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DETECTING A GENERAL WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST



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The Price of Greatness is Responsibility

by Ahmed Charai

Usually, history's turning points are invisible to the living.

Forks in the road are spotted by historians only long after events and their immediate repercussions have faded. But sometimes history visibly shifts for its participants onto a new course. We are now living through one of those turning points in history.

2023 was the year that it became clear that Russia and China, along with their allies North Korea and Iran, united against nations on their peripheries, NATO, and the great guarantor of global security itself, the United States.

It is a war of armies in Ukraine, Syria, Sudan, and Yemen. It is an economic war of trade embargoes against Iran and Russia and, increasingly, against China. It is a diplomatic and cultural conflict. But, most of all, it is a war of values.

President Joseph Biden's speech of October 19 came at a time when democracies face sustained and systematic attacks from those who abhor freedom because it threatens their power. Biden sees that history is moving. And he is right.

Iran has been the world's largest financier of terrorism ever since its 1979 revolution. Tehran has long used a strategy of proxy war, directing its militias in Syria and Yemen to attack Sunni Arabs, its militias in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip to kill and kidnap innocent citizens, and its militias in Tindouf to kill innocent Moroccan citizens.

So, what has changed in 2023?

Vladimir Putin benefits from dividing America's attention. China, too, wants to topple the post-World War II order that extended prosperity and peace to much of the globe. Instead, China prefers to return to a world of empires, one in which its dominion is unchallenged.

Iran offers China a chance to gain influence over the Persian Gulf—where a third of the world's oil threads through straits barely eighteen miles wide. China has also encouraged more cooperation between historical antagonists Iran and Russia.

The emergence of this alliance means an intensifying challenge to America's global leadership.

Imagine a world without American leadership. The US Navy no longer safeguards global shipping, meaning shortages multiply and prices climb. Without the US dollar as the reserve currency, prices are hard to compare across a welter of fluctuating local currencies. Without American

might, larger nations invade their smaller neighbors, and terrorists strike with impunity.

Democracy and cooperation die. Authoritarian predators loom and lurk, striking at will, with all other countries seen as prey. To keep this nightmare at bay, America must continue to fulfill its role as the indispensable global leader.

As British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said of the United States in 1943: “The price of greatness is responsibility.”

The military power available to the United States is essential to deter aggression. But equally vital is its self-confidence, its willingness to act upon its lofty ideals.

What does the global shift mean for American foreign policy in the Middle East?

First, policy towards Iran must be revised entirely. The current approach—endless negotiations over Iran’s needless construction of nuclear weapons, releasing some \$6 billion in frozen funds to free five hostages—has failed.

Iran’s proxies have attacked, taking a dozen US hostages along with over 200 people of other nationalities. Thousands of innocent people on both sides have been killed.

Iran wanted war and Hamas complied. The time for such engagement with Iran has passed. While Iran is already one of the most sanctioned nations on Earth by the United States, the European Union, and other allied nations, Washington must impose new “smart” sanctions on the international travel of the mullahs and their revolutionary guard leadership. Controls on the sale of Iran’s oil and gas reserves must be reimposed.

Hamas’ leaders, Ismail Haniyeh and Khaled Mishaal, must no longer be received as heroes in Arab capitals. The US Treasury must sanction them, their families and deprive them of travel and international payments.

Iran will continually test President Biden’s resolve, as it recently did through proxy attacks on US bases in Iraq and Syria. Yemen’s Houthi militia has launched ballistic and cruise missiles as well as drones toward Israeli targets.

In the coming weeks, as the war between Israel and Hamas escalates, aggressions against U.S. military bases will grow. A military response may be necessary, but it will not be sufficient. America will have to maintain its aircraft carrier groups in or near the region for the foreseeable

future and must also ensure this war does not spread to other countries.

Leadership starts with articulating a vision, a perspective for the post-war period.

The second task for American policy is to give Gaza a better future. Even if the war in Gaza were to eradicate the military capabilities of Hamas, the threat of violence would only disappear once Palestinian youth have a better future.

Then, we need to replace hate with hope in the hearts of ordinary Palestinians. How?

Palestinians need to be shown a clear path to a better life. This begins with an imperative: after the war, a new renewed Palestinian Authority will have to be stood up in Gaza supported by an international coalition under US leadership to provide aid, security and training to the Palestinian police.

Rebuilding Gaza is not just about rebuilding buildings. We must create hospitals, schools, places of culture, and, above all, long-term jobs. It is this material base that will allow a political outcome.

What is expected of a US president after the end of military operations is to create the conditions to negotiate a lasting peace. It is not simple since sometimes painful concessions must be made, but it is not impossible.

The current crisis offers America the opportunity to reaffirm its leadership in the region and present a new vision that will enable the democratic world to contain Iran, to weaken or even destroy its proxies, but also to begin the long march towards the resolution of a conflict that is the thorniest in the world.

America has always risen to take on seemingly impossible tasks. Here is the next one. *

AHMED CHARAI

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1 — Letter from the Publisher

The Price of Greatness is Responsibility

by Ahmed Charai

THE WAR

4 — Initial Lessons From the October 2023 War

by Yaakov Amidror

9 — Beyond Gaza, the Confrontation with Iran

by Ehud Yaari

16 — The Ground War in Gaza Begins

by Seth J. Frantzman

23 — Where's the Nearest Carrier?

by James Foggo

27 — Gazan Civilian Casualties: Hamas' Strategy and Israel's Achilles Heel

by James Jeffrey

33 — Balancing Military and Humanitarian Necessities: Legal Aspects of the War in Israel and Gaza

by Liron A. Libman

38 — How Could This Happen?

by Eran Lerman

44 — The primary victims of Hamas are Palestinian

by Ksenia Svetlova

51 — The Israel/Lebanon Border: Will Escalation Lead to a War on Two Fronts?

by Orna Mizrahi

56 — A Positive Exit Strategy From Gaza

by Robert Silverman

63 — Postwar Gaza Planning: An Initial Checklist

by Thomas Warrick

68 — What's Next for Gaza

by Dov S. Zakheim

73 — Defending the Basic Values of Humanity After October 7

by Michael Zantovsky

78 — Three European Views of the Gaza War

by Hugh Pope, Daniel Schatz, Deidre Berger

86 — Latin American Views on the Gaza War Are in Flux

by Annie Pforzheimer

ESSAYS

92 — Afghanistan Two Years after the Taliban Take-over

by James Cunningham

96 — Was Groupthink Responsible for Israel's Surprise in the 1973 War, Or Is That Just Another Faulty Assumption?

by Amir Oren



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A photograph of a war-torn city street. The foreground is filled with large, grey concrete rubble and debris. In the middle ground, several soldiers in military uniforms are walking through the debris. The background shows damaged buildings with missing windows and structural damage. The sky is a pale, hazy blue.

INITIAL LESSONS FROM THE OCTOBER 2023 WAR

INITIAL LESSONS FROM THE WAR

Israeli soldiers operate inside the Gaza Strip, November 2023. Photo credit: Israeli Defense Forces/ Handout via Reuters





by Yaakov Amidror

As these lines are being written, the war is ongoing and may yet intensify. It is perhaps too early to posit conclusive lessons at this stage. Therefore, I would qualify all of the findings below by suggesting that they must be put to the test of systematic criticism – alongside many of our military and political realities – once the war was over.

This war was launched by surprise, reminiscent of the Yom Kippur War surprise exactly 50 years and a day earlier. The intelligence services failed in the task of early warning, the first line of defense collapsed, the level of losses in the first stage was horrifying, many were taken prisoner, and it was a while before the IDF recuperated and fought back successfully. The main differences, however, are that in 1973 the IDF faced two large and well equipped armies, whereas now it faces a ragtag force without an air force or armor.

In 2023, most of the dead and abducted are civilians murdered or taken from their homes. In this respect, the attack shook up the foundations of Israel's defense doctrine. The sheer brutality of the Hamas attackers added to the loss of the sense of security among the public at large, since it turned out that across the fence we allowed

the rise of a barbaric organization, more cruel than ISIS or al-Qaeda.

At the same time, it should also be said that the IDF did recover in an impressive manner. The shift to a ground offensive aimed at destroying Hamas was conducted in a very orderly fashion and the army and navy used well the period of waiting, during which time the air force was intensively engaged in the Gaza Strip. Combined arms operations have peeled off Hamas defensive layers and the IDF now operates in the urban core of Gaza City, in preparation for taking over the Hamas command and control centers. The IDF will then need to decide when and how to extend its operations so as to eliminate Hamas also in the southern section of the Gaza Strip, and its mission is far from over. The pace is slow, but it enables the IDF to save the lives of its own soldiers while also facilitating the departure of massive numbers of civilians from the battle zones towards the southern part of the Strip.

Nowhere has Hamas succeeded in pushing back IDF advances. While it has not disintegrated, even two weeks into the ground campaign, Hamas' ability to launch rockets has been significantly degraded and its control over the civilian population is loosening. The highest echelon of Hamas command has survived thus far. But its mid-level command has been badly mauled, probably reducing the effectiveness of its fighting. Still, Hamas troops remain



An Iron Dome launcher fires an interceptor rocket in the southern Israeli city of Ashdod.
Photo credit: Reuters/Baz Ratner

determined, probably because they believe they have no choice. Israel is determined to eliminate them, and thus they prefer to fight to the end.

Four major lessons appear to emerge for Israel's defense doctrine and for Israel's future leadership.

First, Israel will need to deploy larger forces to protect its borders. The size of such forces should be assessed on the basis of the bitter lessons of 7 October. Being permanently ready for the "worst possible scenario" will alter the IDF's planning assumptions for border defense; the criterion should not be the enemy's potential but rather the consequences of a surprise attack.

Second, there is no choice but to increase the defense budget. The IDF will be larger and its budget enhanced. The present situation points

to a shortage of formations dealing with more than one front, and this lack of capacity must be addressed by expanding the ground forces order of battle. This would not be a revolution but rather a restoration of what has been neglected.

A good example is the missile defense array, extended all over the country and designed to counter a variety of threats. Once the war is over, Israel can point proudly to the successes of Iron Dome, David's Sling and Arrow 2 and 3 as well as the patriot. They intercepted most of the threats; systemic debriefing would yield future solutions to the few specific failures. In this respect, the war served as a highly significant testing ground.

Third, it is wrong to argue – as some significant critics have done – that too much money has been spent on technology at the expense of training and high levels of combat

readiness. As it turns out, ground operations are demonstrating that technology is vital for the IDF's success in general and for the specific challenges of urban warfare in particular. Iron Dome, "Trophy" (active armored shield protection) and the variety of unmanned aerial vehicles which accompany troops and provide tactical intelligence and "behind the corner" fire cover – all prove the point. Threats are effectively eliminated that once would have exacted heavy losses from similar forces in such situations. Technology repays its investment not only in defense but also in offense, as tools enabling commanders to concentrate great and accurate firepower to remove obstacles to their advance. Investment in innovation must persist.

Finally, basic assumptions in the political as well as the military and intelligence echelons have failed us; things must change. Over the years the defense establishment and the political leadership let go of the concept of a "preemptive strike," let alone the notion of launching such a war. Imagine if eighteen or six months ago, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu or his predecessors had decided on a preventive ground offensive against Hamas, because the threat was too large and imminent. Friend and foe alike would have lashed at Israel in every forum. America would have reassessed its support, leaving Israel isolated (even in Congress, Israel's standing would have been challenged due to this "act of aggression"). Russia would have threatened to shoot down IDF aircraft over Syria. The Gulf Abraham Accords partners would have cut relations. Public opinion in Israel would have turned against the government, accusing it of subordinating national security to political needs.

No longer. The mood of the country has been transformed and so should the support for Israel abroad. Israel's future leaders must restore to the tool kit of national security the understanding that wars of choice are legitimate. Israel must seriously weigh preventive action to push away the buildup of military capabilities

which threaten it – not only in terms of the nuclear threat in all its manifestations, but also the removal of acute conventional threats. The "Begin Doctrine" (of preemptive strikes against nuclear targets first in Iraq in 1981, then in Syria in 2007, and beyond) should be applied also to organizations such as Hizbullah when they attempt to acquire tiebreaker technologies. A small country such as Israel, surrounded by many threats but possessing high technology, must occasionally embark on a preventive war. This was the one measure that could have prevented the catastrophe of October 7. But it would not have been seen as legitimate either at home or abroad. This must change.

With the war still raging, it is thus possible – with a great degree of caution – to point out four missions for the military and political leadership after the war. These four should be carried forward based on broad national consensus:

- * legitimizing the option of a war of choice and preventive action;
- * expanding investment in innovative technology so as to improve Israel's qualitative edge;
- * enhancing the defense budget and enlarging the IDF;
- * and thus, gaining the ability to assign much larger forces to the defense of the borders at all times and to fight more than one front war. *

— YAAKOV AMIDROR

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A pro-Hamas rally in Tehran,
Iran, October 13, 2023.
Photo credit: Sobhan
Farajvan/Pacific Press/Sipa
USA via Reuters Connect

A man in a brown robe and white turban is walking on a paved street, carrying a large Iranian flag and a Palestinian flag. The Iranian flag is green, white, and red with a red emblem in the center. The Palestinian flag is black, white, and green with a red triangle at the top. The man is looking to the right. In the background, there are trees and a building.

BEYOND GAZA, THE CONFRONTATION WITH IRAN



by Ehud Yaari

Iran's leaders seem to have concluded that the objectives of the October 7 attack – which they encouraged Hamas to undertake – were achieved in a manner that surpassed their expectations. They apparently see no need to sacrifice their most valued asset (Lebanon's Hizbullah) in the next stage of the war. Therefore, Iran is now bent on trying to avoid getting Hizbullah, and its own forces, involved in a full-blown war with Israel.

The dramatic reinforcement of the US military presence in the region is certainly contributing to their concerns. Tehran has always regarded its Lebanese proxy – with fighting formations and arsenal of 140,000 missiles, a few hundred of which are already equipped with precision guidance – primarily as a deterrent against strikes on Iran's own nuclear installations. They may reassess this position once the IDF starts a major ground offensive in Gaza. For now, however, their goal is to deny Israel the chance of fulfilling its commitment to destroy Hamas and remove it from governing the Gaza Strip. If Hamas maintains control of Gaza, even after suffering major punishment, Iran would consider that a great victory.

Iran's main interest was – and remains – to prevent the US from brokering Saudi-Israeli normalization. Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian wasted no time declaring during the first week of the war that this goal had been achieved. For his part, Prince Turki Al Faisal, former head of Saudi intelligence, has confirmed that in his view, sabotaging the deal was the aim of the operation.

The Iranians are extremely concerned that Saudi-Israeli normalization would pave the way for the establishment of a US-led security architecture in the Middle East, in which Arab and Israeli armies and intelligence services would cooperate under the direction of CENTCOM. They are worried that while they pressure American units in Iraq and Syria, hoping to see them withdrawn, the US is fortifying its supremacy in the region by forging unwritten alliances between Israel and some of the Gulf states. This was reflected during the course of the current fighting by a huge billboard in the Iranian capital reading: "The battle zone is Tel Aviv not Tehran."

October 7 dealt a severe blow to Israel's image as a powerful actor, enabling Iran to pour cold water on those Arabs seeking reconciliation and collaboration with the Jewish state. Israeli intelligence was stripped of its formidable reputation, the armored units and infantry were not deployed properly for defense and the air force was not on alert. All this happened despite



Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi opens the “Cairo International Summit for Peace,” October 21, 2023.
Photo credit: The Egyptian Presidency/Handout via Reuters

numerous pieces of intelligence that should have alerted Israel to the possibility of that Hamas intends to move from exercise mode to attack. Throughout the days of raging air force bombings in Gaza, and the systematic launching of hundreds of rockets every day into Israeli cities and villages, the Iranians kept quoting Hasan Nasrallah’s old description of Israel as “The House of the Spider” – weaker than cobwebs – that is slowly but surely disintegrating. The evacuation of a total of 100,000 inhabitants from towns and smaller communities in the Gaza border region and the north of Israel is interpreted by them as a precursor to the unraveling of Israel in the future.

By igniting pro-Palestinian sentiments all over the Arab world, the “Axis of Resistance” – as Iran and its allies define themselves – managed not only to stall progress on the Saudi-Israeli track but are to cause strain in the relations between Israel and its two oldest peace partners – Jordan and Egypt. Both president Abd al-Fattah Sisi and King Abdullah may soon have to bow to public calls to suspend diplomatic ties,

recall ambassadors or display dismay in some other manner. In Cairo and many other cities in Egypt, demonstrators – for the first time ever – were urging Hezbollah to pound Israel with missiles and some switched to screaming “Down with Sisi” chants. In Amman the police had a hard time preventing the crowds from storming the Israeli embassy (vacant, due to precautionary instructions) and blocking protesters from reaching the border with Israel. Additional sources of potential trouble are Iranian-sponsored Iraqi Shiite militiamen gathering at the Iraq/Jordan border crossing point, demanding to be allowed “to get to the front.” On Jordan’s border with Syria, small teams of Hezbollah and other militias are setting up positions for attacks on the Golan. In the West Bank, thousands are demonstrating against president Mahmud Abbas and in support of Hamas. The PA Presidential Guard is deployed around Abbas’ compound in Ramallah, the Muqata’a, in view of classified reports of possible attempts by Hamas members together with some units of the security agencies to take over.

In the weeks preceding October 7, Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps officers, headed by Quds Force commander General Qaeni, held secret meetings in Beirut and Damascus with Nasrallah and members of his “Jihad Council,” Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad leaders. They assisted Hamas’ military wing, “Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades,” in adopting a version of the plan devised for Hizbullah’s commando troops, the Radwan Force, to mount raids into Israel.

The information available to this writer from reliable sources indicates that – for reasons of secrecy – the Iranians were not advised of the zero hour or the exact scale of the attack. However, Hamas received from its Iranian interlocutors a promise to open up other fronts, though not a commitment for an all-out war by Hizbullah or Iran. It is quite telling that a fortnight after the war broke out, one of Hamas’ top leaders, Khaled Masha’al, expressed in public his disappointment with the scope of skirmishes initiated by Hizbullah, declaring that “history is not written with hesitant, limited steps.”

