps. This road leads to the Rafah Crossing, which is controlled by Egypt – Gaza’s only entry or exit point not controlled by Israel.

The Philadelphi Protocol stipulated that Egypt would deploy hundreds of border patrol officers along the corridor to prevent smuggling. The Palestinian Authority would control it from the Gaza side.

But Israel soon started finding tunnels under the corridor. In 2006, the Israel Defence Forces demolished 13 tunnels it said had been used to smuggle weapons into Gaza. The problem worsened after Hamas ousted its rival Fatah faction from Gaza in a bloody coup in 2007, wresting control of



The strategically important Philadelphi border corridor between Gaza and Egypt (Image: Eli Dror/X)

the strip from the PA.

In 2014, after a pair of terror attacks in the Sinai Desert near Gaza, the Egyptian government demolished hundreds of houses to widen the corridor to 500 metres, as it was rumoured that the terrorists may have used the smuggling tunnels to enter the country or transport explosives.

The IDF took control of the corridor this past May, and shortly afterward announced that it had discovered 50 tunnels underneath it connecting Gaza to Egypt.

WHY NETANYAHU WON’T GIVE UP PHILADELPHI

Netanyahu has said that these tunnels made the October 7 attack possible.

“It became a huge terrorist base because we left that corridor,” he said at a news conference.

In May – seven months into the war – IDF forces surged into the corridor, defying Egyptian officials who said the action violated their sovereignty. Israeli troops have remained there since, and Netanyahu calls their ongoing presence there a “red line” in ceasefire negotiations.

He said in late August that proposals to leave Philadelphi temporarily would enable Hamas to smuggle the remaining hostages out of Gaza and into Sinai or Iran. The international community would never support Israel retaking the corridor down the road, he argued, inevitably creating the same conditions that led to October 7.

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WHAT NETANYAHU'S CRITICS ARE SAYING

With ceasefire negotiations dragging on for months, Defence Minister Yoav Gallant and a slew of unnamed Israeli officials have slammed Netanyahu for his obstruction, saying he was overstating Philadelphia's significance. And as large swaths of the Israeli public took to the streets to protest, Netanyahu's fixation on Philadelphia has become the centre of their fury.

Some have pointed to the Israeli military's seeming de-prioritisation of Philadelphia during the war's early stages as evidence that the corridor is not as critical as Netanyahu says. (Others maintain it should have been pursued sooner.)

Gallant called Netanyahu's prioritisation of Philadelphia over the hostages "a moral disgrace", according to Israeli news outlets. Former IDF Chief of Staff Benny Gantz, who quit Netanyahu's war cabinet in June, has said the corridor is important but should be abandoned until the remaining hostages – an estimated 60 of whom are believed to be alive – are returned.

The rest of Netanyahu's security cabinet has backed the Prime Minister.

WHY DON'T THE PALESTINIANS AND EGYPT WANT ISRAEL IN THE CORRIDOR?

Hamas is not alone in rejecting Israeli control of the corridor. Egypt, which along with the United States and Qatar is key in brokering any agreement, also wants the IDF out.

Palestinians and their allies see any ongoing Israeli presence in the corridor as a military occupation of Gaza in violation of international law. It would also shut off their only border not controlled by Israel. And it would threaten the tunnels, which are not only used for weapons, but also food and other goods.

"Without withdrawing from the Philadelphia corridor, there will be no agreement," Khalil al-Hayya, Hamas' lead negotiator, said in an interview with Al Jazeera on Sept. 2.

Egypt sees Israel's presence there as a violation of the Philadelphia Protocol – and thus, the Camp David Accords – and it maintains that it is managing the border effectively. It has rejected Israel's proposal for putting eight guard towers along the corridor.

It's perhaps no surprise that the broader Arab world has taken their side. But it seems the US Biden Administration has as well.

While Biden said on Sept. 2 that Netanyahu is not doing enough to end the war, the President has not addressed Philadelphia directly. On Sept. 4, an unnamed White House official did so, characterising Netanyahu's hardline stance on it as disruptive.

"We have taken account of Israel's security concerns in this negotiation," the official said, "and if anything, not get-

ting into this deal is more of a threat to Israel's long-term security than actually concluding the deal and that includes the issue of the Philadelphia corridor."

ARE THERE ANY OTHER OPTIONS FOR RESOLUTION?

Recent reports from the negotiating table are that Netanyahu has appeared open to the idea of withdrawing troops from the corridor in a second phase of a ceasefire deal.

The US has also proposed putting international forces there for six months, with US and the Palestinian Authority – but not Hamas – posted at the Rafah crossing. But the White House official who spoke anonymously on Sept. 2 said that an "alternative security force" wouldn't be necessary for securing the Philadelphia Corridor.

And he noted that Netanyahu's corridor demand has hardly been the only obstacle to a deal. Hamas, the official said, has made the negotiations "a pretty frustrating process."

"What Hamas has been demanding here," they said, "the Israelis have come forward to meet the terms as best they can."

AIR

Louis Keene is a reporter for the New York Forward. Keene has also been published in the New York Times, New York Magazine and VICE. This story originally appeared in the Forward (forward.com). To get the Forward's free email newsletters delivered to your inbox, go to forward.com/newsletter-signup.

PAGER EXPLOSIONS HINT AT STRATEGY SHIFT

Herb Keinon

At 2:36 am on September 17, the Israeli Prime Minister's Office sent out a statement saying that the security cabinet had updated the objectives of the current war to include "returning the residents of the North securely to their homes."

The brief statement concluded: "Israel will continue to act to implement this objective."

Fourteen hours later, thousands of wireless pagers exploded across Lebanon and even in Damascus in the pockets and bags carried by members of Hezbollah, reportedly wounding nearly 3,000, killing at least 11, and delivering a substantial physical and morale blow to the terrorist organisation.

Coincidence? Probably not.



Israel has not taken responsibility for the attack, which is the stuff of which action movies are made, yet Lebanon, Hezbollah, and others are pointing their fingers squarely at the Jewish state.

If indeed Israel was behind the innovative attack, and even before it becomes clear whether this is a prelude to a much wider Israeli military action, this sowed chaos inside Hezbollah, neutralised hundreds of its fighters for at least several days, if not longer, and created disarray regarding the organisation's ability to communicate. It demonstrates several factors:

First, the security cabinet updating the war's aims was not without significance.

Israel did not need to declare that returning the 60,000 displaced Israelis to their homes was a war aim to go after Hezbollah members carrying pagers via those pagers, but that declaration does put the attack into a certain context – what was for the last 11 months is not what will be.

After nearly a year of tit-for-tat exchanges with Hezbollah – during which Israel has had the upper hand, killing more Hezbollah fighters and inflicting far greater damage on its strategic and military sites than it did on Israel – this action signals that Israel is taking off the gloves and escalating to a new level of operation.

The public's patience with the status quo in the north has run out, and the Government understands this – one of the reasons why it updated the aims of the war. This action, so soon after the war aims were updated, sends a message to Hezbollah that the Government is serious about taking more aggressive steps to return its citizens home.

That message is not only for Hezbollah but also for the international community, first and foremost to the US – get Hezbollah to stand down, meaning to move significantly north of the border with Israel and cease firing missiles and drones, or Israel will indeed take the steps it has been threatening to take for months.

Second, this action shows awesome, jaw-dropping capabilities that will be seen throughout the region.

Rigging pagers so that they explode in the hands of thousands of Hezbollah fighters and operatives simultaneously from Beirut to Damascus is obviously something not done overnight.

This shows that whoever was responsible for this had been planning it for a long time. The message in that is also clear: even though Hezbollah may be expecting an Israeli attack, it has little idea of what form it will take.

AN EARLY WARNING?

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said months ago that Israel has new capabilities that will surprise Hezbollah

and Israel's other enemies. This comment was lost among endless other “we-will-send-Lebanon-back-to-the-stone-age” threats he has issued since Hezbollah began attacking Israel on Oct. 8.

Yet this attack, if carried out by Israel, shows that Gallant's words about surprises were not empty.

The level of pre-planning involved is also significant. Given that this war of attrition has dragged on for months and the Government has now declared its readiness to go to war to change the situation in the north, Israel has lost the element of surprise in any conventional attack on Hezbollah.

In other words, if the Israeli Air Force were to strike Beirut tomorrow or tanks rolled into southern Lebanon, it would neither be surprising nor pre-emptive. The enemy is expecting something.

The pager explosions, however, show that there are other, non-conventional ways to surprise the enemy and gain a tactical advantage. And this leads to the third lesson: the next war is never fought like the previous one.

Following the security cabinet's declaration, the mind immediately went to tanks moving into Lebanon like they did during the First Lebanon War in 1982, or planes bombing Hezbollah's Dahiyeh stronghold in Beirut as they did in the Second Lebanon War in 2006. And all that still might materialise if a full-blown Third Lebanon War now erupts. But those are both elements of yesterday's war.