The Hamas military leadership – Yahia Sinwar, Muhammad Deif and a handful of their colleagues – had to choose between opting for a limited raid to take hostages, that may later be exchanged for Hamas prisoners in Israel, or staging an offensive on a scale far bigger than ever before, all along the 70-kilometer border of walls and fences between the Gaza Strip and Israel. The Iranian promise of backing, steered them towards the more ambitious course: a brigade-size assault by their commandos, the Nukhba (“Elite”), employing motorized gliders, pick-up trucks with machine guns and motorbikes for a dawn attack on 22 villages, two towns and 11 army bases. Some of the Hamas groups penetrated 30 kilometers deep into Israel.

In addition, Hamas naval units attempted landings on the beaches near the Israeli coastal cities of Ashqelon and Ashdod. As we learned from brochures they carried with them, as well as interrogations of captured terrorists, their orders were to break into houses: all houses in all villages, take hostages and kill all others. The





Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi meets Hamas' leader Ismail Haniyeh, in Tehran, June 2023.
Photo credit: via Reuters



“Al-Aqsa Flood” missile installation surrounded by Palestinian and Islamic Jihad flags, Tehran, October 13, 2023. Photo credit: Morteza Nikoubazl via Reuters Connect.

orders given to them were to stay for days, even weeks if possible, inside Israeli territory. Quite a few brought with them Captagon and other drugs to increase endurance, just like those that were distributed by ISIS to its men before engaging the enemy.

The Hamas military leadership decided to risk this a large-scale attack out of a desire to make sure the Israeli response would be declaring a war rather than just launching one more round of air strikes lasting at most a few weeks, without substantial ground operations. One can assume that Hamas felt that Hizbullah and Iran would be hard pressed to deliver on their promise for a multifront response, once the IDF was maneuvering into

Gaza. The coming days will show whether this bet was justified.

To understand the calculations of Iran, Hamas and Hizbullah, one has to bear in mind the principles of the “Muqawwama (Resistance) Doctrine” adhered to for decades. This doctrine was refined by the late Qassem Suleimani, founder of Iran’s regional network of militias, who was assassinated by the US near Baghdad in 2020. There is no published document elaborating this doctrine, but this writer summed up its main pillars in an article in *The Jerusalem Report* published 17 years ago:

✱ Peace is not an option. The Arab world must not, because of temporary hardship, be dragged into recognizing Israel and accepting its

existence through peace agreements. When in need of a respite, it is permitted to reach hudna (“armistice”) agreements, valid for a limited period only, with the “Zionist regime.” Thus both Hizbullah and Hamas could maintain long periods of calm along Israel’s borders.

✱ It is not necessary to wait for there to be a balance of power. Unlike Egypt’s President Nasser, who aimed to build up enough military might to beat Israel, or President Hafiz al-Asad, who sought what he called “strategic parity,” the disciples of the Muqawwama Doctrine reject any unnecessary delay in the fighting. On the contrary, even when the balance of forces is clearly in the enemy’s favor, they uphold the imperative of continual warfare, if only on a small scale. The military disadvantage can be narrowed through innovative tactics.

✱ Do not fight over territory. The goal of the Muqawwama is the methodical erosion of the enemy’s resolve. There is no need to defend territory against Israeli occupation, or to try to conquer land. The essence is to spill blood, and since that is the case, it is better to focus on the civilian population as the primary target. The motto is blood, not land, and the effort is directed at denying victory to the enemy, not at achieving a quick result.

✱ Jihad is not a national struggle. In effect, Iran and its associates in Lebanon and Palestine have reformulated the old slogans of the “Popular War of Liberation” fashioned by nationalists such as Yasser Arafat and the leaders of the Algerian revolution, and have injected it with exclusively Islamic content. Fighting is undertaken for the sake of Allah, and not out of patriotic sentiment.

✱ The Arab state is not a suitable vehicle. The Muqawwana is not merely a military system, but a comprehensive, alternative regime. The Arab states constitute a flawed and inefficient apparatus, unfit to conduct the historic battle. The task must be shouldered instead by the Islamic movements that, alongside their military activity, engage in societal reform through educational, health and business institutions.

By encouraging and supporting Hamas’ “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation, Iran managed to subvert, for the time being, President Biden’s vision for a broad Arab-Israeli partnership in the Middle East. Yet Israeli success in destroying Hamas’ military capabilities may turn the tables. Taking Hamas out of the regional equation would constitute a painful setback for Iran’s aspirations to become the dominant power in the Levant.

The Israeli “Swords of Iron” counter-offensive must be given ample time to carry out its mission, including its focus on minimizing losses of Israeli soldiers and Gazan civilians. No one should expect a quick campaign. The IDF can break through in few hours into the heart of Gaza and sit on top of the large tunnels network, but will not opt to send soldiers underground and has to keep in mind that hostages are held there. This dilemma may translate into attrition tactics, waiting for Hamas to exhaust its fuel supplies used to ventilate the tunnels. We may be looking at a series of major raids instead of one decisive offensive, while the air force maintains pressure by hunting down Hamas operatives and destroying infrastructure.

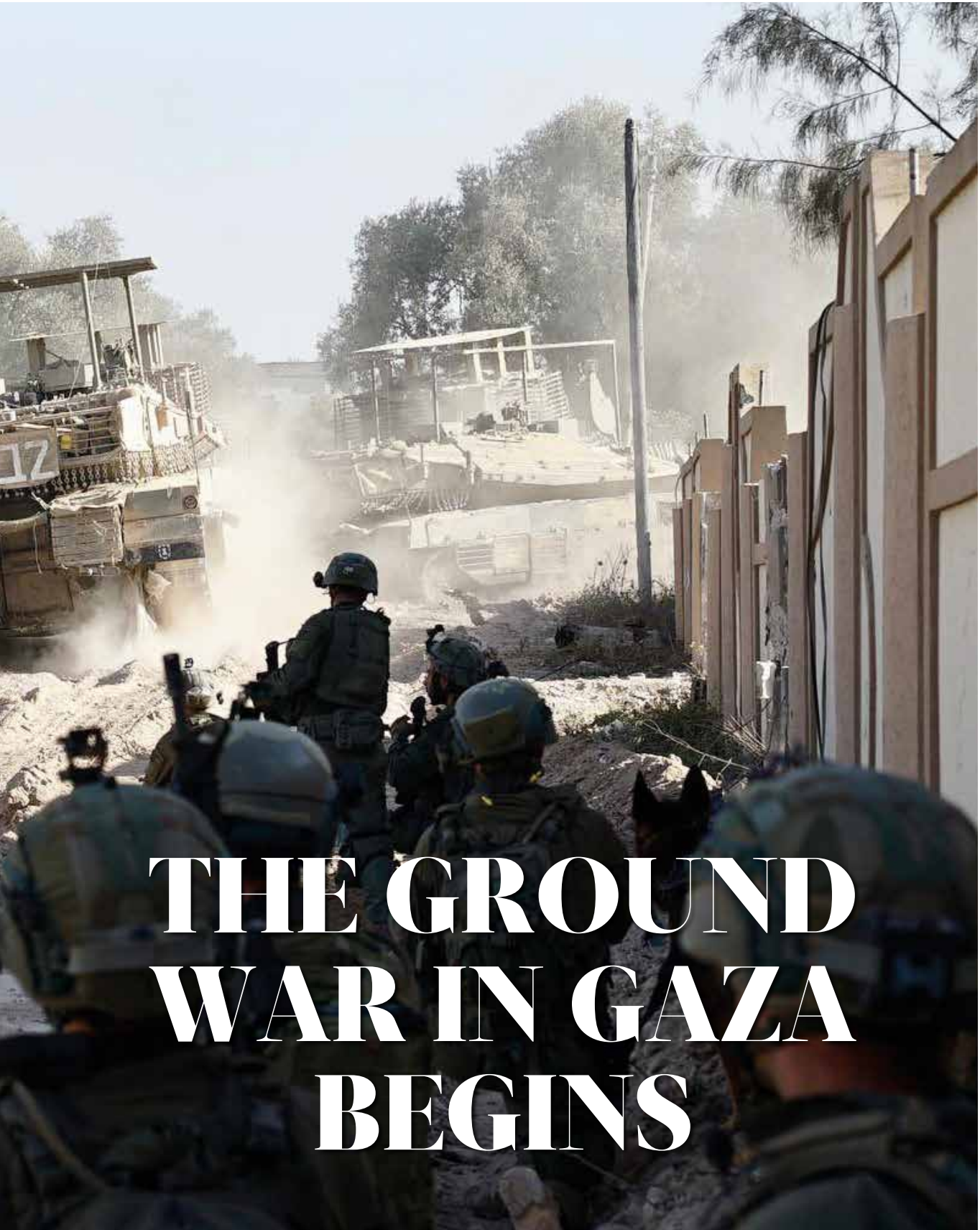
Whatever the tactics chosen by the IDF, the ultimate responsibility falls on the Israeli public to disprove Nasrallah’s fragile cobweb description of their society. ✱

EHUD YAARI

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Israeli soldiers on the frontline of ground operation in northern Gaza Strip, November 2023.
Photo credit: EYEPRESS via Reuters Connect





THE GROUND WAR IN GAZA BEGINS



by Seth J. Frantzman

The week of fighting on the ground that began on Saturday, October 27 was tough. There were Israeli military casualties and Gazan civilian casualties. The worst incident for Israel came when a Namer armored personnel carrier was hit with a missile and eleven soldiers were killed. A well-known tank commander, Salman Habaka, who had played a key role in liberating Kibbutz Be'eri during the massacre of October 7, was also killed in Gaza.

On November 5, the IDF said that its forces had pushed through the Gaza Strip from east to west and reached the Mediterranean Sea. This means that the IDF now sits on the two key north-south roads leading from Gaza City to southern Gaza: the Rashid road on the coast and Salah al-Din in the center. The operation to get this far had taken roughly a week. This is an important symbolic phase for the IDF, since it shows that the forces could carry out a large-scale ground maneuver from multiple points, using the latest technology that the IDF has been working with over the last decade to increase the effectiveness of various firing units, from tanks to drones, planes, ships and artillery.

The war in Gaza has been going on since Hamas attacked Israel on October 7. I have spent several days a week on the Gaza border, or in northern Israel, covering the war from as close to the front as possible. Israel declared much of the area around Gaza a closed military zone after the October 7 attack. Around 100 Israeli communities were evacuated near Gaza and in the north. This includes the cities of Sderot and Kiryat Shmona.

These days when you drive into Sderot it is a ghost town, emptied of its tens of thousands of residents. New neighborhoods that were under construction are now barren. The IDF also has forces patrolling on hilltops and areas between Sderot and Gaza. Journalists are encouraged to stay back in a few places, one of which is near a now-abandoned kindergarten. On November 3, a rocket fired from Gaza struck near the kindergarten, showing there is no safe place to be.

The IDF carries out operations day and night. However, the general pattern has been for Israeli forces to move at night and also carry out increased airstrikes at night. Israel enjoys advantages at night, with optics and technology, whereas Hamas has the tunnels it has built, the urban terrain to hide in, and civilians to hide behind.

While hundreds of thousands of Gazans have fled the northern Gaza Strip, many remain. Israel has been asking them to leave for weeks,



Flares burn in the sky as seen from Sderot, southern Israel, November 5, 2023.
Photo credit: Reuters/Ronen Zvulun

dropping more than a million pamphlets, and making recorded calls, sending text messages and even making individual calls to residents, according to data from the IDF spokesperson. However, Hamas has fired on people trying to leave for the south.

The IDF accuses Hamas of using medical facilities, such as Shifa Hospital and the Indonesian Hospital for cover. Hamas also continues to hold 240 hostages. It had released two American hostages and two elderly women in the first weeks, but that process has stalled. Israel was also able to rescue one of the hostages, Private Ori Megidish, who had been an IDF observer on October 7 when she was kidnapped by Hamas. Israel has vowed to get the hostages back. In Tel Aviv, the city is blanketed with posters and commemorations of the hostages.

Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant has called on Hamas to surrender, warning them that they can either die in their tunnels or give up. He has said Israel will eliminate Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar and says this is a war of "us or them." For the soldiers who flocked to the front on October 7 there is a feeling of motivation akin to a new 1973 war or a new 1948 war.

The IDF began operations on the ground at night, with raids during the evenings between October 24 and October 27. These raids targeted northern and central Gaza. The landscape in these areas is rural and made of fields and dunes. IDF bulldozers and combat engineers made paths for vehicles. At a daily briefing, the IDF explained, "overnight, the IDF conducted a targeted raid using tanks in the northern Gaza



Smoke rises from an Israeli air strike in the city center of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip.
Photo credit: Mohammed Talatene/dpa via Reuters Connect

Strip, as part of preparations for the next stages of combat. The activity was commanded by the Givati Brigade. During the activity, soldiers located and struck numerous terrorists, terror infrastructure and anti-tank missile launch posts, and operated to prepare the battlefield.” Israel also used its Shayetet 13 naval commandos to carry out a raid on the southern Gaza Strip.

On the 27th a larger maneuver began but it was not announced by Israel. Instead the rumors set off concerns in the region and calls for a ceasefire. Israel pushed forward. The ground operation coincided with a threat from Yemen. The Houthis have launched drones and missiles at Israel, on October 17, the 27 and again on the 31st, in an effort to distract Israel from its

operations and support Iran and its proxies in the region.

On October 28, IDF Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi said; “the objectives of this war require a ground operation – the best soldiers are now operating in Gaza.” The IDF said that combat forces, including tanks, infantry and combat engineers had pushed into northern Gaza. They were confronted by Hamas small arms fire, mortars and booby-trapped structures, as well as anti-tank missiles.

Working together the Israel Air Force struck 450 targets the first days and the ground forces took out 20 Hamas terrorists in one area. “In addition, over the last few days, the IDF struck over 600 terror targets, including



Israeli soldiers and tanks take position inside the Gaza Strip, November 5, 2023.
Photo credit: IDF/Handout via Reuters

weapons depots, dozens of anti-tank missile launching positions, as well as hideouts and staging grounds used by the Hamas terrorist organization,” the IDF said on October 29.

The IDF has focused on eliminating Hamas mid-level commanders and more senior officers, such as battalion commanders and commanders of Hamas air defenses. At least a dozen battalion commanders were eliminated over the first month of combat.

Key commanding officers visited the units during the first week. Chief of Staff HaLevi toured several units, such as the artillery; while Major General Yaron Finkelman, commander of Southern Command, conducted a situational assessment. “No matter how long or how hard

the fighting will be, there is no other outcome than victory. We will fight with professionalism and strength, based first and foremost on the IDF values which were instilled in us...We will fight in alleys, we will fight in tunnels, we will fight wherever necessary,” he said.

Meanwhile Iranian proxies sought to derail the Gaza mission. Hizbullah heated up the northern border with Lebanon, carrying out numerous rocket and missile attacks. The Houthis in Yemen also fired a ballistic missile and cruise missile at Israel, forcing Israel to use the Arrow air defense system and to scramble F-35s to stop the threats. These were both a “first” for Israel. The Arrow was developed by Israel and the US and the successful interception

was a major step for the system. Israel has sold the system to Germany. Israel has purchased 75 of the F-35 advanced jets. Israeli defense companies also make wings and helmets for the plane.

As Israel inched closer to Gaza City, it also swept around the south of the city to cut it off from southern Gaza while a third prong of forces pushed south along the coast. As it pressed into Gaza, the IDF continued to take out Hamas commanders. One of them, Ibrahim Biari, was considered by the IDF to be a top leader responsible for sending “Nukhba” (means “elite” in Arabic) terrorist operatives to carry out the murderous terror attack on October 7th. He was killed in the Jabalya Refugee Camp, a densely populated area, where Hamas has tunneled under many residential areas. Strikes on the tunnels also damage nearby houses. Palestinians in Gaza say thousands have been killed; the Gaza Health Ministry said on November 6 that more than 9,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli airstrikes..

The 162nd Division of the IDF, along with elements of the Givati and the Golani Brigades have played key roles in the battle for Gaza. The Golani troops had suffered high casualties on October 7, so for them this was an important return to the field to regain their strength and sense of effectiveness. The stage had been set for surrounding Gaza with the air force striking 11,000 targets in the first month of the war. This helped clear the way for the 16nd to make progress along the coast and in the northern Gaza Strip. After a week of battle on the ground, the IDF said 2,500 targets had been struck. It was unclear if that number included some of the 11,000 the IDF also said had been hit in the first month of fighting.

In addition the IDF said that its 36th division had reached the coast. “The role of the division is to encircle Hamas forces in Gaza City, and to strike and destroy select targets, including significant assets and command and control centers belonging to the Hamas terrorist organization,” the IDF said. The 36th had struck

1,600 targets, the IDF noted. “The targets include the organization’s infrastructure, weapons storage facilities, anti-tank missile launch and observation posts, and Hamas operatives,” the IDF said. It had also eliminated 300 terrorists in its sector. It was not clear the overall estimate of terrorists eliminated but it would appear the first month has included several times that number in other sectors.

My experience along the border with the IDF has shown how they are moving methodically into Gaza. The IDF kept journalists out of Gaza for the first week but allowed a small number of embeds on Saturday, November 4. It is unclear if they will permit more journalists to come into the Strip.

The volume of airstrikes, artillery and tank fire has been very high since the war began. I consulted with several veterans of US operations who served in Iraq in 2004-2006 and they believed Israel’s use of a lot of munitions against Hamas was a good method, as opposed to using too small a force.

Now that Gaza City is surrounded and the IDF has control of the suburban areas, the struggle for the city may begin. The IDF could pause here, as some abroad have called for a humanitarian pause. It can also move street-by-street, as the Iraqis did to retake Mosul from ISIS. Many options remain. Israelis want the hostages to return home and Hamas to be dismantled forever. This remains a complex and difficult task for the second month of fighting. *

— SETH J. FRANTZMAN

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WHERE'S THE NEAREST CARRIER?

The world's largest aircraft carrier, USS Gerald R. Ford, in the Mediterranean, October 11, 2023.
Photo credit: U.S. Naval Forces Central Command / U.S. 6th Fleet / Handout via Reuters



WHERE'S THE NEAREST CARRIER?



by James Foggo

While onboard USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN-71) in 1993, President Bill Clinton opined that when word of a crisis breaks out in Washington, it is no accident that the first question many people ask is: "Where's the nearest carrier?"

President Bill Clinton aboard USS Theodore Roosevelt, March 12, 1993

Once again American history repeats itself. In the immediate aftermath of a horrific act that precipitated a declaration of war by Israel on the terrorist group Hamas, the President of the United States searched for options to prevent and deter any further expansion of the crisis. To this end, on October 8 US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin ordered the aircraft carrier, USS Gerald R. Ford, to proceed expeditiously to the Eastern Mediterranean theater of operations. The Ford is under operational command of the US Sixth Fleet—my alma mater. It was soon augmented by another carrier strike force, that of the USS Eisenhower – which joined it off the coast of Syria – providing a significant military presence

on the eve of President Biden's visit to Israel on October 18.

Questions may well be raised as to the impact of this deployment on Israel's traditional commitment to defend itself by itself. There are voices in Israel who worry about an American bear hug, aimed at restraining Israel's actions against Hamas. But the immediate strategic effect to be achieved by the enhanced American presence is not to detract from Israel's freedom of action, in response to the horrifying events of 7 October: it is to try and avoid, in close coordination with Israel, the expansion of the conflict (beyond Hezbollah's ongoing pinprick attacks in the north), leaving Israel to concentrate on its task in Gaza. Whether the American presence, alongside the full positioning of Israeli ground forces in the north, would suffice still remains to be seen. But in order to understand the capabilities involved it is necessary to learn more about the Ford and the abilities the ship brings with it.

On 24 May 2023, I wrote a piece for *The MOC*—the online journal of the Center for Maritime Strategy of the Navy League of the United States—on the capabilities of this "crown jewel" of the American Fleet. USS Gerald R. Ford's designation as a "CVN" is important. Let's deconstruct this—the "C" is for carrier; the "V" is for aircraft; and the "N" is for Ford's state-



Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin meets Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant in Tel Aviv, October 13, 2023. Photo credit: Chad McNeeley/Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs/Handout via Reuters

of-the-art nuclear propulsion plant. There are three things that make this ship invaluable as a strategic asset to sitting Presidents of the United States—the Sailors who operate this complex warship continuously for up to up to nine months while deployed overseas; the propulsion plant that overcomes the stopping power of water to propel the ship’s 90,000 tons of steel forward at incredible speed; and the variety of combat aircraft onboard that define Ford’s lethality.

USS Gerald R. Ford was on the way to a well-deserved port visit in Marseilles when the ship received the order to head east. When I spoke to the current Commander of Sixth Fleet, VADM Tom Ishee, I asked him about the response of the crew to the new tasking and the cancellation of the port visit. VADM Ishee relayed a

conversation with the Carrier Strike Group Commander who relayed that while the sailors had been looking forward to a liberty port, which will surely come later, they now have a renewed sense of purpose with this mission.

USS Gerald R. Ford is the first new U.S. aircraft carrier design in over 40 years. It incorporates 23 new technologies that outmatch and outclass any other carrier in the world. Some pundits criticized the USS Gerald R. Ford’s hefty price tag and schedule setbacks that delayed this ship’s first deployment, but in my view the platform will pay for itself in terms of the preservation of our national security and that of our Allies over the next 50 years of its expected lifetime. USS Gerald R. Ford’s impressive advances to its aircraft launch system, propulsion, power generation, ordnance

handling, and more are having a disruptive effect on 21st century warfare at sea.

In fact, in April of this year, the Gerald R. Ford Strike Group successfully completed a composite training unit exercise (COMPTUEX): the certifying event for Navy ships preparing for worldwide combat employment. During the final eight days of intense graded operations, USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) and Carrier Air Wing Eight (CVW-8) met or exceeded all expected standards for a deployable aircraft carrier, validating Ford's new design and the readiness of her crew.

On 9 October, after Secretary Austin had ordered USS Gerald R. Ford to the Eastern Mediterranean, a Pentagon spokesperson provided a follow-on statement.

The USS Gerald R. Ford Strike Group includes an embarked air wing and accompanying cruisers and destroyers which will conduct maritime and air operations in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea in order to assure allies and partners throughout the region and ensure regional stability.

USS Gerald R. Ford can conduct a variety of missions while on station in the Eastern Mediterranean that include:

- * Gaining situational awareness and a common operating picture in an increasingly dangerous neighborhood through the carrier's organic Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capability.

- * Demonstrating the carrier's lethality through the visible presence of not only the platform itself, but also her embarked strike fighter squadrons to deter any potential actors who may try to take advantage of this crisis to further exacerbate the situation in Israel and the Gaza strip.

- * Conducting humanitarian and disaster relief operations using fixed or rotary wing assets to deliver relief goods ashore and move them around the theater of operations.

Likewise, if MEDEVAC of wounded personnel is necessary, USS Gerald R. Ford has a fully capable Role 2 surgical medical capability

embarked. Further medical capabilities would be available aboard the two British Royal Navy assets being sent to the region.

- * Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) and Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIO).

- * Search and Rescue Operations (SAR).

- * Support for Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO), if called for.

- * Hostage Rescue Operations, if necessary.

All of this capability on the carrier was summed up by a Pentagon spokesman as follows:

The versatility and mobility of the strike group, which can conduct a full spectrum of missions, from intelligence collection, maritime dominance, to long-range strike, will ensure the United States is postured to respond to any contingencies and minimize the risk of a wider spread conflict that would threaten stability.

Furthermore, during his press conference with Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, in Tel Aviv, on 13 October, Secretary Austin offered the following warning:

As President Biden has said, for any country, for any group, for anyone thinking about trying to take advantage of this atrocity, to try to widen the conflict or spill more blood, we have just one word. "Don't."

The "don't" is meant for both state and non-state actors to include Iran, Syrian, and Lebanese Hezbollah, among others. USS Gerald R. Ford and USS Dwight D. Eisenhower are there to help ensure that they don't. *

JAMES FOGGO

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Palestinians walk by the site of Israeli strikes on houses in Khan Younis, Gaza, October 15, 2023. Photo credit: Reuters/Ibraheem Abu Mustafa

GAZAN CIVILIAN CASUALTIES: HAMAS' STRATEGY AND ISRAEL'S ACHILLES HEEL



by James Jeffrey

Israel has correctly assessed the October 7 attack as an existential threat to the state. To be sure, Hamas could never overrun Israel. But if Hamas remains capable of such attacks, possibly coordinated next time with the greater military threats of Lebanese Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran, Israel could be pushed to the brink (as nearly happened in 1973).

Surely Jerusalem will not be caught by surprise a third time. But avoiding surprise would require permanent mobilization, which would be detrimental to Israel's future. Thus Israel's officially announced war goal—destroy Hamas' capability for offensive operations and remove it from the governance of Gaza—is the only real option.

Israel faces, however, three major risks.

The first is that a wider war could ensue. Israel's mass mobilization reduces the risk of Hezbollah or other enemies intervening, but it cannot be ruled out. President Biden's commitment, backed up by major force deployments, also mitigates this risk.

The second is that heavy Israeli Defense Force (IDF) casualties – fighting block by block through Gaza City – along with the danger to the many hostages could together deter full execution of Israel's war goals. These are choices only Israel can make.

The third is the impact of Gazan civilian casualties on Israel's military operations,

particularly if civilian casualty numbers produce outrage sufficient to shift the Biden administration's current total support for Israel and thereby place IDF resupply and other support in question.

One of the many questions about October 7 was why Hamas took an action that would expose it to the unquestioned *capability* of Israel to then destroy it. One of perhaps several answers could be that Hamas thought that Israel would lose the *intention* to destroy it because of inevitable international blowback from civilian casualties. Precedents from past Middle Eastern conflicts, contradictory positions by US administration officials, and media attention on the dire Gaza civilian situation increasingly drowning out reporting on the horrendous slaughter of Israeli civilians, all suggest that this risk of international blowback needs to be taken seriously.

But two caveats are in order on this very sensitive subject. First, civilians whether Israeli or Palestinian are innocent. They should never be targeted, and whenever feasible, should be protected. Second, there is a danger of moral equivalence, particularly prevalent in some Western circles and the Arab world. There were practical problems with the initial October 13 Israeli alert for Gaza civilians to displace south of the Wadi Gaza line, but undoubtedly the Israeli civilians killed, wounded or seized on October 7 would have appreciated such an alert from Hamas.

Both American and Israeli military operations in the broader Middle East have faced international outcry over civilian casualties. The first American offensive into the



Aftermath of the attack by Hamas gunmen on Kibbutz Beeri, October 2023.
Photo credit: Reuters/Violeta Santos Moura

city of Fallujah in 2004 was halted following criticism both in the American media and by the Iraqi Governing Council. The second offensive in October 2004 was condemned in advance by the UN Secretary General, and only the Arab world's focus on Yasser Arafat's death in the same week as the battle limited the impact. The "shock and awe" air strikes against Iraq in 2003 generated much international criticism, as did an American strike on a hospital in Afghanistan, and more recently air strikes against the Islamic State in Baghuz, Syria.

Importantly, apart from the first Fallujah attack, the United States in each case continued its military operations despite the international criticism.

While international opposition to Israeli actions is common, what is most relevant is how Washington reacts, and here the record is mixed. The frequent fallings out over civilian casualties

between Washington and Jerusalem result from a number of factors: the commendable priority most Americans following foreign policy place on humanitarian issues; the differences between Israel and most US administrations on West Bank policies; and Washington's need to balance relations with Israel with those of Arab states also important to US policy. We saw this in the 2008 and 2014 Gaza conflicts, but most notably during the 2006 Lebanon war. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in her book *No Higher Honor* spells out the administration's concern about civilian casualties and in the end President Bush's determination to halt the Israeli operation.

The difference between those prior conflicts and the current Gaza war is critical. For Israel this is an existential conflict. That means different rules apply, those of the world of war – which the Ukrainian President could eloquently

explain. President Biden and Secretary Blinken appear to get this, judging from their extraordinarily strong language and military moves in support of Israel.

As the Ukrainian president could also explain, Western publics and governments traditionally have problems understanding the world of war. Prioritizing absolutely the safety of civilians and stopping the shooting are usually good instincts in the world of peace in which the West normally lives. But that is not Israel's world today.

President Biden, while reiterating admirably total support for Israel, keeps returning to the need to adhere to the laws of war. And Secretary Blinken in a joint press conference with Prime Minister Netanyahu not only stressed Israel's humanitarian obligations but proposed an almost impossible standard "take every possible precaution to avoid harming civilians." Taken literally, Blinken's statement could imply concern with a bloody ground offensive.

One can argue that these are the usual pro-forma American expressions of concern, but there are other signs that the Biden administration is conflicted. After the Hamas attack, Secretary Blinken and his Palestinian Affairs office tweeted language suggesting the US supported a ceasefire or de-escalation of violence. The tweets were pulled, but according to the Huffington Post the State Department then had to issue guidance on October 13 ordering officials not to use "ceasefire/de-escalation," "ending violence/bloodshed" and "restoring calm," suggesting there are still differences within the State Department. Finally, the administration's legitimate priority of evacuating stranded Palestinian-Americans out of Gaza and returning American hostages could clash with full support of Israeli actions.

American and international media, after days of highlighting Hamas atrocities, have significantly shifted focus to Gaza civilian casualties. That's understandable, it is the latest, significant news. But the one-sided slant of much reporting is troubling, as seen in a dust-up

over an apparently single incident of several white phosphorus shells fired into Gaza. White phosphorus in fact is not prohibited by the laws of war, though it generates much media attention, as the US learned in Fallujah.

More serious has been the reaction to the Israeli call for Palestinian civilians to avoid combat by moving south of Wadi Gaza, the creek that divides the northern and southern parts of the Gaza Strip.

To be sure, the Israeli government invited harsh criticism, particularly by initially setting an unrealistic 24-hour time period for what should have been presented and seen as a humanitarian effort. But the seemingly universal condemnation of the move by humanitarian agencies in Gaza was picked up without questioning by the media. These condemnations ranged from the UN declaring such a move "impossible without devastating humanitarian consequences" to Doctors Without Borders calling the request "outrageous," while the Palestinian Red Crescent Agency termed it "shocking and beyond belief." No wonder that ABC News, reporting on the issue, entitled their piece "Israel Tells More than One Million Gazans to Flee South...but Is that Even Possible?"

This writer, based on much exposure to conflicts, does not question the dire situation of the civilian population or the sincerity of those providing aid under always difficult, now dangerous conditions. But he has also been involved in multiple evacuations of civilians. It is never pretty but far better than the alternative. No media outlet the author reviewed pointed out that for most in Gaza's north, the safe zone south of Wadi Gaza is only about ten to twelve miles away, and judging from the considerable automobile and truck traffic in Gaza, transportation for some could have been arranged.

Other media analyses also condemned the Israeli call for evacuation because those leaving have no place to go. That is correct, but under the laws of war that's not Israel's responsibility. Furthermore, one million Gazans live south of Wadi Gaza and Hamas could order them to take in people fleeing from the north.



Map of the Gaza Strip. Credit: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA oPt)

The US organized civilian displacements from Fallujah in 2004 (smaller than those in Gaza) and repeatedly during the struggle against the Islamic State from 2014 to 2019. During the Syrian Civil War, some twelve million Syrians were displaced internally by Assad's violence, some over hundreds of kilometers with initially the ground as their only shelter. Three million internally displaced people in Idlib, Syria, along the Turkish border are in many cases still living in tents or makeshift dwellings. But in all of these examples, local authorities, Iraqi, Kurdish, or Syrian opposition, supported the movements and provided minimum care.

Hamas in contrast has called on residents to stay put, obviously to use them as they have done previously as human shields to forestall

an Israeli attack. Hamas is reportedly blocking travel to the Rafah border crossing with Egypt. Yet the media, in repeating the "impossible to move" argument, buttresses Hamas' position at the expense of the Israeli effort to save lives.

Again, humanitarian agencies are correct that such a movement under emergency conditions will make an atrocious humanitarian situation worse, and it's their job to make that clear. But while that is a significant moral and practical concern, it is not a categorical imperative or a legally binding stricture. Those agencies certainly know that displacing those who can move ten-twelve miles south is better than subjecting them to a massive Israeli ground attack. It thus appears that the implicit solution to their dilemma is no ground offensive and an end to air strikes. But that course of action would have its own dramatic humanitarian, political and moral considerations affecting the survival of the state of Israel and the security of the entire region.

The American people, and thus any American administration, has difficulties differentiating between humanitarian concerns and categorical imperatives. Administrations therefore are tempted to bridge the difference by requiring the more humane and reasonable party to forgo its legitimate interests for a vague promise of an eventual Washington "deus ex machina" solution.

What this means for Israel is that criticism out of Washington on humanitarian issues is inevitable. But what is vital is that this American criticism doesn't degenerate into curbing operations as seen with Lebanon in 2006.

Unfortunately, this will require Israel to attend to that risk during a time of deep anguish. As Secretary of Defense Austin reiterated at a October 13 press conference in Israel, the question isn't whether or not the IDF will adhere to the laws of war (it will), but rather whether Israel could put more attention into humanitarian issues beyond international law, in other words, the gray zones between law of war requirements and military contingency.



Palestinians flee their houses heading toward the southern part of Gaza Strip, October 13, 2023.
Photo credit: Reuters/Ahmed Zakot

Here are three examples. First, was the limited use of white phosphorous worth the inevitable media blowback? Second, including water with fuel, electricity, and food on the list of items blocked from Gaza had likely the least impact on Hamas' military capabilities but the most on human suffering. Finally, the evacuation rollout message could have been better thought out and written. Israel has since refined its message, giving Gazans more time and designating routes, as well as resuming water supply for the southern part of the Strip. But the damage was already done.

The blunt reality is, the more Israel considers humanitarian concerns, the more time, flexibility, and American administration support it will have to destroy Hamas. *

JAMES JEFFREY

James Jeffrey was deputy national security advisor of the United States from 2007-2008. He also served as US ambassador to Iraq, Turkey and Albania, as Special Presidential Envoy to the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS, and as a US infantry officer in Vietnam. He is currently the chair of the Middle East Program at the Wilson Center.



Trucks carrying humanitarian aid for Gaza wait at Rafah on the Egypt-Gaza border, October 17, 2023. Photo credit: Reuters

BALANCING MILITARY AND HUMANITARIAN NECESSITIES: LEGAL ASPECTS OF THE WAR IN ISRAEL AND GAZA



by Liron A. Libman

The atrocities committed by Hamas against Israeli civilians on October 7 do not exempt Israel from abiding by its own commitments under international law.

Even in a war against a brutal terrorist organization engaged in acts of absolute evil, international humanitarian law still applies. Most of these legal obligations are designed to protect the civilian population – and even the terrorists. After their capture they cannot be subject to retaliation. Revenge is a natural sentiment when facing such barbarity. Nevertheless, retaliation cannot be the purpose of a military operation.

Consistent with Israeli Air Force practice, each target currently being attacked in Gaza is a verified military target, whether it is a pre-planned target based on intelligence gathering, operational research, and legal input, or an immediate (time-sensitive) target identified on the spot, such as a rocket launcher squad or armed operatives.

The foundation upon which international humanitarian law is built is a careful balance between military necessity and humanitarian considerations. Military necessity allows the IDF to attack military targets and military operatives of Hamas and other terrorist organizations in Gaza. The civilian population

must not be the object of attack. Nonetheless, it is permitted under international law to attack military targets, even if civilians in the vicinity of the target may be harmed, provided that the expected collateral loss to civilians is not excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage. In other words, attacking military targets located in a residential area is permitted if it is not expected to be disproportionate.

Furthermore, the military command responsible for planning and executing an attack must take reasonable precautions to spare the civilian population, although the exact nature and extent of the precautions taken are context related. The more vital the military necessity of neutralizing the target, the narrower is the scope of precautions required to protect civilians in the vicinity of the target. However, one precaution that may ease the proportionality dilemma is giving effective advance warning to the civilian population that may be affected by the military offensive.

The reality on the ground in Gaza is that Hamas has located its military infrastructure in densely populated urban areas. Every party to an armed conflict is obliged to move its civilian population away from military infrastructure. Hamas does not violate this duty out of ignorance or neglect; rather, it deliberately locates its military infrastructure in sensitive civilian sites, such as underneath hospitals, using the civilian population as a human shield.