The pager operation shows that the next war with Hezbollah will be fought differently and in an innovative and creative way: two traits with which Israel has been amply blessed.

AIR

Herb Keinon is a senior contributing editor and analyst for the Jerusalem Post, writing extensively on diplomacy, politics and Israeli society. © Jerusalem Post (jpost.com), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

PREVENTING THE WEST BANK FROM BECOMING GAZA

Neomi Neumann

The operation begun on August 27 by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) in the northern West Bank is another milestone in Israel's struggle against Palestinian terrorism from that territory. Aimed at eradicating the local terrorist infrastructure, the operation is the largest



Hezbollah operatives caught by surprise by their exploding pagers while shopping (Image: Screenshot/X)

in the West Bank since Defensive Shield in 2002 and involves three brigades working in several locations simultaneously. According to figures from the Israel Security Agency (ISA), 1,245 attacks emanated from the northern half of the West Bank over the past year, 255 of them categorised as “significant”. There were also 435 attacks against IDF targets. Since October 7, 24 Israelis have been killed in such attacks.

Recently, the failed Tel Aviv suicide bombing on Aug. 18 was carried out by a Palestinian from this area (specifically Nablus). Hamas, whose last “successful” suicide attack inside Israel was a Jerusalem bus bombing in April 2016, claimed responsibility for the Tel Aviv attack and declared its intention to renew suicide bombings in Israel.



Israeli forces have been forced to return to the increasingly lawless cities of the northern West Bank because they have become a haven for Iranian-armed and funded terror gangs (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

Even before the current IDF operation, Israel was constantly working to crush the West Bank terrorist infrastructure, focusing in recent years on the more challenging northern half. Over time, these efforts left their mark, making it difficult for Hamas to attack inside Israel.

Gradually, however, this difficulty has led Hamas and other terrorist organisations to focus more on attacks inside the West Bank. Thus, starting in 2021, various terrorist “battalions” were formed in the territory, mainly in the northern refugee camps. The weak Palestinian Authority rarely entered these areas, nor did Israel, due to agreements with the PA. These battalions focused on attacking both IDF personnel operating in the West Bank and Israeli settlers, later expanding the violence to communities on the Israeli side of the West Bank security barrier, such as Emek Hefer and Gilboa.

According to ISA estimates, about 15 battalions from Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other Palestinian factions are currently operating in the West Bank. Each has dozens of fighters as well as commanders, financiers, and sabotage experts, resulting in attacks that are increasingly sophisticated and daring. The Gaza war has inspired these battalions, which have begun to “Gazify” the West Bank by manufacturing improvised explosive devices (IEDs), digging tunnels, and attempting to produce rockets.

This terrorist infrastructure grew with the backing and support of Hamas figures in Gaza and abroad, who believed that investing in them would yield a return when the “great war” broke out in Gaza and the various fronts united against Israel. Saleh al-Arouri, who was killed by an Israeli airstrike near Beirut in January, was the Hamas figure responsible for encouraging terrorism in the West Bank and preparing the area as a future battlefield. Hamas finance official Zaher Jabarin, who lives in Turkey but is close to Iran and Hezbollah, has replaced Arouri.

Since October 7, Israel has been responding to all manifestations of terrorism in the West Bank, using methods that have not been employed since the Second Intifada in the early 2000s. In addition to dozens of aerial strikes, the IDF has carried out extensive arrest operations, detaining more than 4,000 suspects so far. It has also confiscated large quantities of weaponry, including IEDs and raw materials, along with large sums of money, estimated in the millions of dollars.

The deteriorating security situation is fed by conditions in the Palestinian arena. The weakening of the PA and the loss of public support for President Mahmoud Abbas and his political path have strengthened opposition elements led by Hamas as well as the “resistance” agenda it represents. On social media, Hamas is frequently perceived as restoring Palestinian honour and representing the interests of the Palestinian public.

A PLAYGROUND FOR THE “AXIS OF RESISTANCE”

The intensifying friction with Israel – which includes frequent IDF raids in Area A, the portion of the West Bank administered exclusively by the PA – exacts a heavy price. A large number of Palestinians (634) have been killed in the West Bank since the Gaza war began; this, combined with frequent waves of arrests, has left many residents feeling a loss of personal security.

The West Bank economy, which is inherently weak, is on the verge of crisis. Israel’s restrictions on the PA since the Gaza war began – particularly its withholding of the Gaza portion of the tax revenues it normally transfers to

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the PA and the revocation of 160,000 permits to work in Israel – have made it difficult for the PA to provide services to the population and harmed the standard of living.

Moreover, the PA for a long time has been paying partial salaries to officials – including security personnel, who are now less willing to prevent terrorism and less motivated to maintain stability. Signs of disintegration are also evident in the ruling Fatah Party, as its activists join with Hamas operatives and take part in terrorist “battalion” activities against Israel.

As for the wider Palestinian public, the terrible scenes of war in Gaza, the large number of fatalities and people arrested in Israeli military operations in the West Bank, and the violence by Jewish extremists have deepened the public’s sense of distress. The deteriorating economic situation (including a high unemployment rate, especially in the northern West Bank) encourages anarchy and facilitates recruitment to terrorist organisations.

Yet despite numerous triggers over the past year, the general public in the West Bank has not engaged in wide popular protest. In recent months there has been a decline in the scope of incidents involving stone throwing, Molotov cocktails, demonstrations, and riots. Nevertheless, Hamas is still perceived as restoring Palestinian honour by fighting Israel and is therefore popular with the public, particularly young people. Refugee camp residents and university students are more willing to join the group.

Hamas efforts to set the West Bank ablaze have long been backed by Iran and Hezbollah. In recent years, the territory has become the de facto playground of the “axis of resistance”, which is flooding local communities with weapons, money, and terrorist know-how. Today, many IEDs manufactured in the northern West Bank contain large quantities of explosives, smuggled from Iran to Syria and from there through the border with Jordan. Besides destabilising the West Bank, this flow of arms and funds also undermines the Hashemite Kingdom’s national security.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In parallel to winning the war in Gaza and establishing a stable postwar situation, Israel will need to work intensively to eradicate terrorism in the West Bank and prevent it from spilling over into Israel. That is why it launched its latest military operation: to prevent the West Bank from becoming another front in the war.

“In parallel to winning the war in Gaza and establishing a stable postwar situation, Israel will need to work intensively to eradicate terrorism in the West Bank and prevent it from spilling over into Israel”

For this reason, it is also important to address the porousness of the West Bank security barrier. Even today under wartime conditions, tens of thousands of Palestinians enter Israel illegally on a near-daily basis. These individuals are generally workers trying to find employment; they tend to leave and return daily, though some stay in Israel for as long as a week at a time. Inevitably, some terrorist operatives slip through as well. Given that most of the gaps through which they infiltrate

are in the so-called Jerusalem Envelope, efforts to complete the security barrier need to be prioritised in these areas, both through accelerated construction and by moving troops there from other locations. The police should also improve their handling of employers who facilitate the illegal entry of Palestinians.

At the same time, Israel needs to address the weapons and funds coming from Iran and Hezbollah, which will require cooperation with Jordan and the PA. Preventing smuggling along the border with Jordan requires international cooperation, led by the United States. Israel must invest more in sealing that border. This means assisting the Jordanians in various areas – which is contingent on the state of their bilateral relations – and investing in additional troops and construction of a border fence along a frontier that is mostly open at present.

However, as in Gaza, the solutions to terrorism are not only military. There must be a systemic response that strengthens the PA and enables it to function while weakening the power of West Bank terrorists. It is important to remove incentives for West Bank residents to engage in terrorism by permitting them to work in Israel. Implementing this measure would be politically difficult given the heightened Israeli fears of terrorist infiltration post-October 7. Yet the fact that tens of thousands of Palestinian workers have already been streaming into Israel illegally suggests that there is some room for policy shifts on this issue.

Action must be taken to reduce Jewish extremist violence against Palestinians as well, including arrests and sanctions. While Palestinian violence undoubtedly sows fear among Israeli settlers, it also gives extreme right-wing elements an excuse to act in ways that intensify the conflict.

AIR

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AMUST GOES NUCLEAR

Ran Porat

The *Australian Muslim Times* (*AMUST*) has been featured in the *AIR* many times in the past as a platform that publishes antisemitic material, conspiracy theories and extremist incitement. This only intensified after Hamas perpetrated the October 7 terror attack on Israel, the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust.

Now the newspaper has literally gone “nuclear” in how far it is willing to take its conspiratorial anti-Zionism – publishing a feature story accusing Israel of using nuclear weapons in both Gaza and Lebanon.