Against this backdrop, Israel's call for the residents of Gaza City and the surrounding area to distance themselves from the area of an



A leaflet dropped from Israeli airplanes to residents of Gaza City, asking them to move to the southern portion of the Strip to avoid the coming ground campaign, October 13, 2023. Photo credit: Mohammed Talatene/dpa via Reuters Connect

upcoming military operation is allowed under international humanitarian law.

Furthermore, if circumstances permit, such a warning is a duty to allow an orderly evacuation from the expected fighting zone. The IDF informed the population of Gaza city and surrounding towns of the exact routes and hours in which they will have a safe passage (“humanitarian corridors”) to the south. This call for evacuation is, by no means, a “deportation” or a “displacement.” It is temporary, for the civilians’ safety, and they should be allowed back once Hamas is defeated and hostilities end. This warning is something Hamas itself should have done, even as Israel evacuated part of its civilian population from the vicinity of the border. In fact, the Gaza Strip

is not a large territory, and the evacuation of so many people to the south of the Strip inevitably strains existing civilian infrastructure, which is already stressed because of the war. However, it is not Israel’s duty to provide accommodation for the evacuating population.

In 2005, Israel disengaged from Gaza, evacuating its military forces and civilian settlements. Since then, Israel is not the occupying force in Gaza. Therefore, it does not have an active duty to supply basic humanitarian needs (electricity, fuel, water, medical supplies) to the population of Gaza – although it had been doing so in the hope, proven false, that this would restrain Hamas.

In 2007, just after the Hamas coup d’etat in Gaza, the Israeli Supreme Court held that



Aid trucks arrive at a UN storage facility in Gaza, October 21, 2023. Photo credit: Reuters/Mohammed Salem

Israel cannot immediately and completely cut off electricity and fuel it provides to Gaza, highlighting the total dependency created by 50 years of occupation. Sixteen years later, I doubt if this caveat is still relevant. Hamas, which controls Gaza, chose to invest in rockets and tunnels instead of civilian infrastructure, such as the electricity power grid.

When it comes to the passive duty of allowing neutral third parties to provide humanitarian assistance, the legal status is different. In principle, Israel has a duty to allow third parties to render humanitarian aid. Nonetheless, this duty is subject to two conditions. First, Israel may prescribe technical conditions, such as inspecting the supplies, to ensure that weapons and war materials are not smuggled. Second, Israel may demand that the distribution of

the assistance be carried out by a neutral agency. The rationale here is to ensure that humanitarian assistance is not diverted to the military forces of the enemy, e.g., that fuel entering Gaza does not supply Hamas trucks or electric power generators of command-and-control posts.

Given Hamas's record and priorities, there is a serious reason to doubt whether the second condition can be met and assurances that humanitarian aid entering the Gaza strip would not fall into the hands of Hamas's military wing can be given.

UNRWA, the UN agency working with Palestinian refugees in Gaza, tweeted that fuel and medical equipment from its compound in Gaza City were taken by "a group of people with trucks purporting to be from the Ministry of

Health of the de facto authorities in Gaza”[UN speak for Hamas]. The tweet was quickly deleted.

In practical terms, probably the best solution would be to move the civilian population out of the Gaza City war zone controlled by Hamas and to provide the humanitarian aid there. This has led to Israeli consent to the entry of some supplies from Egypt.

Obviously, a state may do more than what is required by international law for policy reasons. According to reports, Israel agreed to supply some water to the southern areas of the Gaza Strip, where the civilian population is encouraged to go. This may create an incentive for the population to heed the advance warning. Other policy considerations include environmental concerns. For instance, without the water supply from Israel, Gazans may increase pumping from water wells in Gaza. The groundwater level in the coastal aquifer may fall, allowing seawater in and making the water unusable. This aquifer serves both Israel and Gaza. Similarly, without fuel and electricity, sewage treatment facilities in Gaza may stop working, and untreated sewage may pour into the sea and pollute both Gaza’s and Israel’s coasts.

There is one issue at hand where humanitarian obligations are absolute: the taking of civilian hostages is absolutely forbidden and is a war crime. Hamas kidnapped civilians: women and men, children, infants, and elderly people. All must be released immediately and unconditionally. There are serious doubts whether a non-state armed group in a non-international armed conflict may legally, under international law, hold soldiers in captivity. Even those who answer in the affirmative admit that each captured soldier is entitled to be humanely treated, receive medical attention when needed, and be protected from violence, torture, and outrages upon personal dignity. The captive cannot be held incommunicado, access to the representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) must be given, and

correspondence with family members allowed. There is clear evidence that Hamas tramples upon these basic humanitarian obligations now, as it did in the past.

Israel’s Military Advocate General (MAG), assisted by an international law department, advises the IDF on how to deal with these and many other legal issues regarding the war. The MAG is professionally guided by the civilian Attorney General and his staff. They are independent legal officers, subject only to the rule of law.

Another important role of the MAG is law enforcement within the IDF. An illuminating example of the IDF’s values when it comes to human life, even that of an enemy, is the case of Elor Azaria. Azaria was an Israeli soldier who was found guilty of killing a Palestinian assailant who had attacked two IDF soldiers with a knife several minutes earlier. He was indicted because when Azaria shot him, the assailant was already neutralized. In February 2017, Azaria was sentenced to an 18-month prison term. While the IDF punishes soldiers even for killing terrorists after they are neutralized, Hamas takes pride in killing, torturing, raping, mutilating, and kidnapping civilians: women, children, babies, elderly people, and men.

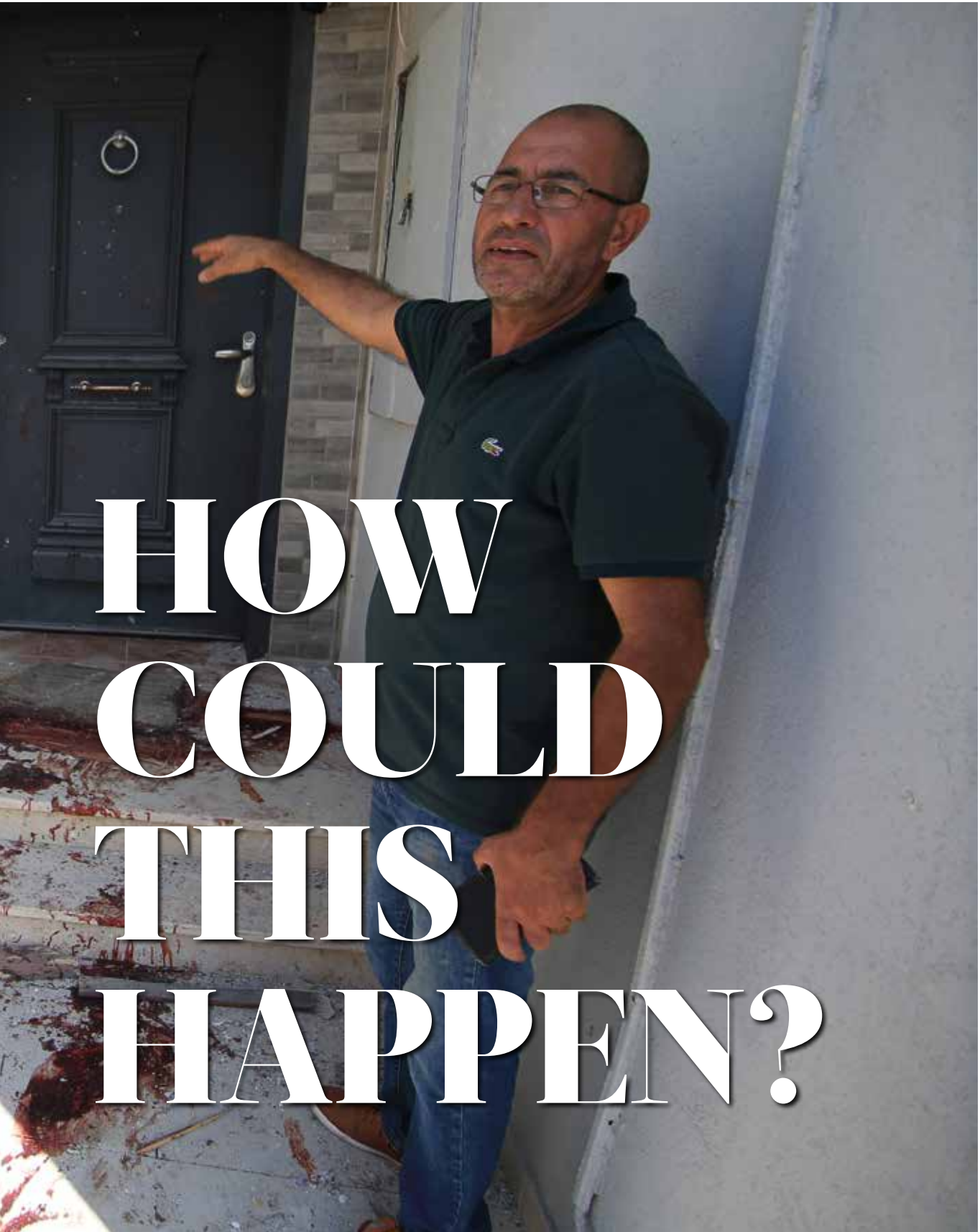
There are voices in Israel, outraged by the horrors of 7 October, who call for indiscriminate action in Gaza. But in the IDF, there is an understanding that fighting while abiding by the law is not a liability but a source of strength. *

LIRON A. LIBMAN

Liron A. Libman served as Chief Military Prosecutor (2005–2008) and the head of the international law department in the Israeli Defense Forces (2009–2011). Currently, he teaches international law at Sapir College in Israel and practices as a lawyer and mediator.



Photo credit: IMAGO/Saeed Qaq via Reuters Connect



HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN?



by Eran Lerman

Israelis woke up on 7 October 2023 to a day of grief, outrage, and ultimately, incomprehension.

It was not the missiles which mattered. Israelis have grown accustomed to missile attacks from Gaza. The horrors which gradually unfolded resulted from an overland breach of the Gaza border defenses. At various points in time on October 7, 14 rural villages and three IDF forward bases were overrun and held by Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorists. Two small towns near Gaza, Sderot and Ofakim, were invaded for long hours. Hundreds were slaughtered in the streets, in their cars on the road, in a desert rave attended by young people, and in their homes. Children and elderly women were forcibly taken to Gaza, and the body of a dead young German woman from the rave was put on display. Young children in a kibbutz home hid in a closet with the bodies of their parents lying nearby. The heartbreaking reports kept coming in, with expressions of international support bringing little by way of solace.

With the number of murders exceeding 700 (and the count still far from final), the wounded at more than 2150, and hostages reportedly at 130, including children, the question that came

first to many in Israel was: How Could This Happen?

Fifty years and a day from the Egyptian and Syrian surprise invasion on Yom Kippur of 1973, the IDF was once again caught unprepared. Once again it happened on a high holiday, with consequences not witnessed in Israel since the desperate days of the War of Independence in 1948. There will surely be a commission of inquiry, not unlike the Agranat Commission of 1974, as Amir Oren reminded JST readers. But well before this happens, several initial observations can be offered.

HAMAS IMPROVEMENTS IN PLANNING AND TACTICS

The military wing of Hamas meticulously planned and coordinated an operation which included an unprecedented use of sophisticated home-made solutions. This in turn raises further questions as to the failure to learn of such plans, or detect the work done on technical devices. Specifically, the key to the border fence breach was the use of small bombs dropped from drones, which were used to disable tanks as well as destroy the monitoring cameras guarding the fence. The Hamas operators managed to maintain strict secrecy as these preparations were underway – which incidentally, gives the lie to the claim that the attack was a spontaneous response to Israeli actions in Jerusalem in the prior week.



Palestinians crossing into Israel from Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip, October 7, 2023. Photo credit: IMAGO/APAimages via Reuters Connect

THE STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE FAILURE

The intelligence failure begins at the strategic level of misapprehending Hamas intentions. Over the preceding two weeks, the Hamas “de facto government” in Gaza, led by Yahia Sinwar, seemed to be angling for more Qatari money (brought in suitcases full of cash, since the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah controls the banks and refuses to help what they see as a rebellious province) and for more workers to be allowed into Israel, which the

Netanyahu government was willing to concede. Israeli analysts concluded that Hamas is steadily becoming more concerned with running a government rather than a terrorist attack against Israeli civilian targets. Whether or not Sinwar knew this or was used as cover – we may never find out. His indirect dialogue with Israel through the good services of the Egyptian Intelligence Service served as cover for the well-guarded plans of the Hamas military wing.

As commander of the Hamas military wing in Gaza, Muhammad Dheif has survived past



Israeli soldiers in the town of Sderot walk past the bodies of civilians killed by Hamas gunmen, October 7, 2023. Photo credit: Reuters/Ammar Awad

assassination attempts (but was maimed in one of them) and was clearly the mastermind behind this well-planned and meticulously executed assault. The Hamas leaders in exile, hosted by the State of Qatar and joyously monitoring events from Doha, provided the vital link to Iranian support. All the while, the Israeli Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI) as well as the Shin Bet (the internal security service, with jurisdiction also over Palestinian affairs generally), responding to a rise in terror attacks in the West Bank, concluded that the Gaza border could be held with fewer troops, with 21 battalions diverted over the last few

months to the West Bank, trusting that an incursion into Israel from Gaza was unlikely. Hence also what seems to have been a reduced level of alert.

Another, less explicable failure occurred at the tactical level of intelligence gathering. The key asset at the crucial moment on the early morning hours of October 7 should have been visual observation of the penetration point and a timely alert. But using drone attacks, as indicated above, the Hamas attackers apparently bombed and neutralized the long-range observation unit (staffed by young IDF women soldiers) and the compound they were working

from. Hamas rendered the IDF blind for a painfully long period of time. A better prepared arrangement for redundancy in monitoring the border could have made this much more difficult to do.

IDF OPERATIONAL FAILURE

To this was added what some observers, particularly MG (res.) Yitzhak Brik, a former tank officer and later IDF ombudsman, have been warning about for the last 15 years. The IDF, once upon a time a well-trained and relatively large military based on its reserve armored formations, has become much smaller, less disciplined, less well trained (since the reserves are rarely called up), poorly prepared for ground warfare and maneuver, and much too reliant on airstrikes, precision munitions, and highly specific intelligence. As a result, there was little that could compensate for the lack of intelligence on 7 October.

While individuals and special forces units did fight with great bravery, and indeed suffered painful losses, it took much too long for the IDF formations to be there when they were needed. For much of the day the residents of the area Israelis call “the Gaza envelope” – the town and villages surrounding the Gaza Strip to the east – felt abandoned to their fate.

The task ahead, despite the immense complications posed by the hostage situation, and by the danger of the conflict expanding to the northern front with Lebanon, is to put an end to the ability of Hamas (and Palestinian Islamic Jihad) to constitute a threat in the future.

These organizations may have gained a short-term tactical success. But they also made the profound mistake of awakening the deepest fears and emotions of the Jewish people. Mass slaughter of civilians, abuse of captive children: these evoke powerful reactions that will not be quelled until the perpetrators in Gaza and elsewhere (including Qatar) have paid the ultimate penalty for these acts. While the

social networks are flooded with expressions of Palestinian “pride” for what they wrought, one is bound at the end of these bitter days to wonder about the sanity of those who chose to inflict such atrocities on a much superior military power – and still hope they can survive the ordeal they have now brought upon their own people. *

ERAN LERMAN

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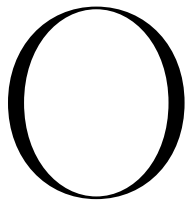
THE PRIMARY VICTIMS OF HAMAS ARE PALESTINIAN

A Palestinian girl stands outside her family's home in a poor neighborhood in Beit Lahia, northern Gaza Strip, December 2022. Photo credit: Majdi Fathi via Reuters Connect





by Ksenia Svetlova



n the night of January 25, 2006, after Hamas won a majority of the seats in elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council, its political leader Ismail Haniya told the press he had requested a meeting with Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas to discuss the future of the Palestinian government. “Hamas will cooperate with everybody for the benefit of all the people,” he was quoted in *The Guardian* the next day.

17 years later, when Hamas launched a horrific attack, it’s clear that the only beneficiary of this victory was Hamas itself. The rest of the Palestinian people have lost.

JIHAD AND CORRUPTION

In 2006, Hamas’ electoral win came just five months after the unilateral Israeli disengagement from Gaza. Hamas’ successful electoral strategy was based on two ideas: declaring a “jihad” against the rampant corruption of the Palestinian Authority; framing the Israeli unilateral disengagement from Gaza as a great victory for the “muqawama” – meaning armed resistance, which includes suicide bombings and other targeting of civilians (shooting and kidnapping) – that Hamas and other Palestinian organizations had been waging since October 2000.

Polls in 2006 showed that the Palestinian public did give Hamas most of the credit for disengagement. Some Palestinians also believed that Hamas leaders, who at that time lived in refugee camps and shared the burden of ordinary life, would be more decent than Fatah officials, who were infamous for their lavish lifestyles and nepotism.

As a journalist, I covered Gaza during that time for Israeli television’s Russian language Channel 9 as well as international media. The few months between the disengagement in August 2005 and parliamentary elections in January 2006 were characterized by turmoil and internal fighting between Fatah and Hamas, but they were also months of hope. Arab and some Western investors explored opportunities for hotel and college construction and residential developments. A Lebanese-Palestinian friend of mine decided to invest some money in a condo near the sea – he was now able to travel from Lebanon to Gaza via the Rafah border crossing with Egypt.

If all these plans were to materialize, many jobs would have become available to Gazans. Many were out of work since the beginning of the Second Intifada in 2000. The border crossing to Egypt was supervised by EU monitors, Gazans finally could come and go freely, and there was some cautious optimism that things might finally work out for Gaza.

But once Hamas managed to translate its post-Intifada popularity into political victory, these hopes were soon shattered. Despite its promises to “work for the benefit of the



Hamas supporters celebrate election results in Gaza, January 26, 2006. Photo credit: Reuters/Ahmed Jadallah

Palestinian people” the movement began to vigorously promote its own military-political project.

An interview with Hamas co-founder Mahmoud al-Zahar on al-Arabiya television on March 18, 2006 reflected the hardline opinion, and indicated that even after assuming power Hamas would remain Hamas – a hardcore fundamentalist terrorist organization. “If Hamas joins the government, it will do so on the basis of its economic, social, and political program, which does not cede even one centimeter and which [at best – K.S.] grants a long-term ceasefire, leaving the conflict unresolved, even though we will not be talking about a military struggle. The difference between Hamas and others is that Hamas is based on a religious foundation, which regards Palestine as Islamic

land. If the present generation lacks the capability to carry this out, it does not mean that [this ideal] needs to be relinquished.”