On September 13, *AMUST* published “The use of nuclear weapons in Gaza: A call for justice” by Zaakiy Siddiqui, a regular contributor. This piece centres on a conspiracy theory that has also featured in Hezbollah’s media mouthpiece *Al Mayadeen* – a fact noted in the *AMUST* story itself. The report cites a supposed study by a controversial extreme left UK scientist, Christopher Busby, which claims to have located fragments of enriched uranium – a key ingredient of atomic bombs – in “soil samples taken from bomb craters in southern Lebanon.” Siddiqui then alleges – incorrectly – that these “findings” point “to the use of neutron bombs.”

In the rest of the article, Siddiqui claims that “Since 2008, evidence has been mounting that Israel has used nuclear weapons in its military operations in both Gaza and Lebanon. In 2021, scientists published the results of analyses from 65 soil and building material samples collected in Gaza, all of which contained enriched uranium.”

Needless to say, all of these claims are baseless – the use of nuclear weapons could not possibly be hidden from global radiation and satellite surveillance systems. Siddiqui’s allegations constitute just the latest in a long series of fake accusations alleging Israel is using atomic bombs in various cases (for example, the Beirut Port explosion in 2020 led to online speculation it was a nuclear weapon).

In addition to the nuclear conspiracy theory, here are more recent examples from *AMUST* and the newspaper’s habit of publishing antisemitic tropes, incitement and conspiracy theories in virtually every edition.

THE EVIL ‘ZIONIST LOBBY’

In his report about the pro-Palestine University of Sydney (USyd) encampment, *AMUST* Editor-in-Chief Zia Ahmad (July 2) takes his readership down a rabbit hole for a tour of antisemitic conspiracy theories about alleged



AMUST contributors (from top): Zia Ahmad, Daud Batchelor, Fadhil Wilmot (Screenshots)

Jewish control of the media. He argues that *Channel 9*’s “60 Minutes” exposé about the central role the extremist and antisemitic Islamic movement Hizb ut-Tahrir had played in the USyd protest was “a concerted campaign” aimed at “discrediting” the encampment.

Ignoring testimonies that Sydney University’s campus was unsafe for Jews during the protests, Ahmad claims that it was “the Zionist lobby [who] put pressure on the University to take action against the encampment accusing it of creating fear amongst Jewish students, no go areas for Jews and of anti-Semitism.”

Addressing the Labor Government’s policy towards the war in Gaza (“ALP alienates growing proportion of Australians over abysmal inaction on the Palestinian holocaust”, June 29), *AMUST* contributor Daud Batchelor introduces antisemitic tropes and conspiracy theories. He starts by falsely accusing Israel of “State-sanctioned massacres of women, and innocent children...; deaths by deliberate starvation and stealing of Palestinian lands.” Then he trivialises the Holocaust, stating that what is happening in Gaza “is clearly a ‘genocide’ rivalling the WW2

genocide of Jews.”

In a message corresponding with the infamous trope about overwhelming Jewish power controlling governments, Batchelor criticises what he calls the “inaction” of the ALP as a result of “cowardly ‘kowtowing’ to Zionist lobbies.” Any pretence of reporting or analysis disappears when Batchelor openly pushes that conspiracy theory as self-evidently true, stating: “Continued appalling appeasement of Zionist lobbies by President Biden for Israeli pogroms against Palestinians, even when genocidal intent is clear, is apparent to all Australians. The Lobby, neocons, Israeli dual-citizens and allies now control all key US state institutions.”

Commenting on Batchelor’s article, *AMUST* regular contributor Bilal Cleland parrots his conspiratorial views,



concluding that “The betrayal of Labor values by all except Senator Payman means that the ALP has submitted to the local Zionist lobby.”

HOLOCAUST TRIVIALISATION

Fadlullah Wilmot, in his “Genocides ignored: The Srebrenica Genocide and now the Gaza Genocide ignored by the West” (June 30), offers the same line of Holocaust distortion/trivialisation and contextualised antisemitism. Comparing the 1995 Srebrenica Massacre of 7,000 Muslim men by Serbian forces to the current war in Gaza, Wilmot argues to *AMUST* readers that “Just as in the case of Gaza today, the West played the role of voyeur – a silent witness and enabler of some of the worst atrocities and crimes against humanity to occur in Europe in this century.”

The ‘analysis’ continues with Wilmot spraying wild accusations that “Zionists” and Serbs are Islam-haters for various imaginary reasons: “The Serbs and Zionists harbour similar anti-Islam sentiments steeped in their own congenital rational [sic]. Serbs hate fellow Slavs for becoming Muslim and proclaiming their Bosnian identity while Zionists hate fellow Semites for becoming Muslim and proclaiming their Palestinian identity. Both deny them the right to a state of their own or that it ever existed.”

Referring to anti-Zionist Israeli historian Shlomo Sands, Wilmot argues that Zionists and Serbs “push the narrative of hatred and Islamophobia framing the narrative in a way that paints the aggressors – the Serbs and the Zionists – as the victims and the Bosnian and Palestinian victims as the aggressors who are a threat to ‘civilisation’ whose claims to a national identity have no basis and that the aggressors are reclaiming their historical rights to the land.”

The piece finishes with the famous exaggerated myth that Jews enjoyed a ‘golden age’ under Muslim rule in Spain and a claim they are now killing Muslims to cover up this “fact”: “They both ignore the history of centuries of Muslim tolerance and coexistence while using the conflict as an excuse to destroy the historical evidence of a Muslim presence and tradition.”

UGLY HINTS ABOUT ‘DUAL LOYALTY’

AMUST also reprinted several controversial opinion pieces about the war in Gaza.

Evan Jones’ “The elephant in the Zionist classroom” (June 20, originally published on the radical *Independent Australia* website) is a blatant attempt to soil the reputation of Australian Jewish schools with ugly innuendos about dual loyalty.

Jones opens his text by describing Israel in terms taken directly from blood libel tropes and infamous narratives aimed at discrediting its right to exist. The “*raison d’être*” of the Jewish state, he says, is “decidedly blood-soaked. The young Israel had been created out of settler colonialism and terrorism in a country with a majority Indigenous non-Jewish population.”

Jones then tries to ‘prove’ that “Australian Jewish schools in general put Israel, uncritically and devotionally, on the curriculum and into school culture.” While his “evidence” – cherry-picked snippets from Jewish schools’ websites – is unconvincing to say the least, his comment about the visit of Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu to Sydney’s Moriah College in 2017 hints that the Jewish schools do not foster a sense of loyalty to Australia – “How this show business affair enhanced the highly emotional primary school students’ sense of identity as Jewish Australians is not obvious.”

Finally, Jones asserts, without offering any evidence, that Jewish school camps “involve soldier training simulations that feed, whether directly through recruitment or in sympathy, into Israel’s militarised society and killing machine.”

The article finishes with a ‘warning’ by Jones that “An unqualified attachment by the Jewish school system to a pariah state sits uneasily with the system’s other ‘core values’ that emphasise critical thinking and Jewish ethics. Is this school system the nursery for the Israel lobby in Australia?”

RECOMMENDED: ‘EXHILARATED’ BY OCTOBER 7

Hena Jawaid urges *AMUST* readers to read the writings of notorious anti-Zionist Jewish American writer Norman Finkelstein in “Why we need to read Norman Finkelstein?” (July 1). Why? Because, she alleges, “He was exhilarated when Hamas retaliated on Saturday, 7 October, 2023.”

Jawaid’s interpretation of Finkelstein’s work is that he backs a variety of pro-Palestinian conspiracy theories. Finkelstein “should be appreciated... for resiliently writing about Zionism-led atrocities which include killing the native people, grabbing their land, extending settlement areas, playing the victim card, spreading propaganda, influencing mainstream electronic media and social media, shaping mindset [sic] of people to think about Jews in reference with Holocaust only which would eventually make it easy for them to ignore their crimes and brutalities against helpless, weak and powerless indigenous people of Palestine.”

Facts and truths do not appear to concern *AMUST* when it comes to Israel, focussed as it is on spreading lies and hatred against the Jewish state even as it fights against Hamas terrorists. AIR

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When Rights groups go wrong

The corruption of the human rights establishment

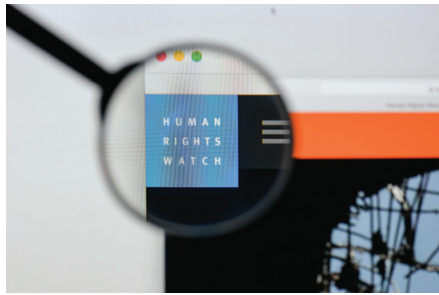
Danielle Haas

Released with fanfare at a high-wattage press conference every year, the *World Report* is Human Rights Watch’s (HRW’s) flagship annual review of global human rights abuses. For 13 years I was its editor, overseeing a six-month production cycle that involved hundreds of staff and resulted in some 100 country chapters. I was the only person in the organisation to read every chapter, giving me a unique Afghanistan-to-Zimbabwe overview of their content and length. And every few years, noting its irregularity, I would raise the same question: “Why is the Israel-Palestine chapter so long?”