The Quartet of the US, EU, UN and Russia required Hamas to forsake violence, recognize Israel and respect all previous agreements (the “Quartet Conditions”) but, to no avail. Hamas could have earned international recognition, funds and influence, but it wasn’t interested. While during the first half of 2006 Hamas mostly refrained from firing rockets into Israel (while allowing other organizations to do so), on June 25, 2006 its fighters used a tunnel to sneak into Israel, ambush IDF soldiers, kill two and and kidnap another, Gilad Shalit (released in a prisoner exchange in 2011). In doing so, Hamas revealed that it had invested vast funds to prepare for subterranean warfare.



Hamas leader Ismail Haniyah. Photo credit: Reuters/Aziz Taher

In retaliation, Israel bombed Gaza's sole power station and launched Operation Summer Rain, and Hamas sprayed civilians in Southern Israeli cities with its rockets. In total, 1,247 rockets and 28 mortars were fired at Israel in 2006 (a rise from 574 mortar shells and 286 Qassam rockets in 2005).

Israel imposed economic sanctions and a blockade on the Gaza Strip in July 2007, following the violent takeover of Hamas – when hundreds of Fatah men as well as non-combatants were executed. Hamas now established its own rule in Gaza. Energy blackouts became common, and life in the Gaza Strip became even more difficult.

Israel's blockade was aimed at Hamas' attempt to arm itself with more sophisticated weapons, beyond their own home-made Qassam rockets. A quick glance at the number of rockets that were fired at Israel in the following years

show that this strategy simply didn't succeed: Iran found ways around the blockade. In 2010, Iran succeeded in smuggling 1,000 mortar shells and hundreds of short-range rockets into Gaza. Northern Sinai became Hamas's "backyard" for operations and storage of arms.

Unemployment in Gaza reached 38 percent and poverty increased. Corruption allegations, such as the ones against the Palestinian Authority that had brought Hamas to power in 2006, were now heard out loud – against the leaders of Palestinian Islamist groups, some of whom quickly enriched themselves and sent their kids to study abroad. In 2014, Khaled Mashaal was reportedly worth 2.6 billion US dollars or more; his then deputy Musa Abu-Marzouq – 2 to 3 billion US dollars.

Ismail Haniyah, the current leader of Hamas outside of Gaza, and his sons are estimated to be worth 4-5 billion dollars. This man had called his



Hamas showing how their engineers turn water pipes into rocket tubes.
Photo credit: EYEPRESS via Reuters Connect

fellow Palestinians to be satisfied with “olive oil and zaatar” during the first years of a blockade that was imposed in order to prevent Hamas from getting more weapons into the Strip. While Gaza became poorer, Hamas leaders deposited billions into their bank accounts.

VIOLENCE AND AUTHORITARIANISM

When it became clear that the economic situation in the Strip was not about to improve, protests against Hamas broke out. In 2011, a few activists rallied in Gaza for Palestinian unity. They were arrested by Hamas police and then tortured. Human Rights Watch called for an investigation.

During the Israel/Hamas conflict of 2014, Hamas tortured and executed 23 Palestinians, including children, suspected of cooperating with Israel, according to Amnesty

International. “In the chaos of the conflict, the de facto Hamas administration granted its security forces free rein to carry out horrific abuses including against people in its custody. These spine-chilling actions, some of which amount to war crimes, were designed to exact revenge and spread fear across the Gaza Strip,” the report said.

Anyone who wonders about the source of Hamas’s brutality on October 7 should know that the organization had years and years of practice – at home. “The Hamas leadership repeatedly calls for rights and justice for Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere. But they do not always act in a manner that reflects respect for rights, justice and the rule of law. By failing to halt such grave violations, the Hamas authorities are dragging the name of justice through the mud and condoning these appalling crimes,” according to Amnesty International.

In 2019, protests erupted in the Strip against corruption and dire living conditions. In response, Hamas arrested dozens of protesters, beat activists and violently suppressed attempts by local media to cover the unrest. Hamas also targeted journalists (though it is suddenly very concerned for journalists' safety now, when Israel is attacking its terror infrastructure).

It also persecuted, tortured and killed members of the LGBT community and jailed women for "moral offenses".

Just this August, Hamas arrested nearly 400 people during another desperate protest against deteriorating living conditions. A 14-years old girl named Batol Abu-Salima disappeared following this wave of arrests.

HAMAS' RAISON D'ÊTRE – JIHADI VIOLENCE

Hamas could have had it all. In 2005, Israel left Gaza and opened the Rafah border crossing with Egypt. If Hamas had met the conditions of the Quartet back then, investments would have poured in, unemployment would have shrunk and in the absence of violence Gazans could have also continued working in Israel, as they did prior to the Second Intifada.

Hamas could have invested in building state institutions and the economy, and thus promote Palestinian struggle for an independent state. Instead, Hamas increased its rocket attacks, kidnapped a soldier and then a few civilians and spent many billions of dollars in acquiring arms, manufacturing rockets and digging military tunnels. This self-serving move was intended to preserve authority in Hamas hands. While the terrorist organization was able to inflict some harm on Israel, during its 16 years of rule it completely mismanaged and ruined life in Gaza. They focused on a "forever war" with Israel, while neglecting everything else – water, sewage, electricity, employment, and every other sphere of civilian life. The terror organization now controls land, but it never evolved into a responsible governing authority, despite all of Israel's assessments.

A word must be said about the Israeli government as well. For years it nurtured relations with Hamas and Qatar, while offering no real partnership with the Palestinian Authority beyond security cooperation – another self-serving move that allowed Prime Minister Netanyahu and his allies on the extreme right to avoid negotiations. Over the years many Gazans said to me that while they opposed Hamas, they were also appalled by what they perceived as "constant humiliation" of the Palestinian Authority and its leader, Mahmoud Abbas. Today, when Israel mulls again reinstating "a moderate regime in Gaza" when and if the Hamas regime is toppled, and fears violent protests in the West Bank, continuing the campaign against the Palestinian Authority seems even more dangerous.

Hamas's destructive policies have harmed the Palestinians beyond imagination. The world should not let Hamas off the hook just because it skillfully uses the victim card. Its brutal and violent deeds do not bring Palestinians closer to a solution and do not advance independence. Israel, undoubtedly, needs to thoroughly revise its failed policies and strategies: it needs to eradicate the evil of Hamas, while strengthening what remains of its Palestinian partner – not just to find a quick fix for Gaza (no such quick fix exists), but to build the necessary trust, start from fresh and work towards a realistic and just solution. *

KSENIA SVETLOVA

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Lebanese protesters carry Hezbollah and Palestinian flags, October 2023. Photo credit: Marwan Naamani/dpa via Reuters Connect

THE ISRAEL/ LEBANON BORDER: WILL ESCALATION LEAD TO A WAR ON TWO FRONTS?



by Orna Mizrahi

The danger of today's conflict in Gaza becoming a two-front war for Israel depends on a range of issues, most importantly Lebanese Hizbullah's leadership and capabilities, the strategic aims of Hizbullah's patron, Iran, and the actions of Israel and the United States to effectively deter escalation.

Hizbullah as an organization plays three different roles at the same time:

- * Ideologically, it is fully invested in Ayatollah Khomeini's version of Shi'ite Islam, and adheres to the policy orientation set forth by Iran's present Supreme leader, Ali Khamene'i – in effect, Tehran's most powerful and most loyal proxy in the Middle East, with the ultimate destruction of Israel as a major tenet of its faith.

- * Politically, it is the dominant party of Shi'ites of Lebanon, which are now the largest of the country's confessional groups. While Hizbullah suffered a setback in the latest parliamentary elections, and have failed so far to elect a president of their choice, the party still has veto power on national decisions and in national institutions.

- * Militarily, it is the most powerful force in Lebanon – far exceeding the Lebanese Army, which Hizbullah humiliated in May 2008 and has intimidated ever since. It has a sophisticated raiding unit – the Radwan Force; anti-tank weapons of Syrian (i.e., Russian) provenance; drones and UAVs; air defense and offensive cyber capacities; and above all, a massive array of rockets and missiles of various ranges, estimated

at some 150,000 in number, covering most if not all of Israel, some with precision guidance.

Immediately following Hamas' October 7 attack on the Gaza border, Hezbollah mobilized in a parallel escalatory cycle on Israel's border with Lebanon. The first shot was fired by Hizbullah, who broke the relative quiet in the north on the second day of the war, 8 October. It fired rockets into the slopes of Har Dov – in what they openly described as an act of solidarity with the Palestinian struggle, while also paying lip service to the call for the liberation of "occupied Lebanese territory" (an area, known as Sheba'a Farms, claimed by Hizbullah as Lebanese, although it was under Syrian rule until taken by Israel in 1967). Israel responded with artillery fire. From that point onwards, local exchanges of fire have taken place all along the border, with tensions steadily rising.

These incidents involve both Hizbullah and Palestinian elements operating from Lebanon. Since October 14, both the number of incidents and their intensity has significantly increased. Despite the escalation, Hizbullah's attacks remain limited and focused. It claims to be targeting only military positions and assets (although civilian targets have been hit), and seeks to maintain a "retaliatory equation" balancing their losses with attacks on Israel. An example of this symmetrical practice came when Hizbullah struck the cameras and technical equipment on the Israeli border fence – in retaliation for IDF strikes against Hizbullah watch towers. This was literally an eye for an eye. This was followed by several instances in which anti-tank missiles were fired into Israel, some of them causing casualties. There were also several infiltration attempts by Palestinian groups,



Hizballah leader Hasan Nasrallah meets with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in Lebanon, October 13, 2023. Photo credit: via Reuters

supported by Hizballah, who tried to cross the border but were detected and destroyed.

On 19 October, Hamas in Lebanon took responsibility for what they claimed was a 30-rocket barrage aimed at various towns in northern Israel, which could not have happened without Hizballah permission.

Meanwhile, Hizballah has been in constant coordination with its partners in the “resistance camp” (al-muqawamah) – Iran, whose foreign minister, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, visited the region during the first week of the fighting, as well as leaders of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) who operate from Beirut. It is safe to assume that Hizballah’s conduct since October 8 reflects the impact of this coordination – even though the organization does have its own independent considerations and chooses its modus operandi.

Beyond a show of solidarity with Hamas and a demonstration of their utility to Iran, the

purpose of Hizballah’s actions thus far seems to be to limit Israel’s options in Gaza, and ultimately to deter the IDF from carrying out a ground campaign, by signaling that this would lead to the opening of another front in the north..

Iran’s Supreme Leader, as well as Abdollahian and senior Hizballah leaders, issued such warnings, and suggested that if Israel would cross their “red lines” – which they were careful not to define – “the resistance would lose its patience” and a much more significant response can be expected on the northern front, expanding the war against Israel, and indeed bringing about what has been described in Israel as the “coming together of all hostile fronts.”

A close observation of Hizballah’s conduct so far nevertheless indicates that party leader Hasan Nasrallah is reluctant to be drawn into war, beyond the level of painful pinpricks, a tit-for-tat calculus within the rules the IDF has become

familiar with, far from the threshold of an all-out war. This reluctance reflects three restraining factors which have been in place for years:

- * Lebanon's parlous condition, owing to a several economic and political factors: spiraling inflation, rendering a financial system close to bankruptcy; massive unemployment; collapsing infrastructure and practically no government services; and political deadlock which has left the country without a president since May 2022. The country remains under a caretaker government. All this has led to the rise of anger and protests against Hizbullah's role in the country's ruin and its allegiance to the "resistance" and to Iranian rather than to the Lebanese interests. Both Prime Minister Najib Mikati and his foreign minister Abdallah Buhabib have made it explicit that Lebanon does not wish to be drawn into a war which is not in its own interest.

- * The lingering deterrent effect of the 2006 war with Israel. Though celebrated at the time by Nasrallah as a "divine victory," he later acknowledged it was a miscalculation. (Had he known how Israel's leaders at the time would react, he said later, he would not have launched the attack that led to it.) In addition, Hizbullah's current popular legitimacy is reduced because of its support of the Syrian regime in suppressing its people. Thus, Nasrallah has to weigh the heavy cost of an all-out war on both his organization – in men and material – and on the Lebanese Shi'a community that relies on it.

- * The Iranian need to retain Hizbullah's fighting force as a deterrent to any Israeli intention to strike at Iran's nuclear project.

There are three new considerations restraining Hizbollah as well:

- * The loss of any prospect of surprise (the main advantage Hamas enjoyed in its attack in the south). The IDF, now fully aware of the possibility of a multi-front conflict, managed to achieve full mobilization and sent significant formations to the north. It is now on high alert and prepared for a variety of scenarios. Israel also evacuated 28 villages within a two-

kilometer zone along its side of the Lebanese border (which may be extended further), so as to ensure that an attempted Hizbullah penetration would not have the catastrophic results witnessed near Gaza.

- * The terse American warning – "don't!" Hizbullah has treated it with bravado in public (and threatened the lives of Americans in Lebanon and beyond), but this warning cannot really be ignored, backed as it is with two aircraft carrier battle groups near Lebanese shores. For the time being, at least, it is Israel which can still rely on broad international support. Key nations in Europe – Britain (which has sent logistical support ships to the region), France (which has passed on some warnings to the Lebanese), Germany and Italy – joined the Biden administration on October 9 in warning against any widening of the conflict.

- * The deterrent effect produced by the Israeli Air Force strikes in Gaza since 7 October – reminiscent of, and exceeding, the well-remembered effects of the attacks on the Dahia (the Hizbullah-controlled neighborhood of southwestern Beirut) in 2006 – which demonstrate what might befall Lebanon and its fragile infrastructure in the case of total war.

At the same time, the temptation and pressure to open a new front is there. Should this happen, Israel would face severe challenges which would transform the war. However, this scenario of a two-front war – unlike the surprise terror attack by Hamas on 7 October – is one which the IDF has been preparing and training for, taking into account the possible combination of a ground incursion and massive rocket and missile attacks in the context of a multi-front conflict.

Thus, the range of potential threats coming from Lebanon in this war include the following: continuation of the current pattern of limited attacks by Hizbullah and Palestinian elements in Lebanon; a limited escalation and rising intensity of attacks, leading to isolated days of local combat with the IDF; an all-out attack, including attempted ground incursions and



Israeli soldiers near the border with Lebanon, October 16, 2023. Photo credit: Reuters/Lisi Niesner

a full missile barrage on Israel's cities and infrastructure.

At this point in time there can be no certainty as to where things may lead. The danger of escalation in the north will increase as the war goes on: under Iranian guidance, Hizbullah would certainly seek to keep the level of conflict high in the north throughout the war, and may seek further escalation along the border as the fighting in the south evolves – specifically, once the IDF ground maneuver begins – but keep it below the threshold of an all-out war. This remains a dangerous possibility, whether by design or through uncontrolled escalation – and yet, given the presence of the aforementioned restraining factors, it is not inevitable. *

ORNA MIZRAHI

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A rainbow over the border wall in the northern Gaza Strip, near Netiv HaAsara, Israel. Photo credit: Reuters/Amir Cohen



A POSITIVE EXIT STRATEGY FROM GAZA





by Robert Silverman

“The real victory comes not from defeating our enemy but from achieving a better place for Israel and our Palestinian neighbors.”

Yair Lapid, Knesset Speech, October 16, 2023

The ground campaign in Gaza has yet to start as I write on October 16. Much of the world’s focus is rightly on supporting Israel’s stated objectives: destroy Hamas and free the 239 hostages. At the same time, Israel must provide for the humanitarian supply of Gazan civilians and take all possible measures to avoid civilian casualties, consistent with both the laws of war and its legitimate military objectives, as Jim Jeffrey laid out in his recent piece in this journal.

Now there is a third priority: planning for a positive exit strategy from Gaza once Israel completes the military campaign. Recognizing that the kinetic phase (to use US military jargon) may take many weeks, this planning is nevertheless urgent. To contribute to what is an emerging conversation over planning for future Gaza reconstruction and governance, I outline below two aspects: models to avoid; and a good model to adopt.

After decades of failed international engagement in Gaza, we owe it this time to the Palestinians, Israelis and Egyptians – and to ourselves – to get this right.

BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT: THE MFO MODEL

Once the fighting is finished and humanitarian supply is assured, the IDF should withdraw troops from Gaza as soon as their replacement is in place. A lingering Israeli security presence throughout Gaza will not help post-stabilization efforts, though Israel should continue to maintain a corridor into Gaza in support of the multinational missions. The replacement should be two separate missions with two commands under a single head: one is a multinational gendarme force to maintain order and begin training a new Gazan police force; and the other is a multinational civilian governance team to help the Gazans rebuild economically and begin the process of governing themselves politically.

We cannot repeat two failed prior efforts in Gaza: the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations Relief and Welfare Agency (UNRWA). They have troubled missions on the West Bank in desperate need of internal reform. They must focus on the West Bank and cannot take on a new mission in Gaza with any realistic expectation of success.

However, both the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA must be consulted frequently, along with Israel and Egypt. The Palestinian Authority must be assured that the ultimate intention of the multinational mission is for Gaza to decide to reunite with a reformed West Bank Authority. That intention must be publicly and frequently stated: the multinational mission cannot be seen as a continuation of any “divide and conquer”

What is the MFO?



The Multinational Force & Observers is an international peacekeeping force with the mission of supervising the implementation of the security provisions of the Egypt-Israel Treaty of Peace. The MFO is supported by 22 member nations.

Some contribute resources and host MFO headquarters (Israel, Egypt, Italy, the UK, Germany, Norway, Korea) while others contribute troops (Australia, Canada, Colombia, Uruguay, Japan Fiji, Czech Republic); the US is both a major funder and troop contributor.

strategy separating Gaza and the West Bank. After it is formed and established in Gaza, the multinational mission must be independent of Israel, Egypt and its member nation governments, with frequent consultations with all of the above.