Not longer than a few chapters – longer than more than 90% of them, including those highlighting corrupt dictatorships sans free speech, repressive regimes in which women are second-class citizens, and countries that practise generational forced labour.

I tried again this July. “Is it so long because HRW invests more resources here?” I asked. “Thinks the abuses are more egregious than elsewhere? Has better access than to countries like North Korea and Iran? Whatever the reason, we should be transparent with readers.” But there never was a clear explanation, and after so many years, I did not need one.

The political and ideological creep in many NGOs has become so perva-



Groups like Human Rights Watch are being granted a “watchdog” role without ever having to prove they are fit to bark (Image: Shutterstock)

sive and deep-rooted that Israel has become their watchword of outrage, the focus of disproportionate attention, and the note to sound for signalling fealty to a human rights movement that is increasingly hijacked by politics and dominated by groupthink.

This must change. For too long, human rights groups have been granted a free pass to serve as society’s watchdogs without first proving they are fit to bark. Opaque, unelected, and largely unaccountable, they must finally be required to descend from their moral mountaintops and demonstrate in their own conduct the accountability and transparency they demand of others.

There have been signs for years that all is not well inside rights groups. In 2020, for example, it was revealed that HRW had accepted money from a Saudi donor (whose company it had identified as having committed labour-rights abuses) on

the condition that the funds not be used to support LGBT advocacy in the Middle East and North Africa. (HRW later returned the donation.) It also faces allegations based on newly released documents that it accepted money from Qatar in 2018. (HRW has denied the claim.)

It was reported in April 2023 that Amnesty International’s board had for months sat on a critical report that showed the organisation had “not sufficiently substantiated” its claims from the previous year that Ukraine’s military had breached international law on protecting civilians by setting up bases in schools and counterattacking Russia from populated civilian areas. The report judged that Amnesty’s language was “ambiguous, imprecise, and in some respects legally questionable.”

Then came October 7. If there were doubts before Hamas’ massacres that the moral inputs and the conceptual and practical processing are gravely awry in NGO functioning, they were gone by Oct. 8.

As the only Jewish HRW staff member living in Israel over the past eight years, I was utterly shocked, along with the rest of the country, at the dystopian horror that unfolded from the moment the first missile siren wailed that Saturday morning. But over the hours, then days and weeks, that followed, a trauma of a different kind set in as I wrestled with the non-existent, muted, or distorted reactions to the largest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust from my roughly 600 colleagues at the rights-touting organisation where I had worked for so long.

Before I left in mid-November, I wrote via WhatsApp to one of the few colleagues who reached out to me following HRW’s clinical first public reaction to the bloodshed, which stated, “Palestinian armed groups carried out a deadly assault on October 7, 2023, that killed several hundred Israeli civilians and led to Israeli counter-strikes that killed hundreds of Palestinians.”





Amnesty International Secretary-General Agnes Callamard who failed to call for the release of Israeli hostages after October 7 (Image: Amnesty International)

“I am at a loss,” I said. “How on earth can there not be one sentence that gives unequivocal space to what happened here in Israel... One line from HRW to note and condemn the absolute barbarity would have been the least. But it couldn’t.”

It couldn’t because, as October 7 and its aftermath made clear, the outrage of many rights monitors depends not on human rights principles, but on who is being abused and who is being accused.

These are groups that hurl stinging rebukes on a daily basis. “Heinous”, “abhorrent” and “morally reprehensible” were descriptions in their lexicons before October 7: They were used to describe Salvadorian state abuses, Singaporean hangings, and the UK’s pushback of migrants. After September 11, 2001, Amnesty was “appalled at [the] devastating attacks against civilians.” But on October 7, rights monitors lost their moral voice.

An “unprecedented operation by its fighters into southern Israel” is what Amnesty called Hamas’ mass slaughter and rapes. Others simply subsumed more than 1,200 murdered, mutilated, and kidnapped Israelis into such banalities as “military offensives” (Oxfam) and an “escalation in violence” (Save the Children).

Their responses reflected an escalation of a different sort that has been happening for years within many NGOs, where Israel has become so demonised that there is no space to see Israelis as victims, or to absorb nuance or voices that challenge their orthodoxies. In a conceptual universe where Israel is an occupier-coloniser-

apartheid state, it is *a priori* the aggressor, regardless of the brutal human-rights abuses it suffers.

“There’s no honor in unlawful attacks on civilians. No matter how just your resistance to apartheid and

oppression is,” HRW’s program director Sari Bashi wrote on X (formerly Twitter) during the October 7 attack, trafficking in the language of virtue rather than morality. Israeli hostages were mentioned only twice in the X posts of Amnesty Secretary-General Agnès Callamard in the month of October; the posts did not call for their release.

More recently, in January 2024, rights groups had little to say about reporting that Gazan teachers, a social worker, and other staff of UNRWA – the UN agency ostensibly dedicated to helping Palestinian refugees – likely moonlighted on October 7 as kidnapers, killers, and RPG suppliers. Instead, many downplayed or presented the allegations as a mysterious human rights whodunnit, as an adviser in Amnesty’s regional office put it:

The #US + co. chose to freeze funds to @UNRWA, the biggest provider of aid in Gaza, based on what the Israeli government alleged a tiny fraction of staff did. Maybe they did, maybe they didn’t, we don’t know.

UNRWA apparently knew, though: It had already fired the staff members in question. And several major UNRWA donors were sufficiently convinced that they froze their funds – a “sickening” decision, wrote Amnesty’s Callamard in another X post, made because of the “alleged crimes of 12 people.”

Claims about the blurred lines between

militants and aid agencies in Gaza have swirled for years, and a released Israeli hostage spoke in November of being held in an UNRWA teacher’s attic. Still, on Jan. 11, just two weeks before the UNRWA news, human rights groups were drawing a blank. “On the accusations that have been made against UNRWA,” HRW Executive Director Tirana Hassan told the UN, “Human Rights Watch has no evidence to give credibility to those claims.” Which demands the question: Did rights groups even look for evidence?

This same unhealthy scepticism of Israelis guided their response to the Hamas attacks themselves. Despite Hamas filming and livestreaming its own bloodletting, and the videos and survivor testimony saturating the media, on Oct. 9 HRW still referred to the “apparent deliberate targeting of civilians.” Only on Oct. 18 did it state with confidence that Hamas had intended to kill anyone, announcing it had “verified four videos” from October 7 “showing three incidents of deliberate killings.”

Because NGOs follow a course set by an existing narrative, “evidence” has relative value. When Israel finds Hamas tunnels beneath children’s beds, or third-party investigations reveal that Israel did not cause the deadly Oct. 17 blast at al-Ahli Hospital, these findings receive scant attention compared with Israeli abuses because, in the minds of NGOs and those who work there, they are mere inconveniences to the prevailing nar-



Human Rights Watch’s Omar Shakir (Image: HRW)

rative that Israel is fundamentally to blame.

For instance, when the *New York Times* reported on Feb. 12 that al-Shifa Hospital was a hotbed of Hamas activity, Omar Shakir, with a dual portfolio as HRW’s Israel and Palestine director, did not feature this relevant information in any of his posts on X that day, or the next. Instead, his focus was on exports to Israel of Dutch fighter-jet parts and the release of a video clip from an Al Jazeera interview in which he paid familiar anaemic lip service to Hamas and its murders (or, in his words, “the people who carried out October 7th” and “involved the commission of grave crimes”) before returning to the usual script: “We’re here precisely because of years of impunity for grave abuses, including Israel’s apartheid against Palestinians.”

“APARTHEID”

The word has been constantly on the lips and in the posts of NGOs and their staff before and after October 7 in reference to Israel. HRW’s 2021 report on apartheid accused Israel of employing an overarching policy “to maintain the domination by Jewish Israelis over Palestinians” and accused its officials of committing crimes of apartheid and persecution. Amnesty followed suit the next year, citing other NGOs that similarly criticised Israel.

These groups cannot stop using the term because the “apartheid” framing is part of a larger ideological messaging strategy used by some of them to pursue “narrative change” that seeks to proactively shape public thinking and rhetoric, including about Israel. In keeping with this model, human rights actors now focus on new allies and younger voices – including Hollywood players and social-media influencers – to circumvent tradi-

tional power structures. In 2023, HRW signed on with a Los Angeles-based talent-management firm committed to inserting its messages into popular culture.