The positive model is the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO), a non-UN international organization staffed and funded by 22 member states with a strictly defined mandate. The US and Israel should convene a joint planning team now to begin defining mandates for the two missions – a security mission and a governance/reconstruction mission – while recruiting nations for these two new multinational teams. The Negev Forum countries (Israel, Egypt, Morocco, UAE and Bahrain) should be consulted from the early stages of planning. But the key members are most likely to be American friends and allies in Europe, South America and the Pacific (see box on MFO).

REFRAIN FROM DOING HARM

In chatting with experts over the past week about Gaza, I confirmed what seems obvious: no one in the international community knows very much about the potential politics of a liberated

Gaza. So the key becomes choosing the right personnel who can innovate in a fairly unknown and somewhat unpredictable environment.

Hamas has killed any competitors for leadership. There are vestiges of Fatah support and some supporters of Mohamed Dahlan, the former Fatah security chief from Khan Yunis who lives in Abu Dhabi. Dahlan is preoccupied with his many business interests in the Gulf these days and was seen as corrupt when he exercised power; he is unlikely to want to return. Likewise the al-Shawwa family, the traditional source of Gaza City mayors under both the Egyptian and Israeli occupations from 1949-1995, hasn't had significant political support in Gaza since the Hamas coup d'état of June 2007.

In short, the Gazans post-Hamas may be able to have a fresh start at self-government. But of course they will need a stable security environment and the support of capable, dedicated multinational teams, who are funded and prepared to stay in Gaza to support the locals for many years. As a point of comparison, the MFO recently celebrated its 40th year in Sinai observing and monitoring the Israel-Egypt peace.

The American-Israeli planning team for post-Hamas Gaza should first take an oath to do no harm, and here is what I mean by that.



MFO Force in Sinai. Source: www.mfo.org

NO EXPATRIATE RULERS

One lesson from past failures in Gaza, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere is to avoid the well-educated, English-speaking expatriates whom Americans feel will be welcomed by the locals. Everyone recalls Iraq's Ahmed Chalabi or Afghanistan's Hamid Karzai, but more relevant here is the PLO return to Gaza in the mid-1990s. They replicated their Tunis seaside villa lifestyle in the midst of Gaza. They set up armed guards on the corniche to prevent the average Gazan from entering the exclusive residential zone of their new rulers. When the Gazans got a chance, they voted the PLO thugs out of power (and instead got the genocidal maniacs of Hamas.)

Even the expatriate Palestinian technocrats in the international organizations are bad fits (though some are impressive individuals, for instance, former World Bank economist Salim Fayyad and former IMF economist Jihad al-Wazir). They have no local followings and don't have the hard experience of building political constituencies. That's not their training or background.

Instead of taking the easy way out of town by dumping Gaza on some set of beguiling

expatriates, the multinational governance team should be prepared to work with the local Gazans to build governance capacity – over the course of years.

NO AMATEURS OR ADVENTURERS – AND NO CONSULTANTS SEEKING THEIR OWN BUSINESS INTERESTS

As an Arabic-speaking US diplomat I was assigned in 2003 to the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq to help build self-government among Iraqis. That mission attracted hundreds of Americans from outside government service, some very well-meaning, but nearly all of whom had no Middle East experience and thus achieved little to nothing in Iraq. Now some of these volunteers over time built a resume of Middle East experience, they learned from mistakes made, including by them, in the US occupation of Iraq. But we cannot indulge the amateur adventurer model at the Gazans' and our expense.

We must also avoid the Washington consultants, and current government officials who will exit the revolving door into their former consultancies, who always try to tie anything



Khan Younis in Gaza after Israeli airstrikes, October 2023. Photo credit: Reuters/Ahmed Zakot

Middle-East related to the Saudis, because they want those ties for their own private business interests.

On one of last Sunday morning talk shows, I heard one such person say that the way to really defeat Hamas was to achieve Israel-Saudi normalization. I felt a familiar chill creep my spine – this was the kind of talk that after 9/11 had the US invade Iraq, a country that had nothing to do with 9/11. Saudi Arabia – Israel normalization likewise is a completely different issue from rebuilding Gaza.

Let's allow Saudi-Israel normalization to develop gradually, maturing from mutual Israel-Saudi interests rather than US inducements.

Normalization will be best achieved through private sector contacts that produce benefits seen by the Saudi people. Let's not try to force it into the Gaza project because some people want to benefit personally from Saudi ties.

SO WHO THEN?

Governmental and non-governmental organization professional staff – in the US, Europe and a few other places – may not have effective lobbies or media appeal, but they (and especially those with prior Middle East experience) are the most likely to succeed in helping Gaza become self-governing. Among this

cohort are many who don't have the right skill sets for the Gaza mission. Personnel recruitment and selection will be the most important initial step in planning.

On the civilian governance side, the multinational team will need to be able to bring in a wide variety of expertise, from education to business development, once there is interest by the locals. Again, this cannot be driven from outsiders, including West Bankers. The pace and intensity of engagement has to be dictated by local Gazans and the process could take many years. But identifying and recruiting expertise should begin early in the planning process.

The MFO has worked effectively for over 40 years and it is the right model for Gaza. There are no Israeli or Egyptian staff in it, nor should there be in the Gaza missions. The MFO security team is usually headed by a non-American military officer while the civilian side is headed by an American diplomat seconded to the mission. The entire staff are government professionals from MFO member countries.

Now, the Gaza reconstruction mission will be much more complicated than the MFO border monitoring mission. But some MFO elements are directly applicable : funded by member states and intended to be in place for years with no pre-planned end date, and staffed strictly by professionals.

No one knows what to expect precisely from a post-Hamas Gaza. But we might be surprised at some of the Gazans' reactions.

In October 1988, I took an intensive two-month course in the Palestinian dialect of Arabic at Ulpan Akiva in Netanya. I had left my law firm job in Los Angeles and was headed into the US Foreign Service in January, with some time off in between. My roommate at Ulpan Akiva was a Gazan doctor, a young man who was there to study Hebrew prior to doing an internship at an Israeli hospital. The Intifada had already broken out in Gaza but he was so excited to learn about Israel's medical practice and, in fact, to learn Hebrew.

Like many educated Gazans I suspect he has

relocated elsewhere over the years of PLO and then Hamas rule. But I hope we will find others like him, interested in learning, and in leading Gaza towards a different and positive future. *

ROBERT SILVERMAN

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Aftermath of Israeli airstrikes on Gaza, October 2023.
Photo credit: Ahmed Zakot / SOPA Images/Sipa USA via Reuters Connect

POSTWAR GAZA PLANNING: AN INITIAL CHECKLIST



by Thomas Warrick

Postwar planning for Gaza needs to start now. Prior to October 7, nobody in Israel was planning for this war. Thus, planning now for what happens if Hamas is defeated may be way behind. It will take many weeks to marshal the necessary resources, equipment, people, and authorizations to meet the basic requirements of Gaza's residents. Israelis will have their own requirements to ensure that Hamas and other terrorist groups do not again launch terrorist attacks against Israel. Poor planning and scant resources are now everyone's enemy.

This checklist is far from an actual plan. Actual plans could run hundreds of pages long with a team of authors. This checklist is intended to give a sense of the scale of what will be required for postwar Gaza planning.

This paper assumes an Israeli ground victory over Hamas in which areas within Gaza, in succession, are cleared of Hamas fighters. The succession of clearing operations presents an additional challenge, because humanitarian assistance, postwar efforts, and military operations may be going on in adjacent districts. Israel cannot afford to wait until all fighting in Gaza ceases before undertaking humanitarian and other efforts in areas that are relatively secure.

This paper does not address the vital issue of humanitarian assistance for Gaza's over two million people. The world has considerable capability to deliver humanitarian assistance in times of war and disaster—with the enormous caveats of resources and access. Diplomats and aid officials are already working these issues intensively.

However, one lesson from US planning efforts for Iraq and Afghanistan is that postwar planning cannot wait until humanitarian assistance is in place. That is a recipe for disaster. The lead time for postwar planning is too long—weeks and months—and the needs are immediate once the shooting stops. Humanitarian assistance and postwar planning efforts need to proceed in parallel. Both will need millions of dollars in the short term and, likely, billions of dollars over the next several years. Both will need thousands of additional people of multiple nationalities working down to the local level until all-local services can be restored. However, while the global infrastructure to coordinate humanitarian assistance to Gaza exists, the infrastructure for postwar planning and operations does not. It will have to be built—and quickly.

This paper also does not address the political issue of Israel handing off civilian authority over Gaza to someone else. That decision is a matter of extreme urgency and deserves a separate checklist.



An Iraqi girl prepares to dump trash on a Baghdad street, May 2003. Photo credit: Reuters.

AN INITIAL CHECKLIST OF TEN POINTS:

1. Restore SWET: sewer, water, electricity, and trash removal. Israeli officials know full well that restoring these will not be as simple as flipping a switch. In Gaza, these are interconnected: water and sewer both need electricity. Electricity needs fuel, even if just to power local generators, especially in hospitals.

The US assumption for Iraq was that the Iraqis responsible for these essential services would go back to work on the day after. That may not happen in Gaza because the staff may have evacuated to safer areas in the south, or may refuse to work as long as Israel is in charge. Even

so, Israel or some emergency administrative authority will need to restore electricity, water, and sewer service.

2. Prevent looting. This includes small-scale, petty looting, but the real danger here is large-scale, strategic looting. Someone needs to be assigned the duty of basic policing. If this is not to be the IDF and Israeli security forces, and the local Gazan police are unwilling or have fled, then someone must be found to do this, and they need to be in place within a day or two after the shooting stops.

An even greater danger, as the United States learned in both Bosnia and Iraq, is



Damage to Erez crossing between Gaza and Israel, October 2023.
Photo credit: Israel's Ministry of Defense Press Office.

the destruction of basic infrastructure that renders restoration of services impossible. The Bosnian Serbs in 1995 tore out the plumbing of apartment buildings in Sarajevo that they were required by the Dayton accords to turn over to the Bosnian government.

In Iraq in 2003, Baath Party operatives destroyed the electricity grid's infrastructure, creating an economic and humanitarian nightmare that still holds Iraq back more than twenty years later. The destruction of Iraqi government records was also an intentional effort to make Iraq ungovernable. Hamas is already using human shields—both captured Israelis and others, and the civilians of Gaza. The idea that Hamas would engage in strategic looting of Gaza has to be a core part of Israel's planning.

3. Even when the fighting stops, Israel can be expected to continue to carry out security measures against Hamas remnants. Israel will need additional large-scale detention facilities for those captured that do not become terrorist training camps like Camp Bucca was for the United States in Iraq. These need to be adequately resourced—overcrowding and a lack of resources to handle prisoners is a time-honored way to make things worse.

4. Identify the Gazan businesses needed for ordinary life, and provide them the ability to re-open quickly. Be ready to help with rebuilding inventories of necessities. This will likely require purchasing supplies in Israel or elsewhere for delivery into the parts of Gaza where the shooting has stopped.

5. Bring in field hospitals to let Palestinian doctors and staff treat patients. Israel, the United States, or someone needs to make calls now to arrange for field hospitals to be set up in the parts of Gaza where the shooting has stopped.

6. Seize Hamas's cash while not interfering with local Gazans. Israel will no doubt seize any Hamas military equipment, rocket manufacturing facilities, and stores of currency. However, wholesale seizures of noncombatants' currency is neither legal nor wise.

7. Survey damage. Someone needs to be tasked with comprehensive damage surveys to help in rebuilding.

8. Set up a cell phone network you trust, but restore civilian cell phone networks also. Everyone will assume cell phones and social media are monitored for security, but the civilian population needs some way to communicate.

9. Begin to set up the mechanisms to end Hamas's culture of corruption. Corruption is at the heart of what Hamas uses to keep the Gazan people in line. This needs to end. Dismantling Hamas's network of corruption will require once-in-a-generation root-and-branch reforms in public integrity in government contracting, civil service hiring, and business practices in Gaza. Some of the preliminary steps will need to be taken within hours of the end of organized fighting.

10. Set up more efficient capabilities to inspect people and goods moving in and out of areas where the fighting has ended. This will require inspectors, metal detectors, and X-ray machines such as are used at airports and border crossings. Much of Israel's checkpoint infrastructure was destroyed on October 7. Replacement equipment for the checkpoints

should be ordered immediately, if it hasn't already been ordered.

This gives a sense of scale of what will be needed at the outset of postwar planning for Gaza. *

THOMAS WARRICK

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WHAT'S NEXT FOR GAZA

A 3D satellite map of the earth showing the Gaza Strip. Photo credit: Shutterstock





by Dov S. Zakheim

The longer Israel holds off entering the Gaza Strip, the greater will be the number of voices around the world calling upon Israel not to enter at all. The arguments against an incursion are depressingly familiar. There will be those who will counsel against anger and revenge and for “proportionality.” And there will be those who ask whether the government of Israel has any idea as to how Gaza’s future might take shape once it has achieved its two primary goals, namely, rescuing the hostages and decapitating Hamas.

“Proportionality” in the current war is meaningless; there is no proportion to be applied against the rapes, beheadings and kidnappings that Hamas perpetrated against innocent people. Warnings about anger and revenge are also somewhat beside the point. When the United States attacked the Taliban-led Afghanistan in angry response to the 9/11 attacks, Washington had the support not only of its NATO allies, who for the first time ever invoked Article 5 as a threat against them all, but of many other states as well, most notably including Vladimir Putin’s Russia.

Rather, it is the concerns with postwar Gaza that Israel must take to heart, and it must do so quickly. It is not enough to rescue hostages or eliminate the Hamas leadership. There needs to be a plan to resuscitate Gaza, to give its people hope, and to prevent another Hamas-like organization from seizing power and continuing to seek the destruction of the Jewish state.

No actionable plan for the aftermath of the war has as yet come forth from Jerusalem. There is some talk of cutting off all intercourse between Gaza and Israel, preventing Gazans from working inside Israel because some workers may have provided Hamas with specific Israeli targets, including private addresses. Yet for Israel to implement a total cut-off would be self-defeating. It would deprive many ordinary Palestinians of the decent jobs they hold in the Jewish state, workers who would certainly form the core of those who are willing to live in peace alongside it. Indeed, it is not at all clear whether those Gazans who provided information to Hamas did so only because their families were threatened if they did not meet its demands.

What then might Israel do once it has accomplished its primary military objectives?

To begin with, the government should recognize that Israel cannot offload all responsibility for Gaza’s future onto any other state. At the same time Israel cannot on its



Israeli soldiers on Gaza border. Photo credit: Kyodo via Reuters Connect

own formulate, much less implement, a plan to rebuild a post-Hamas Gaza. It will have to be part of a coalition—what the leading experts at the Washington Institute for Near Eastern Policy have termed a “consortium” that sets about creating a viable institutional basis for managing the two million souls who live in the Gaza Strip.

America’s initial experience in Iraq provides some lessons on how not to go about creating a new Gaza. In contrast with its attack on the Taliban, America did not lash out at Iraq in anger. Realists like Brent Scowcroft, who helped lead the team that defeated Saddam in the First Gulf War of 1991, argued that there was no real basis for attacking the dictator a second time just over a decade later, and presciently warned of the consequences of doing so. Having launched its invasion, and defeated Saddam, Washington

erroneously appointed a civilian, Paul Bremer, who had no real experience in the region, to lead a Coalition Provisional Authority. The Authority consisted of representatives from several states, but Americans dominated—and many of them had as little experience of the Middle East as Bremer. Those initial missteps led to chaos, civil war and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi deaths.

Once the Israeli operation ends, Gaza will certainly need a governing authority to maintain order while a new Palestinian leadership comes into being. That authority should initially be military, and should be neither American nor Israeli. Nor should it be a United Nations force; that organization has not proved itself capable of managing anything more than minor military crises and is deeply distrusted by the Israelis. Instead, military leadership should come from Britain, one of the EU states, or indeed from the

EU itself, with perhaps France taking the EU lead. Both Paris and London have been notable in supporting Israel's right to defend itself and both bring deep experience of the region.

The objective of the temporary military government would be to prevent chaos. After a relatively brief period, say six months and no more than a year, it should hand the reins of government to Palestinians who have no affiliation with Hamas, but may have close ties to, or even represent, the Palestinian Authority.

At the same time, a consortium of states, to include not only states that have formal relations with Israel, that is, Egypt, Jordan and the Abraham Accord states, as the Washington Institute recommends, but those that have supported Palestine in the past, namely Qatar and Saudi Arabia, should join with Israel to undertake the rebuilding of Gaza. This would involve recruiting Palestinian technocrats from both Gaza and the West Bank, to develop civil and governmental institutions that can serve the people. The wealthier members of the consortium, the Saudis, Qataris, Emiratis would furnish the massive financial aid that reconstruction will require. The EU and the United States could provide support both for institution building and in the financial realm, but neither should take the lead. Gaza must be first and foremost a regional project.

None of the foregoing will be feasible, however, if Jerusalem continues to refuse to countenance the vision of a functioning Palestinian state that comes into being alongside Israel. In this regard the United States can and should play a dominant role. It must forcefully push Jerusalem to end settlement expansion; it should formulate plans for financing the relocation of the relatively small minority of settlers living outside the West Bank wall, and it should help to identify land swaps to compensate for the area between the wall and the Green Line.

While it is true that Israel offered the Palestinians a state of their own on multiple occasions with the PA leadership refusing to

negotiate on the basis of the Israeli offer, the aftermath of the Gaza war should provide yet another opportunity for the two sides to reach a peaceful resolution to a conflict that otherwise will never end. The consortium of states helping to restore Gaza could play a major role in bringing the Palestinians to the negotiating table. In Israel, the stage may be set after the war for a unity government that is ready to talk seriously to Palestinians about a common future for both peoples.

Many years ago, strategist Carl von Clausewitz wrote, "war is a mere continuation of policy by other means...War is not merely a political act, but also a real political instrument." When the guns finally fall silent, it is crucial that the policy objectives of the Gaza war yield a political outcome that will ensure that those guns remain silent for many years to come. *

DOV S. ZAKHEIM

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Hadas Kalderon, whose family members were killed and kidnapped on October 7, in the burned-out remains of her mother's home, Kibbutz Nir Oz, October 30, 2023. Photo credit: Reuters/Evelyn Hockstein.