NGOs are therefore dual actors. As activists, they have a mission to ensure that the message of so-called

“An ‘unprecedented operation by its fighters into southern Israel’ is what Amnesty called Hamas’ mass slaughter and rapes”

Israeli apartheid takes root in the wider world. But as self-described witnesses, they are dedicated to rigorous firsthand research that underpins their findings and recommendations.

There are at least two problems with this. The first is that the long-form, deeply researched reports that were once the trademark publications of HRW have been in decline for years. Short-form written pieces, multimedia output, and social-media quick hits now far outnumber them, with related changes in tone, nuance, and argumentation, not to mention the absence of consistent fact-checking.

The second problem is that the roles of activist and witness are fundamentally discordant. The former involves a ready-made mindset and imposition. The latter requires an open mind and exploration.

The reaction of NGOs to Hamas’ attack laid bare the troubles of their split identities, exposing which of the twin roles has become dominant. Because they were consumed with being “Israel apartheid” evangelists, rights groups failed to bear due witness to Hamas’ atrocities.

From here you get more than 100

Human Rights Watch researchers rushing after October 7 to sign a petition related to a pending press release about Israeli hostages. Their cry? Not for the organisation to be clearer and louder in condemning Hamas’ unspeakable sexual violence against women or its killing of babies. It was to demand from senior managers that the hostage-focused piece reference Israeli apartheid.

It’s no wonder that NGO staff members, both Jewish and non-Jewish, told me that, for years, they had raised concerns with managers and in wider discussion forums about antisemitism and methodological problems related to Israel work, only to face hostility at worst, inaction and indifference at best.

Most said they now self-censored because of their experiences. And over the years, I mostly did the same. But the points I made in an email to HRW’s general counsel in 2019, after Israel was the only country mentioned in every plenary session at the organisation’s annual New York gathering, remained true until I left. “The issue for me is not negative discussion at HRW about Israeli actions and policies... I share many, if not all, of these views,” I wrote.

The complexity comes with the ease and weight of the discussion... the appropriation of Israel/Palestine as a way to express dedication to the human rights cause and left-wing credibility... It comes with the very public forums in which Israeli examples are given freely in front of people who, for the most part, have no professional experience of the issue and almost no personal experience of Israel.

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After October 7, at human-rights institutions nominally committed to acceptance and free speech, Jewish and non-Jewish staff felt safe to express their horror at the toxic climate only by resorting to encrypted apps and other platforms outside internal communication systems.

In recent years, NGOs have made a point to hire and integrate into their work colleagues with relevant ethnic, national, or other identities – for example, African Americans in US work, or LGBT staff in work on LGBT issues. But not always. During my eight years working as senior editor for Human Rights Watch from Israel, to my knowledge, the organisation included no Israel-based Jewish staff in its work on Israel-Palestine. Even I was there only by personal, not institutional design. I was hired and worked in New York before moving to Israel of my own volition.

My position in the program office, the division that oversees HRW’s thematic and geographic work, meant I could reliably be asked to handle material on all manner of global issues – other than those related to Israel. It was not from lack of trying. My repeated efforts to be involved, based on my academic, linguistic, and professional credentials, and 17 years’ cumulative experience on the ground, went nowhere.

The value of local staff who speak the cultural language and are related to those around them was driven home after the October 7 attacks, when a colleague asked if I would help to convince ZAKA – Israel’s emergency first responders – to talk to HRW.

We know from a slew of recent examples – including the taciturnity of Hollywood and the Catholic Church over known sexual predation in their ranks – that power players are often less dedicated to moral probity than they are to protecting their finances, their images, and their own.

In 2009, Marc Garlasco, Human Rights Watch’s senior military analyst, was outed as an avid collector of Nazi memorabilia. HRW’s knee-jerk



Nazi memorabilia enthusiast and HRW ‘expert’ Marc Garlasco (Image: LinkedIn)

response was to vigorously defend him, claiming that his after-hours pursuits were purely scholarly. But Garlasco had already authored a book on Nazi-era medals, a 400-page red flag indicating that his excitement for all things Reich – including a leather SS jacket that he gushed online made him “go cold it is so COOL!” – was no passing peccadillo. Facing growing pressure, HRW suspended him pending an investigation of his hobby, but not without dismissing public outrage as “a distraction from the real issue, which is the Israeli government’s behaviour.”

Even if one accepts that the odd Nazi-jacket enthusiast turned human-rights activist may be the sort of problem that can crop up, rights monitors have shown enduring ability in the years since to stomach eliminationist behaviour related to Jews and Israel.

In the summer of 2023, Amnesty staffers met senior leaders to demand accountability after a board member of Amnesty International USA was found to have written and shared social media posts that denied the legitimacy of Israel and lauded a 2022 mass shooting as a “#Tel_Aviv_Operation”. She also retweeted an image of a cartoon hand flicking a Star of David off an arm shaped as Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. “This land does not fit two identities. It’s either us – or us,” the Arabic text said. Leadership confirmed the posts’ authenticity and agreed they could be seen as antisemitic but said there would be no disciplinary action. It also rejected a request to issue a general statement condemning antisemitism, saying that to do so in the context of the tweets would not be in the organisation’s best interest. The board member retains her position today.

It is hard not to wonder what the Zionist fathers of the human-rights movement would make of it all. Raphael Lemkin, the Polish-born Holocaust survivor, Zionist activist, and

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lawyer behind the word “genocide” and the United Nations Genocide Convention, died in 1959. Lawyer Hersch Lauterpacht, the founder of international human rights law who drafted Israel’s Declaration of Independence, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the European Convention on Human Rights, died in 1960. The Jewish-born founder

“Needless to say, the media must treat NGOs as they would any other source: critically and with fact-checking”

of Amnesty, Peter Benenson, passed away in 2005.

But we do know what Robert Bernstein, who died in 2019 and founded the rights-monitoring groups that in 1988 merged to form Human Rights Watch, thought of the evolution of the entity he helped birth. He made it clear in a *New York Times* op-ed in 2009. HRW, he said, had “lost critical perspective on a conflict in which Israel has been repeatedly attacked by Hamas and Hezbollah, organisations that go after Israeli citizens and use their own people as human shields.”

Needless to say, he faced the same internal institutional eye-rolling and external pushback, vilification, and gaslighting that those who challenge dogma or who aren’t deemed to be valid messengers often endure – that is, if they aren’t simply ejected. Contrary to usual practice, HRW locked me out of its system shortly after I sent my farewell email detailing issues I had with its Israel work, without warning and a day ahead of my scheduled departure. In doing so, it sent a clear message to remaining staff: Speak truth to power, just not here.

It’s instructive to understand that money and reputation are what are important to rights monitors, rather than a “team of rivals” approach of listening to voices that don’t necessarily sing the same tune but that could ultimately strengthen their cause. Above all, this dynamic explains the

futility of upbraiding NGOs to uphold their own standards and on-paper policies, and the inefficacy of proving they are unequal-opportunity accusers or antisemitic. Such strategies do not work because NGOs do not care – and do not have to. They answer to virtually no one.

These are enormous organisations. In 2022, HRW’s annual budget was around AU\$150 million, Amnesty’s nearly AU\$600 million, and Doctors Without Borders’ (the medical-care NGO that has been notably unvociferous about Hamas’ misuse of medical facilities) more than AU\$3 billion. Incredibly, given the size and influence of these organisations, their accountability is practised primarily via self-regulatory mechanisms and internal rules and procedures.

Too often, rights groups have been able to swat away allegations of bias without meaningful proof or challenge. Too frequently, NGO issues have arisen only to disappear from the radar as rogue incidents, rather than being connected as points in a possible pattern. There are too many examples of malpractice that have come to light only because of leaks, rather than because rights groups practise the transparency and accountability that they demand of others.

Shamefully then, they must be *made* to do so. The push for them to prove, not just claim, their rectitude must be exerted from without and targeted at what *does* matter to them.

Needless to say, the media must treat NGOs as they would any other source: critically and with fact-checking.

Human rights organisations must submit to independent, thorough, external reviews of their operations, with the findings made public – and not only after a reporter happens to find that such a review has been sat on for months.

These audits should include investigating their editing, correc-

tions, and fact-checking processes, as well as complaint mechanisms, meeting minutes, research priorities, resource allocations, terminology, and organisational operations. Staff must be interviewed for their experiences related to workplace culture and management. (In nearly 14 years, I formally reviewed my managers once. Budget reasons, I was told.)

Concerned staff must speak out and join forces if they want to change the course of organisations they feel are gravely distorting their values. NGO Confidential is a new platform designed for this purpose. The often-heard rationale that was my own for many years – “I don’t like what’s happening, but at least if I’m here, I can try to do something about it” – is doomed to fail if everyone thinks it alone.

Focusing on the warped thinking and practice, never mind the deafening silence of many NGOs on Hamas’ wanton savagery of October 7, does not abnegate Palestinian suffering or Israeli abuses.