DEFENDING THE BASIC VALUES OF HUMANITY AFTER OCTOBER 7



by Michael Zantovsky

In Europe, we have fancied ourselves to be living in a postmodern world where truth is a matter of narratives, where perpetrators of crimes are in fact themselves victims of abuse by the society, where right and wrong are no more than constructs in the eyes of the beholder and where good and evil do not really exist. But after the totalitarian assault by Russia against Ukraine eighteen months ago and this month's terrorist attack by Hamas against Israeli civilians, many of whom were old people, women and babies, this dispassion is a luxury we can no longer afford.

This wave of aggression, violence and hatred in Ukraine and Israel, in both cases disguised as the defense of an oppressed people and affirmation of the true faith against infidels, is something Europe has not witnessed so far in this century. Proud of its enlightened values and democratic ways, we in our prosperous part of the world have come to believe that we are enlightened enough to encompass and reconcile all differences, all creeds, all ways of life and all ideological persuasions. We tended to ignore the quickly multiplying warning signals from within and without Europe as mere rhetoric, manifestations of free speech, or at worst, as aberrations committed by disturbed individuals

expressing legitimate grievances in unhelpful ways.

This perspective, prevailing among the European political establishment, public intellectuals and glitterati, is not uniformly shared by all Europeans. In particular, among the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe with their relatively recent memories of totalitarian communist rule and, before that, of the horrors committed by Nazi Germany, the demons of the past are not ancient history but rather hosts of the undead, ready to rise from their graves at an opportune moment.

The memories, painful and glorious at the same time, of the long history of Jewish communities in Europe, their significant contributions to Europe's economy, science, education and culture, their untold suffering through discrimination, prejudice, humiliation and pogroms, culminating in the horrors of the bloodlands and black earth of the Holocaust, in which many of Central and Eastern Europeans were also implicated, have at long last metamorphosed into an awareness of shared history, cultural affinity, guilt and solidarity with the people of the Jewish state, to which we Central Europeans were one of the godfathers. In 1947, we knew enough to support the UN-mandated partition of the British Mandate Palestine and the creation of a Jewish state, and assist it in its struggle for survival that followed.

After the fall of communism in 1989, Central and Eastern European states were quick to shed



Pro-Israel demonstrators in Prague, October 9, 2023. Photo credit: Reuters/David W Cerny

the legacy of decades of official antisemitism thinly disguised as anti-Zionism. They reestablished diplomatic, economic and cultural relations with Israel, severed after the Six Day War in 1967, to mutual benefit. The countries of Central Europe have become one of the favorite destinations of Israeli tourists, coming to revisit and learn about the Jewish past without fear of becoming the targets of snide antisemitic barbs, or worse, terrorist attacks. Czech foreign policy and diplomacy, together with those of some of its neighbors, stalwartly defended and advocated for Israel in the halls of the United Nations and EU institutions.

At the same time, Central and Eastern Europeans were equally quick to recognize, unlike their historically luckier neighbors in the West, the increasing threat of the ever

more authoritarian, aggressive and irredentist leanings in Russia under the rule of a former KGB officer. Just like in the 1930s at the time of Hitler's ascendancy, many Europeans were once again making the mistake of confusing the outlandish claims and crude fabrications of Putin's regime with mere rhetoric and propaganda. On 24 February, 2022, Europeans suddenly woke up to witness Russia's assault on Ukraine, just as brutal as and far more bloody than the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968.

It was not surprising, then, that Central Europeans were among the first to respond to the aggression some of them had been predicting for quite some time. We opened the door to hundreds of thousands of civilian refugees from Ukraine fleeing the embattled country.

We provided humanitarian help, medicines and supplies to the Ukrainian towns along the front several thousand kilometers long. We emptied our military stores and provided military assistance to the Ukrainian army at that crucial moment, just like Czechoslovakia did for Israel in the War of Independence in 1948.

The Czech Prime Minister, along with the Prime Minister of Poland and the President of Slovenia were the first foreign officials to visit Kyiv when it was still within range of the attacking Russian armored columns. Along with our American and British allies, we succeeded in alerting the rest of Europe to the existential threat not just to Ukraine but to the international order and the values of freedom in all countries and forge a united front of assistance to Ukraine, international sanctions and moral condemnation to thwart the Russian aggression, a front which has lasted and buttressed the Ukrainian struggle until now.

It is in this context that one needs to understand the wave of revulsion at the Hamas terrorist assault and the outpouring of sympathy and support for Israel that has emanated from Prague and Central Europe in the aftermath of the October 7 attack.

Czech politicians, starting with President Petr Pavel and Prime Minister Petr Fiala were quick and unequivocal in condemning the slaughter of mothers, children and old people as well as in the unqualified recognition of the right of Israel to defend itself and to pursue and punish the perpetrators.

Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavský became the first European official to visit Jerusalem and express support for and solidarity with Israel in his meetings with President Isaac Herzog and Foreign Minister Eli Cohen. He empathized with the victims of the terrorist abomination in meeting Adva, the granddaughter of the 85-year old Yaffe Advar of Kibbutz Nir Oz who had been kidnapped by the Hamas terrorists and dragged to Gaza. The Foreign Minister not only helped evacuate dozens of Czech citizens from Israel on his flight back to Prague on a government plane,

but helped organize, in coordination with the Czech Air Force, an air bridge between Prague and Ben Gurion Airport, which brought back several hundreds of Czech citizens and provided transport for the Israeli citizens who were left stranded in the Czech Republic and needed to rejoin their families or join the mobilization of the IDF in Israel.

In allying with Israel, we are standing up for the same values of freedom and humanity that have informed our restoration of democracy in 1989, our successful integration in the community of democracies, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union, and our principled condemnation of the attack against the international system and the sovereignty and integrity of states guaranteed by the UN Charter waged by Russia against Ukraine. In siding with Israel, we express our total rejection of targeted terrorist attacks against civilians as attacks against humanity itself, which cannot be explained, justified or defended by claims of self-determination, revenge for wrongs, real or imagined, or alleged divine mandate.

Our conflict is not with the Palestinians, who deserve a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness just like any other people. For several decades now, we have supported the Palestinian people with humanitarian and economic aid and recognized their legitimate claims to independence and self-governance.

Unlike other countries, we can safely proclaim that our bilateral assistance has never filtered through to end up in the hands of Hamas terrorists. In spite of all the setbacks and disappointments for the Palestinians, many though not all of their own making, we never gave up hope of seeing Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in peace. In this, we were much encouraged by the recent changes in the region towards greater understanding and better coexistence, including the Abraham Accords between Israel and several Arab countries, and hoped they will expand soon to include some of the most important Arab states.



Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala meets with Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu in Tel Aviv, Israel, October 25, 2023. Photo credit: Avi Ohayon / GPO

The blow struck by Hamas against the heart of all Jewish people has equally been a blow against those hopes and against the aspirations of the Palestinian people and all people in the region. Those who celebrate Hamas “victory” in the streets of some countries of the Middle East, Europe and America are tragically ignorant of the fact that they are celebrating their own failure, the failure to remain human. *

MICHAEL ZANTOVSKY

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Pro-Palestinian demonstration in London, October 28, 2023. Photo credit: Ben Cawthra/Sipa USA via Reuters Connect

THREE EURO OF THE GA



PEAN VIEWS ZA WAR



by Hugh Pope, Daniel Schatz, Deidre Berger

Public Opinion Swings Against Israel

by Hugh Pope

In a recent broadcast, the presenters of *The Rest is Politics* – a bipartisan British podcast listened to by five million people a month – demonstrated a trend in Europe away from unconditional support for Israel to more sympathy for the Palestinians. Hosts Alastair Campbell and Rory Stewart noted how a swing from the initial outpouring of moral support for the traumatized population of Israel after the 7 October attacks by Hamas has turned into a realization that the population of Gaza is getting hammered too.

Stewart detailed the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and noted that Israel dropped nearly as many bombs on the Gaza Strip in six days as were used in the whole Libya war. [Ed. note: Stewart knows something about humanitarian catastrophe; he volunteered as a British civil servant for the Coalition Provisional Authority that occupied Iraq in 2003-2004 where he served as Deputy Governor of Maysan Province and wrote a book about his experience entitled *Prince of the Marshes*.] Campbell saw a “recalibration” in the UK and elsewhere to a position more balanced between the two actors than at first.

One of the first European leaders to go public with this shift was Belgium’s liberal Prime Minister Alexander de Croo, who told a press conference: “Our country won’t look away if Israel commits war crimes. Israel has the right to defend itself ... but even in a war there are rules. Collective punishment of Gaza is unacceptable.”

Concern is also rising in Europe about the Middle Eastern conflict’s already toxic overspill. Many commentators worry about how deeply the conflict was polarizing opinion, giving cover for antisemitic attacks and feeding negative tendencies in social media. In the conservative Dutch newspaper *Het Financieel Dagblad*, leading social commentator Joris van Luyendijk warned of the dangers to Europe of rushing to support one side or the other.

Shocking as the upsurge in violence might be, Luyendijk said, Europeans would be wise to realize that if they don’t take care, the polarization of Israel/Palestine would soon be stalking their streets too. The only beneficiary of this would be extremist politicians. He called on his readers to learn to hold two key ideas in their head simultaneously: sympathy for the Jewish people after all they have suffered over centuries, and sympathy for the Palestinians, who have suffered so much too in the past several decades.

In France and Germany, with governments that officially resolutely stand by Israel, the escalation of the conflict has become a topic for everyday grandstanding in domestic politics. After the initial blanket support for Israel during the first days of horror, sympathy for



Stars of David spray-painted on Jewish homes in Paris, October 31, 2023. Photo credit: Poitout Florian/ABACA via Reuters Connect

the Palestinians is rising and in some cases has fanned the embers of antisemitism into flames. In Germany, in particular, increasing polarization means that both the far left and the far right have found something on which they agree: a slogan that works for both, for instance, is now “Free Palestine from German guilt.”

The French newspaper *Le Monde* pointed out how the queue of Western leaders visiting Israel with unquestioning support was feeding the anger of the Global South against what the South sees as hypocritical double standards. The South already sees Europe’s reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine as one-sided, *Le Monde* explained, so if the West wants to regain traction with leaders of the developing world, it will have

to be firmer in its calls to Israel for international law to be respected.

Conscious that Jewish communities in Europe are feeling vulnerable, and wary of cancellation by the more extreme factions on both sides, many commentators are choosing their words carefully. This also reflects the somewhat shame-faced rediscovery in Europe of the fact that Israelis and Palestinians never stopped being engaged in a war; the absence of media coverage in recent years had lulled people into a false sense that there was peace. They now see more clearly that until the two Middle Eastern sides settle for what they can and agree to a fair deal, the horrors will continue for them both.

Two Polarizing Trends: Sharp Rise in Antisemitism and Increased Solidarity with Israel

by Deidre Berger

Jewish security throughout Europe has been deeply affected by the outbreak of war in Israel. Within hours after the brutal murders on October 7, representatives of Hamas-affiliated organizations were handing out pastries and sweets in the Berlin district of Neukölln, allegedly to savor the sweetness of victory. By evening, there were pro-Palestinian demonstrations throughout Berlin and elsewhere in Europe, some of which took place despite local bans. Posters and chants with slogans such as “From the River to the Sea,” belie claims that the demonstrators were solely expressing support for Palestinian human rights.

Monitors in Germany and elsewhere in Europe are reporting a sharp spike in cases of antisemitism, with numerous incidents at schools, sports arenas, the workplace, and numerous other locations. The British Metropolitan Police say there has been a jump of 1,350% in antisemitic hate crimes in the UK since the Hamas massacre. A national German monitoring association, Report Antisemitism, recorded a 240% rise in hate incidents alone in the week following the Hamas attack. The “Decoding Antisemitism” project, which analyzes comments on social media in Germany, the UK, and France, deems the significant jump in the number and degree of radicalization of antisemitic postings since October 7, 2023, a turning point in social media discourse.

At the same time, October 7 also sparked a counter-trend of solidarity with Israel. In Germany, with its strong network of non-

governmental organizations promoting Jewish life and fighting antisemitism, together with Germany’s more than 100 local Jewish communities, there was a quick response. An Israel solidarity rally took place in Frankfurt on the evening of October 7, with an event in Berlin the following afternoon.

There were events and displays of solidarity with Israel in dozens of other German cities. Cities also stepped up security for Jewish institutions. Civil society groups organized vigils in front of synagogues, particularly after a nighttime firebomb attack on a Berlin synagogue caused damage to the building complex. City halls, sports associations, and other public sites displayed Israeli flags, although Israeli flags and posters of Israeli hostages have often been torn down. Civil society networks linked on social media keep the fate of the Israeli hostages in the public eye.

The wave of antisemitic incidents after October 7 unsettled many within Germany’s Jewish communities. Anxieties about safety prompted parents of children at many Jewish schools to keep them home for days after the synagogue attack in Berlin. Some events at Jewish institutions were called off. At a solidarity rally in Berlin at Brandenburg Gate on October 23, President Frank-Walter Steinmeier called it unacceptable that Jews today must be fearful, particularly in Germany.

The October 22 solidarity rally organized by the German-Israeli Society drew an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 participants, the largest event of its kind in post-war German history. The nearly four-hour rally, with speeches from a broad spectrum of political parties and civil society, demonstrated a powerful display of public support for Israel. Yet it has thus far been the only such event of its kind in Europe. That, too, is a statement on the difficulties for Israel garnering public support in much of Europe.

So far, there has been a fairly tepid response by European governments to the rise in antisemitism. France, Germany, and the UK announced bans on organizations linked to Hamas, an organization which has been on

the EU terror list since 2001. German federal and state governments have reacted to violent antisemitism with measures such as the banning of demonstrations at sites known for repeated incidents of antisemitism, and a ban on Palestinian symbols at Berlin schools.

The celebrations of the gruesome massacre on German streets have re-sparked debates about antisemitism amongst incoming refugees. Polls show higher levels of antisemitism among European Muslim communities than in general European populations, though Muslim antisemitism in Europe existed long before the 2015-16 wave of chiefly Syrian, Iraqi, and Afghani refugees arrived.

It is far too soon to tell if the reactions to the October 7 massacre represent a new sensibility in Europe or only a temporary wave of solidarity with Israel. A family member of one of the Israeli hostages spoke movingly at the Brandenburg Gate rally on October 23 about recognizing the importance of defending liberal democracy, calling October 7 “a defining moment.” It is an open challenge to Germany and Europe to support Israel’s democracy, including its ability to defend itself, while showing sympathy to the Palestinian civilians caught up in the current war.

Is Sweden Reconsidering Its Policy Towards Israel and the Palestinians?

by Daniel Schatz

On October 10, Sweden announced it was temporarily suspending development aid to the Palestinian Authority owing to the Authority’s failure to condemn Hamas’ terrorist attack

in Israel. “We have a new situation after the 7th of October,” said Sweden’s Minister of International Development Cooperation, Johan Forssell, during a press briefing.

The minister emphasized that Sweden, historically among the top five largest donors to the Palestinians, would conduct a comprehensive review of all aid programs to ensure that no Swedish funds support entities that do not unequivocally condemn Hamas, that engage in violence, promote or endorse violence against the State of Israel, or pursue antisemitic agendas.

A change in Sweden’s Middle East policy would be significant, given that the country has historically been regarded as one of Israel’s most vocal critics in Europe. How can this nascent shift in Sweden’s relations toward Israel and the Palestinians be explained?

The traditional alliance of Sweden with the Palestinian cause began with Olof Palme, Sweden’s Social Democratic prime minister from 1969 to 1976 and from 1982 until his assassination in 1986. Palme was the prime exponent of Sweden’s foreign policy of non-alignment and of Sweden as a “moral super power,” which included support for national liberation movements. In 1974, Palme became the first leader of a Western democracy to meet with Yasser Arafat; he was also the first Western head of government to visit Cuba after its communist revolution, giving a speech in Santiago praising Fidel Castro.

Sweden’s pro-Palestinian policy line remained constant, with minor adjustments, until Social Democratic Prime Minister Göran Persson warmed Sweden’s relations with Israel between 1999 and 2001, during Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak’s tenure and an ongoing peace process. In May 2000, as a result of its newly enjoyed confidence of both Israelis and Palestinians, Sweden under Persson facilitated two rounds of secret Israeli-Palestinian back-channel peace negotiations at the prime minister’s official countryside residence outside Stockholm.



Pro-Palestinian demonstration in Stockholm, Sweden, October 22, 2023. Photo credit: TT News Agency/Pontus Lundahl via Reuters

Tensions between Sweden and Israel returned to form, and even increased, during the tenure of Sweden's center-right governments from 2006 to 2014 when frictions were often publicly expressed with center-right governments led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Relations took a further significant downturn in 2014 when Prime Minister Stefan Löfven's center-left government officially recognized a Palestinian state, making Sweden the first EU member state to take such a step.

The foreign policy shift underway in Stockholm owes much to the changing internal politics of Sweden. Two out of three parties in Sweden's current right-wing governing coalition—the Liberals and the Christian

Democrats— plus a third party outside the governing coalition – the populist Sweden Democrats – support steps to improve Sweden's relations with Israel. These three parties endorse the transfer of the Swedish embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. They have actively campaigned for Sweden to revoke its 2014 recognition of a Palestinian state, a recognition current Foreign Minister Tobias Billström has called “premature” and “unfortunate”.

As of now, the largest party in the governing coalition, the center-right Moderate Party which holds the prime minister and foreign minister positions, is hesitant to make changes. While generally pro-Israel, the Moderates are

influenced by foreign ministry bureaucrats who prefer to preserve the status quo.

In short, Swedish politics are changing and its foreign policy can be expected to change as well, though gradually and through a consensus formed by a large segment of its political class, as is always the case in Swedish political culture. *

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People hold signs reading “Gaza Free” and “Long live Palestine, beautiful, free and sovereign” at a pro-Palestinian march in Buenos Aires, Argentina, November 3, 2023.
Photo credit: Reuters/Tomas Cuesta

LATIN AMERICA GAZA WAR



N VIEWS ON THE ARE IN FLUX



by Annie Pforzheimer

In the days and weeks after the October 7 terrorist attack and Israeli military response, some Latin American nations have distanced themselves politically from Israel. While views of the conflict are evolving, the Latin American public's reliance on social media for news reports, amid relentlessly negative images of suffering in Gaza, has contributed to widespread support for a cease-fire and the deterioration of Israel's soft power in the region.