Rather, pointing this out is to show that the failures of rights monitors before and after October 7 reveal wider problems so fundamental to accuracy and fairness that they ultimately collapse NGO claims to be reliable and apolitical when they serve as society’s presumptive moral ambassadors in the halls of power and influence.

And this focus is about noting the dismal reality that the capacity of people to rejoice at, ignore, and relativise Jewish suffering has historically often been the canary in the coal mine, a portent of society’s wider moral slide.

As such, the corruption of human rights organisations is a warning light not just for Jews and Israelis, but for all.

Danielle Haas was the senior editor in the program office of Human Rights Watch from 2010 to 2023. © Sapir (www.sapirjournal.org), reprinted by permission, all rights reserved.

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NOTED AND QUOTED

THE MONTH IN MEDIA

HOSTAGE DIPLOMACY

In the *Adelaide Advertiser* (Sept. 3), AIJAC's Justin Amler wrote of the joy experienced in Israel after the IDF's rescue in late August of 52-year-old Qaid Farhan al-Qadi, an Israeli Bedouin held hostage in Gaza since October 7.

Al-Qadi, he wrote, "was saved... because Israel values every life. But a few days later, six hostages were murdered by Hamas, because Israel's enemies embrace murder, death and destruction."

Meanwhile, AIJAC Research Associate Ran Porat told ABC Radio's *Triple J* (Sept. 3) that mass protests in Israel against the Government's failure to secure the release of the six Israeli hostages alive would not coerce PM Netanyahu to accept a bad ceasefire deal.

Dr Porat explained that "Hamas has maximalist demands" that Netanyahu cannot accept. These include "the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces [from Gaza]... And we've seen what Hamas is. Hamas executed at the last minute hostages about to be freed," he said.

REAL DOWNER

Writing in the *Australian* (Sept. 9), former Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer condemned the response of Western governments to the brutal murder of the six Israeli hostages by Hamas.

"Two days after this brutal execution of six innocent people, the British government announced it was imposing bans on certain arms sales to Israel. From the point of view of Hamas, the criticism by Biden and the decision by the British government just encourage the terror group to keep and maltreat those remaining

hostages who are still alive. And the Australian government? All Anthony Albanese could bring himself to do was express his sorrow at the deaths on X," he wrote.

NUMBERS GAME

On Sept. 10, most of the local media uncritically reported the claims by the Hamas Health Department in Gaza that an Israeli air strike killed at least 40 people in a designated humanitarian zone near Khan Younis.

Israel's claim that only 19 Palestinians were killed, all of them Hamas-affiliated terrorists, was given short shrift.

Unusually, Hamas subsequently revised the number of killed it listed down to 19. While some reports noted the update, this received nowhere near the same amount of coverage as the initial estimate.

On *ABC TV News* (Sept. 15), Save the Children's Alexandra Sayeh condemned Israel for launching strikes on UN buildings where, she said, Palestinians are sheltering.

Asked to respond to an Israeli military statement that it didn't target schools, only "Hamas militants" using them as bases, Sayeh changed the subject, saying, "we know... that families were affected, that children have been killed, that women were sheltering there with their children. And we're seeing this again and again and again."

Of course, Sayeh didn't demand Hamas stop setting up military headquarters in schools, mosques, and medical facilities, including in the humanitarian zone.

She also accused Israel of obstructing aid coming into Gaza and not allowing medical supplies to

enter in closed trucks with cold storage, but didn't explain that Hamas is stealing aid and armed gunmen are more likely to be hiding inside sealed vehicles.

LUCE WITH THE TRUTH

In the *Australian Financial Review* (Aug. 23), *Financial Times* columnist Edward Luce compared the death and destruction in Gaza to Warsaw 1945 or Grozny 1999, claiming Israel is "indiscriminate[ly]" bombing "to teach Palestinians a collective lesson."

The only reason why there is widespread destruction in Gaza and a high death toll is due to Hamas' immoral and calculated tactic of basing its fighters and terror infrastructure amidst dense civilian populations. And those who highlight the civilian cost of the conflict almost never have any answer when asked how it would be possible for Israel to fight Hamas without causing substantial civilian casualties in the urban jungle of Gaza where Hamas has placed its military infrastructure in every civilian neighbourhood, and in homes, schools, mosques and hospitals.

Luce said the Biden Administration's "poor record" on the Middle East predates October 7, citing its failure to "rejoin the Iran nuclear deal... Trump pulled the US out of in 2018," which he attributed to a "fear of the pro-Netanyahu Israeli lobby." Of course, it was actually Teheran that rejected returning to the 2015 nuclear deal when offered precisely this by the Biden Administration.

Meanwhile, AIJAC's Tammy Reznik on the ABC "Religion & Ethics" website (Sept. 8) lamented that Hamas has "mastered the art of flipping the narrative," and has succeeded in convincing many people that it is

an organisation of “courageous freedom fighters”.

RODGER THAT

Commenting in the Nine newspapers (Sept. 4), on the cruel execution of six Israeli hostages held by Hamas in Gaza since October 7, 2023, analyst Rodger Shanahan noted that after the Hamas mass terror attack and kidnapping, “Israel had no choice but to take revenge against Hamas, and to degrade it to the point where it was

no longer capable of threatening Israel in the way that it did on October 7.”

He added that “for all the justifiable criticism of the Israeli approach to civilian harm minimisation in Gaza, one should never lose sight of the fact the mentality that led Hamas to kill six hostages in cold blood is the same one that allowed it to believe that shooting innocent concert-goers, or throwing grenades into bomb shelters housing young people in the prime of their lives, could somehow be justified in the name of Palestinian

sovereignty. Those advocating support for Hamas would do well to reflect on this.”

Earlier in the Nine newspapers (Aug. 14), Shanahan was critical of Israel’s conduct of the war, saying “the strategic aims it set itself, along with the scale and duration of the Gaza operation should have been constructed so that at the end of the military campaign Israel was more secure than it was at the start.” However, he completely failed to explain how that could be achieved.



IN PARLIAMENT

Julian Leeser (Lib., Berowra) – Sept. 12 – “Australians are shocked by what we’ve seen since 7 October... calling for death to Jews; hate preachers openly calling for the murder of Jews.”

Andrew Wilkie (Ind., Clark) – Sept. 12 – “The Australian Government should ... engage no further in trading arms ... with the Israel Defence Forces until we can be sure they would not be used to commit a genocide.”

Assistant Minister for Climate Change and Energy **Josh Wilson** (ALP, Fremantle) – Sept. 9 – “Israel has inflicted carnage on a trapped and defenceless civilian population in Gaza. More than 40,000 civilians have died, the majority ... women and children.”

Monique Ryan (Ind., Kooyong) – Sept. 9 – “[The] Israeli administration ... seems intransigent to the urgings of governments, the UN and the International Court of Justice to halt the killing of innocents [and] to respect international law...”

Shadow Minister for Trade and Tourism **Kevin Hogan** (Nat., Page) – Aug. 21 – “[Hamas] thought it was okay to film themselves and celebrate those horrible things ... and ... hides behind [Gazans] in tunnels and in schools and hospitals.”

Max Chandler-Mather (Greens, Griffith) – Aug. 21 – Moving a motion accusing Israel of apartheid, sexual abuse of prisoners and genocide and calling for sanctions: “Over 15,000 Palestinian children... have been murdered by Israel...”

Andrew Wallace (LNP, Fisher) – “Not only did [Hamas] kill innocent Israelis; they killed women and children, beheading people. There was rape. Where were the Greens? It’s ‘me too’ unless you’re a Jew.”

Only the Greens and independents **Andrew Wilkie** and **Helen Haines** opposed an ALP motion to adjourn the debate.

Senator **Jacqui Lambie** (JLN, Tas.) – Aug. 21 – “Australian authorities have registered and given special tax status to a charity directed by a key figure within Hizb ut-Tahrir who has urged Muslims to send weapons to Gaza.”

Shadow Assistant Minister to the Leader of the Opposi-

tion Senator **James McGrath** (LNP, Qld) – Aug. 20 – “7 October was ... an attack on the core values of freedom, democracy and liberty... Hamas must be eradicated, the hostages must be released.”

Prime Minister **Anthony Albanese** (ALP, Grayndler) – Aug. 20 – “[Hamas] are enemies not only of the people of Israel; they are enemies of the Palestinian people because Hamas do not respect the human rights of Palestinian people.”

Tony Zappia (ALP, Makin) – Aug. 19 – “Over 40,000 Palestinian civilians have been killed in Gaza from targeted Israeli attacks... The Netanyahu Government ignores international law, blocks humanitarian aid to fleeing Palestinians and hinders efforts to contain the spread of polio.”

Opposition Leader **Peter Dutton** (Lib., Dickson) – Aug. 15 – “The Israeli Government is a democratically elected government... They have helped thwart terrorist attacks in our country... The level of antisemitism in our country is at a record high.”

Shadow Assistant Foreign Minister Senator **Claire Chandler** (Lib., Tas) – Aug. 14 – “The Iran regime and the terrorist groups they arm and fund make absolutely no secret of their desire to eradicate Israel and to spread dangerous and violent antisemitism around the world... It is absolutely unacceptable to have a foreign official openly espousing such dangerous antisemitic hatred in the Australian community, and it is extremely disturbing that the Iranian ambassador has been doing so since October 2023.”

Greens Deputy Leader Senator **Mehreen Faruqi** (NSW) – Aug. 14 – “It’s been 10 months of Israel’s genocide in Gaza ... of unimaginable savagery—of slaughtered children, of families burning in tents... This genocide is the greatest shame of our time... Labor lets Israel run riot, violating international laws, bombing nations across the Middle East.”

Greens Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Senator **Jordon Steele-John** (WA) – Aug. 13 – Moving to allow a motion to sanction Israel and cut ties: “The genocide has been going on for over 300 days. That’s 300 days of war crimes.”

Only the Greens and Senator **Fatima Payman** supported the motion.

VICIOUS CYCLES

On *ABC Radio National* “Breakfast” (Aug. 28), visiting AIJAC guest Behnam Ben Taleblu warned of the dangerous consequences that will follow the Biden Administration’s policy of pressuring Israel not to finish the job of dismantling Hamas’ terror capabilities in Gaza.

Taleblu said, “the Americans [are] put[ting] the handcuffs on the Israelis rather than on the Iranians who are escalating this situation. That’s an eerie position for the West to be in, where its adversaries are driving it to restrain its allies.”

If Israel fails to achieve its war aims, he said, “the [Iranian] regime would take the victory lap” and boast that it has “become the champions or the defenders of Gaza. And from that sense would grow emboldened,” leading to “another boom-and-bust cycle of violence.”

CANBERRA, TEHERAN AND JERUSALEM

The *Australian* (Aug. 22), condemned the Albanese Government’s “wet lettuce” response to a tweet by Iran’s Ambassador to Australia that said “the Zionist plague” should be “wiped out of the holy lands of Palestine” by 2027.

Strategic Analysis Australia’s Anthony Bergin and Peter Jennings in the *Australian* (Aug. 19) were highly critical of the Federal Government’s stance on the Israel-Hamas war, writing, when “Anthony Albanese says there’s no place for Hamas in Gaza, how does he think that outcome will be delivered? When Labor calls for an immediate ceasefire, the result would be to leave Hamas in charge.”

Meanwhile, in the *Daily Telegraph* (Sept. 8), recent AIJAC Rambam Israel study tour participant Piers Akerman listed the Albanese Government’s major negative decisions against Israel since it came to power in May 2022.

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENCE

On *ABC TV* “7.30” (Aug. 20), host Sarah Ferguson asked Majed al-Ansari, a foreign affairs adviser to Qatar’s PM, why Australia should recognise Palestine as a state if his own country refuses to recognise Israel.

Dr al-Ansari responded by waffling, saying, “Whenever we are talking about recognition here, we are talking about the recognition of the peace process itself and the result of that peace process is a two-state solution and obviously the decisions of sovereign countries are left to their own devices. We applaud these decisions whenever they come.”

The next night, Ferguson interviewed Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib, who falsely accused Israel of perpetuating the conflict with Lebanon because it won’t “withdraw to its internationally recognised borders.”

Israel does not occupy any Lebanese territory, a fact that was officially confirmed by the UN after Israel withdrew all its forces in May 2000.

Dr Habib also claimed that “in 1948, the United Nations called for two states in the geographic Palestine. One state was established. The other is still fighting to establish... the best way to do it is to have a two-state solution, like what the world wanted.”

The reason why no Palestinian state was established in 1948 is the same reason why it doesn’t exist in 2024 – for nearly eight decades Palestinian leaders have repeatedly rejected every opportunity to create one.

MEAA CULPA

AIJAC’s Colin Rubenstein was quoted by the *Australian* (Sept. 9), condemning a resolution passed by

the federal council of the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA) that expressed solidarity with Palestinian media workers killed in Gaza since October 7.

Dr Rubenstein said, “This one-sided resolution reflects the lack of objectivity that has sadly characterised too much reporting in the Hamas initiated war in Gaza.”

Israel, he said, never “deliberately targeted non-combatants” and has provided “convincing evidence” that “many of the so-called ‘journalists’ killed have in fact been fighters for Hamas, or individuals who colluded with Hamas’ military activities.”

He said a more appropriate resolution would have honoured “both Israelis and Palestinians” killed in the conflict.

NELSON’S COLUMN

A UK *Sunday Times* article republished by the *Australian* (Sept. 2) depicted jailed terrorist Marwan Barghouti as the “Palestinian Nelson Mandela”.

The article also absurdly suggested that Barghouti, who has served 20 years in an Israeli prison for organising the murder of five Israeli civilians during the Second Intifada, was at risk of being murdered by his Israeli jailors in retribution for Israeli hostages murdered in Gaza.

A letter by AIJAC’s Allon Lee published by the *Australian* (Sept. 3) ridiculed any comparison between Mandela and Barghouti, noting that no one accused the former “of ordering the murder of anyone, much less convicted him of murdering civilians.”

In contrast, he wrote, “Palestinian leaders chose terrorism at the exact moment when... Palestinian President Yasser Arafat rejected Israeli PM Ehud Barak’s historic offer at the Camp David peace summit in July 2000 and ordered Barghouti to prepare a campaign of terror against Israeli civilians. Indeed, news reports

in October 2000 quote Barghouti actively encouraging violence in defiance of an ostensible ceasefire.”

MERCURY FALLING

In the Hobart *Mercury* (Aug. 28), the paper’s former journalist Harriet Binet accused Israel of “disproportionately killing women and children” in Gaza, suggested that “92,000 Palestinians – double the official estimates” – have died, and implied Israel has already been found guilty of genocide in Gaza by the International Court of Justice.

Contrary to irresponsible reports, the Court has made no substantive finding whatsoever regarding this accusation, as the Court’s former President Joan Donoghue has publicly clarified.

Meanwhile, the claim that 92,000 Palestinians have died is more than double the current estimate provided by the Hamas-controlled Gaza authorities, who have every reason to exaggerate rather than play down this number. Indeed, the UN recently halved the percentage of women and children in the estimated death toll precisely because the Hamas-provided data was exaggerating these numbers.

Especially dubious was Binet’s reliance on an unsupported claim from controversial UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese as proof that “genocide” is occurring. This is the same Albanese who publicly said Hamas had a right to engage in violent “resistance” against Israel prior to its campaign of brutal massacre, rape, and kidnappings on October 7, and then insisted Israel has no legal right to self-defence against these attacks afterwards. She has also been widely criticised for openly antisemitic statements in the past.

HICKS UP

On Sept. 11, an op-ed in the *Mercury* by former teacher Peter Hicks said, “16,000 children have been

killed by Israel’s campaign of bombing, starvation, snipers and siege. Save the Children estimate there are a further 20,000 Palestinian children lost, disappeared, detained or buried under the rubble or in mass graves.”

But as AIJAC’s Jamie Hyams noted in a letter the *Mercury* published on Sept. 16, Hicks did not “even mention... Hamas... which speaks volumes about his perspective and the reliability of his analysis, including his unquestioning acceptance of Hamas-supplied casualty figures.”

Hyams stressed that “the plight of Gaza’s children since Hamas started the war is indeed tragic, but it’s wrong to blame Israel. Hamas systematically uses schools for military purposes, including hiding weapons, and tunnelling under. The UN has even called it out on this.”

MARK: HIS WORDS

Canberra Times columnist Mark Kenny (Sept. 15) was also prone to extreme hyperbole, claiming that “there is literally no violent excess to which Tel Aviv could go that would halt America’s supply of arms or break its international protection (via the UN Security Council)... not the targeting of schools, or hospitals, or refugee camps, or the murder of countless children, ambulance drivers, aid workers and journalists... Forty-thousand-plus dead in Gaza, the enclave bombed into an uninhabitable rubble. Apart from the tens of thousands annihilated, displaced survivors include women and children maimed, starved, traumatised and terrorised.”

But as AIJAC’s Jamie Hyams noted in a letter published by the *Canberra Times* (Sept. 18) “Israel does not murder civilians. It tries to avoid civilian casualties with evacuations. Around half the casualties have been fighters, a far better outcome than other recent urban wars, especially considering Hamas’ human shield and sacrifice tactics.” Moreover, Kenny’s

insinuation that 40,000 plus Gazans who died are all innocents absurdly implied that zero Hamas fighters have been killed in nearly 12 months of war.

OPEN SECRET

The *Herald Sun* (Aug. 8) chastised the Albanese Government’s decision to resume its funding earlier this year of UNRWA, the UN’s aid agency for Palestinians, given a UN investigation has confirmed allegations that nine employees participated in the October 7 massacre.

The newspaper said, “those familiar with UNRWA’s operations” know “militant infiltration and terrorist sympathy” inside it is an “open secret” and Australia should redirect its funding to “transparent, apolitical aid groups.”

AIJAC’s Colin Rubenstein was quoted by the editorial, saying that “UNRWA is an organisation that continues to employ terrorists, to co-operate with Hamas, to incite violence and to educate towards a future of hatred and intolerance rather than peaceful coexistence – and it does so with our taxpayer dollars.”

PRIOR GOOD ACTS

An *Australian* report (Aug. 27) quoted Australian Muslim spokespeople using the word “unprecedented” to describe an Executive Council of Australian Jewry’s condemnation of violence committed by a tiny minority of settlers on the West Bank, which described such attacks as “criminal under Israeli law” and “completely antithetical to Jewish values.”

But there is actually nothing remarkable about Australian Jewish communal organisations denouncing appalling criminal behaviour by a violent minority of settlers.

Indeed, AIJAC has done just that repeatedly over the years, including in July 2015, February 2023 and this August.

Allon Lee

JOHN'S ALTERNATE UNIVERSE

The ABC's Global Affairs Editor John Lyons is the public broadcaster's default in-house commentator on developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

But if Lyons' recent commentary – characterised by grossly misleading claims and lack of context, as well as basic factual errors – is anything to go by, maybe someone else deserves a turn.

Lyons asserted on *ABC TV News* (Aug. 29) that more than 600 West Bank Palestinians have been killed by Israeli “soldiers and settlers” since October 7 and “not one of those people will be charged.”

The inference that Israeli soldiers and settlers have been simply murdering Palestinian civilians without cause and should all be arrested is grossly irresponsible. In fact, UN figures show that 98.2% of those 600 Palestinians were killed in clashes with the IDF, not by settlers – and other data shows these were overwhelmingly armed gunman or terror group members. Plus, a quick Google search proves that settlers have often been charged when they break the law.

In late August/early September, Lyons repeatedly commented on the IDF operations targeting terror cells in northern West Bank cities backed by Iranian funding and arms (see p. 24).

On *ABC TV News* (Aug. 29), Lyons dismissed the operation as unjustified, insisting, “the notion that suddenly there are all these nests of militants and would-be terrorists just doesn't pass muster.”

Lyons' Sept. 2 online article claimed, “most of the time, the West Bank has been a low-level security problem for Israel.”

In fact, between January and June 2023, Israel recorded more than 500 successful or foiled Palestinian terror attacks emanating from the West Bank, while this year there have been 255 “significant” terror attacks launched from the area, as well as 435 attacks against IDF targets.

On ABC Radio “Nightlife” (Sept. 5), Lyons stressed that “the whole six years I lived there [between 2008 and 2013]... I... spoke to a lot of Israeli... military leaders and intelligence people, never once did they talk about the West Bank being some hotbed of Iranian-inspired terrorism. Why suddenly is that the case?”

That was more than ten years ago, and there have recently been numerous mainstream media reports about

Iran's growing investment in cultivating West Bank terror cells over the last few years – for instance, in the *New York Times*.

On Aug. 29, Lyons outlined his theory about the West Bank operations, asserting that “it's driven clearly by the political elite. There is a big split now between Prime Minister Netanyahu, who fully endorses these so-called operations, and the head of their security service, Shin Bet... Ronen Bar.”

Lyons is wrong about Bar – apparently having misunderstood recent public comments by him warning of the danger of West Bank settler violence. Since 2022, Bar has been a leading voice in Israel warning of Iran's efforts to foment terror on the West Bank and forces

from the Shin Bet have been a key part of the recent West Bank operations.

In a Sept. 5 radio interview, Lyons claimed “Netanyahu... his Government, and the army, are using the cover of Gaza [to] create as much havoc as possible [in the West Bank].”

Lyons said the evidence proving these operations were purely punitive is the “fact” that when the operation concludes, the IDF supposedly uses bulldozers to dig up the roads, and must be doing this to “make daily life so much harder.”

In reality, however, the IDF's bulldozers usually precede, not follow, the entry of troops into West Bank cities to prevent soldiers being killed by IEDs hidden under roads – as the ABC itself has reported.

On “Foreign Correspondent” on March 14, reporting on operations in Tulkarem, ABC Middle East correspondent Allyson Horn noted that “Israel says the bulldozers uncovered dozens of explosive devices planted under these streets.”

In two appearances on *ABC TV* on Sept. 3, Lyons claimed that the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty prohibited Israel from stationing troops along the Egypt-Gaza border.

Also wrong. The 1979 treaty explicitly allows Israel to station four battalions along the border area.

Discussing the murder of Israeli hostages in Gaza (*ABC TV News*, Sept. 3), Lyons claimed that Netanyahu “begged for forgiveness, for not prioritising the hostages sooner.”

In fact, Netanyahu had “ask[ed] for your forgiveness that we did not succeed in bringing them home alive”, making no admission about not having prioritised them.

“In a Sept. 5 radio interview, Lyons claimed ‘Netanyahu... his Government, and the army, are using the cover of Gaza [to] create as much havoc as possible [in the West Bank].’”

THE LAST WORD

Rabbi Ralph Genende

BEYOND THIS YEAR OF SHATTERED HOPE

It has been a year of shattered pieces, fragmented bodies and fractured hopes. Broken pieces, broken hearts, broken hopes. So much has been crushed and damaged for the Jewish people. It's hard to let go of the dark images from Kibbutz Be'eri, to unsee the soul-destroying scenes from the Nova music festival, to unhear the terror of the young children speaking from a cupboard while the bodies of their murdered parents lie just metres away. To unimagine the last moments of those six beautiful young hostages executed in that dark, dank tunnel, when rescue was so near.

It has also been a year of shattered innocence – or was it a blissful naïveté – for those of us who believed that antisemitism had been banished to the dark corners of humanity, that we were living in a new age of tolerance, akin to Francis Fukuyama's idyllic "end of history". Then came October 7. A day that will take its dishonourable place alongside the attempted Persian genocide in 475 BCE, the Alexandrian pogrom of 19 CE, the slaughter of the Jews of Jerusalem in 70 CE, the crusades, expulsions and countless pogroms in every century – and more recently, Hebron (1929), Auschwitz, Belzec and Babi Yar (1941-45).

The ferocity and pervasiveness of the new antisemitism has sent us spinning into a vortex of doxxing and cancelling, a cold and isolating space where rationality appears to have no place, fantasies and conspiracy theories about Jewish monstrosity have no number. It has been especially hard for the Jewish community in Australia where, for the first time in our long and noble history, many of us are today feeling deeply unsettled, unwelcome, misunderstood and unappreciated. Our proud and iconic Sydney Opera House rang with the repellent howls of Jew hatred even

as we were reeling in shock and trauma from the brutal and savage attacks on innocent compatriots in Israel.

According to Jewish wisdom, Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year (which commences this year on October 2), reminds us that there are so many things you cannot change or undo. Shakespeare put it elegantly when he said, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will."

The most haunting lines in our prayers during this season seem to accentuate this: "On Rosh Hashanah it is written... who shall live and who shall die, who in a good time and who by an untimely death..." You have no control over who will die by fire or fury, mowed down mid-dance or while huddling in a shelter...

For the whole Jewish people, that one day, October 7, changed everything. What a difference a single day made to our sense of security, our assumptions about our identity, our survival and our place in the world.

Yet for all this, the high holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, are also potentially a life-transforming experience.

They inform us that there is so very much you can do to make a difference, if not to the wider world, to yourself and your own world. We have the power to choose life and make the life of those around us gentler and better. Love, forgiveness, compassion and charity can reset the compass and realign the focus and direction of our fractured and trembling planet. That frightening prayer of 'who shall live' ends with an assurance that you can still change, or at least minimise, what is ostensibly decreed for you. This optimism amidst bleak realism has always been the secret of Jewish survival. Today, it is the secret weapon of that amazing and resilient country we call Israel.

We still believe in the Jewish capacity to change the bitter into better, to convert the acidic into the sweet, despair into destiny. Despite our pain, this Rosh Hashanah we will continue to dip our apples into honey in the hope of a sweet year – for we are a people who believe in the power of hope to transform evil into good, hatred and hubris into hopefulness and healing.



The devastation wrought by October 7 and its aftermath must not be allowed to destroy our optimism (Image: Jose Hernandez/ Shutterstock)



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