Regional governments' decisions about their posture on the war reflect the domestic political clout of diasporas, as well as broader geopolitical factors in the Western Hemisphere such as Russian, Chinese, and Iranian influence, and the ever-complex legacy of the US power politics.

PUBLIC POSTURES AGAINST ISRAEL

In a seminal vote at the UN General Assembly calling for a cease-fire, out of 14 votes against the resolution, the US and Israel were joined only by Guatemala and Paraguay out of the 34 nations of Latin America and the Caribbean; three Latin American nations abstained (Haiti, Panama, and Uruguay.)

On October 31, Chile and Colombia recalled their ambassadors from Israel, and Honduras followed suit on November 3. Bolivia formally

broke relations with Israel on October 31, accusing it of "crimes against humanity." (Bolivia had re-established relations in 2020, after breaking them in 2009.) Mexico and Peru also made forceful statements on November 1 condemning Israel's conduct of the war, while Argentina said "nothing justified" violations of international human rights law. The statements also condemned Hamas and called for the unconditional release of hostages, and for a humanitarian cease-fire. In the rotating presidency of the UN Security Council in October, Brazil had the pen on a cease-fire resolution that was vetoed by the United States. Caribbean nations issued a joint statement calling for an end to violence engendered by the ' Hamas attacks and Israeli counter-attacks.'

The leftist presidents of Brazil and Colombia have gone even farther on social media, calling Israel's actions a "genocide" against Palestinians. President Petro of Colombia has made the most one-sided and incendiary statements about Israel's actions, refusing to completely condemn the Hamas attack and stating that the situation of Gaza and its occupants is equivalent to that of a concentration camp. Petro's statements have been roundly criticized by Colombians, beyond his normal internal opposition. In response, Israel's foreign ministry announced a suspension of defense sales to Colombia, disrupting what had been a strong military partnership between the two nations. The next day Petro tried to make partial amends by being photographed meeting separately with the



El Salvador President Nayib Bukele, of Palestinian ancestry, unequivocally condemned Hamas leaders and militants as “savage beasts [who] do not represent the Palestinians”. Photo credit: Reuters/Jose Cabezas

ambassadors of Palestine and Israel. This was followed, however, by the ambassadorial recall.

Some Latin America and Caribbean countries had no one to recall; Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua, traditionally close to both Russia and China, have no embassies in Israel. All three nations hosted Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in June 2023.

President Alberto Fernández of Argentina ordered security upgrades for Jewish institutions in the country following October 7. (Note: In 1994, a suicide car bomber blew up the Buenos Aires Jewish community center *Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA)*,

killing 87 and wounding over 100. Until the October 7 attack by Hamas, the AMIA bombing was the largest antisemitic attack in the world since the Holocaust. Evidence indicates Iranian-backed Hizbullah was behind this attack, though no arrests were made in Argentina.

STRIKING A BALANCE

Chile has the largest Palestinian diaspora outside the Middle East, with an estimated 500,000 people. Other notable Palestinian populations are in Central America, Mexico, and Brazil. These diasporas reflect various groups



Pro-Palestinian rally in Buenos Aires, Argentina, November 3, 2023. Photo credit: Reuters/Tomas Cuesta

who left the Middle East, the earliest of whom were mainly Christians in the 19th century in search of economic opportunity or fleeing sectarian conflict, with later waves mainly stemming from displacement after 1948.

The diaspora of Jews in Latin America is tiny – less than .1% of the total population – with equally limited political influence. But Israel has friends in Latin America and the Caribbean and some measure of popular support. In 2017 Netanyahu became the first Israeli Prime Minister to visit the region. While the pro-Palestinian rhetoric from key Latin American nations has gotten attention, serving as a convenient way for governments to play directly to their political base, almost all these

nations condemned Hamas for its terrorist acts and Argentina has publicly mourned its more than two dozen citizens killed or kidnapped in the attack. In Brazil, immediately after October 7, the flag of Israel was laser projected over the National Congress.

There are a variety of reasons for this reservoir of Israeli soft power. Some nations friendly to Israel reflect their own conservative and increasingly Christian evangelical voter base, likely a key factor in Guatemala's outlier support for Israel at the General Assembly. Reflecting the region's fight against transnational crime, El Salvador President Nayib Bukele, of Palestinian ancestry, unequivocally condemned Hamas leaders

and militants as “savage beasts [who] do not represent the Palestinians,” comparing them to the deadly street gangs in El Salvador against whom he continues to use authoritarian tactics.

DOES LATIN AMERICA EVEN CARE?

The war in Gaza does not command sustained attention among the populations in Latin America and the Caribbean as it does in Europe, the Middle East, and North America. Reflecting distrust of mainstream media and their own governments, citizens have mainly followed events on social media, which by its high quotient of emotional coverage – and what may include deliberate manipulation – lends support to calls for a cease-fire and an end to civilian deaths in Gaza.

The prominent role of the United States as its supporter doesn’t help Israel in this case, given the history of US power politics in the Western Hemisphere and a region accustomed to questioning American motives. As a Brazilian analyst writes in *Foreign Policy*, Latin Americans do not see themselves immediately impacted by the Gaza conflict “but they appear determined to take a stand on what many see as violations of international law. In doing so, they and other countries in the global south are also casting skepticism on U.S. claims to be the defender of the rules-based international order,” a system which historically weak nations in the Western Hemisphere watch closely.

National leaders in Latin America and the Caribbean, through conviction, domestic expediency, or geopolitics, are likely to continue denouncing Israel’s efforts and US support as long as disturbing images from Gaza fill the internet. Israel’s efforts to promote its soft power in this region have produced only a limited reservoir of trust.

Ambassadorial recalls and public statements are diplomatic tactics which make headlines without actually disrupting relations. With enough will, and over time, diplomatic fights are fixable and soft power can regenerate. But where

deep hostility takes hold, as seems to be the case with some of the left-wing governments in Latin America, the damage done will not be easy to repair. *

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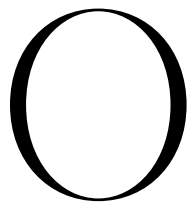


AFGHANISTAN TWO YEARS AFTER THE TALIBAN TAKE- OVER



Soldiers return home from deployment in Afghanistan, Fort Drum, New York, September 2021. Photo credit: Reuters/Brendan McDermid

BY JAMES CUNNINGHAM



On August 15, the Taliban celebrated the second anniversary of the fall off Kabul. Few other Afghans did the same. After two years of Taliban repression, Afghanistan is in danger of becoming a failed state, with all that implies for Afghans, regional stability and, ultimately, the security of America and its allies. The tragedy of Afghanistan is that it neither deserved nor needed to reach this condition. Now, the options for America and the international community are poor and limited by political and practical realities.

In 2019, before the fatally flawed Trump/Pompeo/Khalilzad surrender document to the Taliban called the Doha Agreement, Afghanistan was a poor, struggling but developing, democratic Islamic Republic, supported by a military coalition of almost 50 countries while dealing with a pernicious insurrection aided by Pakistan, and receiving significant development assistance from the international community. It was a Muslim ally in combating Islamic extremism. Yes, there was significant corruption and exploitation by Afghan elites, and a fractious political scene; dealing with that was a constant struggle. Afghanistan was never going to develop

quickly and change required time and strategic patience. But by virtually every metric it was making progress, especially as a new generation of Afghans came to the fore. The number of US forces had declined to some 12,000 and were headed much lower. In 2019, there were fewer US military fatalities in Afghanistan than there were globally from training accidents.

The Trump administration initially briefed the media that US withdrawal would be conditions-based, contingent on the Taliban breaking with Al-Qaeda and engaging in serious peace negotiations on an inclusive political agreement. Trump, however, soon made clear that he intended to withdraw no matter what, even as the Taliban violated the agreement from the outset.

When he took office a year later, Biden had no need to implement Doha. As long as the Afghans remained willing to fight, he could have maintained a small US and NATO presence, at a sustainable military and financial cost, as a long-term insurance policy for security, as we have done in Korea and Japan. That is what our allies and partners, who would have stayed, wanted. That could have provided what was necessary from the very beginning: a conditions-based foundation of security to set the stage for a coherent political strategy to achieve peace.

Instead, after April 2021, the Afghan security forces, which we created to depend on



President Biden defends Afghan exit, August 31, 2021. Photo credit: Pool/ABACA via Reuters Connect

our military and contractor support, began to collapse as that support withered.

Afghanistan is again a refuge for terrorists and a source of instability for Pakistan, facing economic distress, isolated internationally and in the midst of a humanitarian crisis forestalled by continuing efforts to provide aid. Women and girls are being obliterated from public life. Many thousands of Afghans are in limbo trying to secure passage to the US and other countries. And finally, US credibility as a long-term partner has suffered a serious blow in Afghanistan, under both the Trump and Biden presidencies, with lessons not lost on allies and adversaries. *

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**WAS GROUP THINK
RESPONSIBLE FOR
ISRAEL'S SURPRISE
IN THE 1973 WAR,
OR IS THAT JUST
ANOTHER FAULTY
ASSUMPTION?**



Prime Minister Golda Meir, accompanied by Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, meets with Israeli soldiers at a base on the Golan Heights during the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Photo credit: Reuters

BY AMIR OREN

With the approach of the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War of October 1973, it's time to revisit one of its ongoing scandals in Israel, the claim that the government's surprise at the start of the war was caused by a set of assumptions, based on intelligence assessments, called in Hebrew the "*konzeptzia*."

This term *konzeptzia* is a Hebraized import from the Eastern European languages of Israel's founders. It literally means "an interrelated set of working assumptions on a specific topic." In Israel, the term acquired the pejorative sense of "groupthink" (first used in this way to describe the faulty security plan in the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre of Israeli athletes). Today no Israeli in his right mind, least of all in the intelligence industry, dares embrace the term, although working assumptions are necessary in planning operations.

The notion that an intelligence *konzeptzia* was responsible for Israel's surprise in the Yom

Kippur War of October 1973 originated with the five members of the Agranat Commission of Inquiry.

Prime Minister Golda Meir set up the Agranat Commission several weeks after the war ended on the Egyptian front (though the war continued as low-level attrition combat for an additional seven months on the Syrian front) and six weeks before a general election was to be held. She hoped that the public would trust the Agranats to issue a fair appraisal of the various actors and agencies accountable for the shocking under-performance of the vaunted defense establishment.

The terms of reference for the inquiry were conveniently – for Meir – limited to the run-up to the war and its first three days, marking both the end of the Egyptian advance into Sinai and the failure of the initial IDF Southern Command counter-offensive. While members of the political echelon were not specifically outside the Commission's purview, they were spared and instead the Commission focused on career military and intel officers. It is for the public to pass judgment on elected officials through elections, the Commission members would later say – but their report wasn't available when



First meeting of the Agranat Commission in Jerusalem (L-R: Yigael Yadin, Moshe Landau, Shimon Agranat, Yitzhak Nevenzal and Haim Laskov). Photo credit: Sa'ar Ya'acov, GPO

voters went to the polls on December 31, 1973. The Agranat Commission issued its report three months later, well after Meir had formed her third cabinet in four years.

A gaping omission in the inquiry had to do with diplomacy and strategy. Meir's platform of war and peace, her secret contacts with the Nixon administration, the impact of domestic politics on defense priorities – all of that remained in the background, as the Commissioners raced to crucify the generals and intelligence chiefs. Years on, some of the Agranats admitted as much, saying that stabilizing the Meir government was crucial for an Israel engulfed in self-doubt and recriminations.

Who were five members of the Agranat Commission? The Agranat Five were the epitome of the Israeli establishment, though they had zero political experience, which may partly explain their naïveté. Shimon Agranat was the Kentucky-born Chief Justice of Israel's Supreme Court. His Supreme Court colleague, Moshe Landau, was in line for the chief justice job based on seniority. The State Comptroller, Yitzhak Nevenzal, was an efficient book-keeper, presumably able like the jurists to establish facts and assign responsibility and culpability.

And then there were the two retired lieutenant-generals (Israel's highest military rank). Yigael Yadin and Haim Laskov had both



Yom Kippur War: A long-range 175mm gun firing at Syrian targets on the northern front. Photo credit: Rubinger David, GPO

led the Israel Defence Forces in the 1950's and apparently got stuck there. They were respected but outdated, their military knowledge as relevant to 1973 as was the British Army of 1943 and the Haganah irregular force of 1948. But in the Israeli public a former Chief of Staff was as revered a figure as you could get. Only decades later was it revealed that hours before he agreed to serve on the Commission, Yadin had checked with Meir's confidants to see whether she would appoint him to be a cabinet minister.

Conflict of interest aside, Agranat and company had to base their anti-intelligence attitude on valid-sounding charges. Thus, the *konzeptzia*. Allegedly, the boneheaded intelligence officers dogmatically stuck to their bias, regardless of the warning signs that reality was much more complicated and demanded caution, not complacency.

The Commission's first fault was in focusing on an intelligence *konzeptzia* as the reason for the initial failure in the war. Documents from that era show it to be false.

Once Egypt and Syria had attacked, the term-du-jour became "The Scenario" – a diplomatic plan demanded by Meir and agreed to by newly-installed Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. The Scenario's premise was that Israel would quickly block the invading forces on both fronts and then move to counteroffensive and gain new ground across the violated ceasefire lines. Sadat and Assad, indeed the entire world, would learn that Israel punishes those who dare attack it. The American role in the Scenario was to stall all efforts in the UN Security Council to adopt ceasefire resolutions freezing the front lines, until the invasions were repelled.

The Scenario was shattered by reality. Israel failed to meet its own military expectations. Less than a week after the war started, the Israel Air Force lost so many planes and pilots that its chief pleaded for an immediate ceasefire in order to recover and regroup. Kissinger was stunned to hear about Meir's about face. He deflected the UN diplomacy to the British and from them to the Australians, only to hear that the Arabs – who earlier had been content with keeping their initial successes and calling it quits – now insisted on prolonging the war. The Agranat Commission was neither aware of nor interested in any of this, though the cost in subsequent Israeli casualties was enormous.

By whatever name, either *konzeptzia* or The Scenario, people and governments must proceed according to some plans and assumptions following their assessment of the situation. A choice must be made between alternatives. It may turn out to be wrong and “the road not taken” to be right, but the reality of flexible working assumptions – not groupthink or dogma – is natural and commonplace.

So what was so terrible about the *konzeptzia* of the intelligence agencies as presented to the Israeli public in the Agranat report? Let's review the situation leading up to the Yom Kippur War of 1973.

The Six-Day War of 1967 ended in a UN-mandated ceasefire along the lines reached by the conquering Israeli forces. But the losing parties – Egypt, Syria and Jordan – never agreed to the occupied territories being kept by Israel. They vowed to liberate them by whatever means necessary. For the following six years, Israel was on notice that full-scale renewed hostilities could be averted only by diplomacy and deterrence.

This was not peace. It was not even an armistice, but merely a lower level of violence, consisting of exchanges of fire across the Suez Canal with Israel's main enemy, Egypt. This War of Attrition ended in early August 1970 when Egypt's Soviet surface-to-air missiles foiled sorties of Israel's US F-4 planes and

Meir had to accept a diplomatic blueprint. When summer turned to autumn, war could have very well resumed if Nasser had so chosen.

It was not to be, because the ailing Nasser died in late September 1970. Egypt focused on the transition of Vice President Sadat, who had to consolidate his grip on power against a Soviet-backed rival. The renewed war against Israel could wait for a more opportune time. There was no rush.

Meanwhile, in Damascus, another transition took place. Defense Minister Hafiz al-Assad led a coup and became Syria's ruler, launching a dynasty still in power 53 years later. Assad, too, was cautious. He vowed to liberate the Golan Heights, one way or the other, but not just now.

Throughout the early 1970s, Israel had good – not perfect – intelligence on relatively open Egypt and not-so-good on police-state Syria. Jordanian Intelligence had recruited a senior Syrian Army commander, probably a brigadier-general, who was privy to contingency planning and military deployments, but not to Assad's calculations. King Hussein, grateful to Israel for rescuing him from a Syrian-backed attempted Palestinian coup in September 1970, shared this information with the Mossad, CIA and with Meir personally.

This Jordanian source was partly told by Sadat and Assad that they intended to wage war on Israel. They suspected he had secret channels to both Washington and Jerusalem, and kept the most crucial detail, their D-Day, to themselves. When he met Meir at a Mossad facility 12 days before the war, in September 1973, this source was not – and could not have been – aware of their decision to launch simultaneous attacks on October 6. The Egyptian and Syrian General Staffs only ratified this tentative plan on October 3.

In addition, Israel had insights into Sadat's mind thanks to its source, Nasser's son-in-law Ashraf Marwan. But it had no inner circle equivalent close to Assad. Israeli intelligence collected a lot of material on doctrine,

disposition, training and operational planning, but was in the dark regarding precise intentions.

The *konzeptzia*, as cited by Agranat, posited that Egypt would not go to war without Syria (and vice versa). Without a second front, the full thrust of Israel's air force and armored divisions would concentrate on one inferior Arab belligerent. Furthermore, the belief was that Syria was in a no-go framework.

As for Egypt, the *konzeptzia* assumed Sadat would not dare attack in the Suez Canal area – either by artillery, commando raids or full-fledged invasion – as long as the Israel air force had total dominance over Egyptian air space, enabling it to attack at will targets in Cairo and other hinterland regions. What Sadat needed, so the thinking went, was to neutralize this dominance through a counter-deterrent, a weapon capable of penetrating Israel's air defense and hitting its population centers. Only once he had such a weapon could Israel be expected to choose mutual restraint on both home fronts and limit the conflict to Sinai.

In turn, this limited campaign in Sinai would suffice to bring about Sadat's strategic goal of breaking Israel's myth of military invulnerability, restoring Egyptian pride and paving the way to peace talks, in the process moving Cairo into Washington's political and economic orbit.

This paradigm was not the speculative product of an analytical process at the headquarters of the Directorate of Military Intelligence (Hebrew acronym is AMAN) or the Air Force Intelligence Group (named Machman, later changed to Lamdan), though it was validated by analysts in both places. It was the real thing, an intelligence gem, pilfered by Marwan out of discussions and documents. All the Israelis had to do was to check the text against actual delivery.

This is where they failed. The *konzeptzia* was not a museum piece. It was fluid, dynamic, requiring constant updates. The Israelis knew Sadat wanted more strike aircraft as the

counter-deterrent weapon. Those he got on loan from Libya were not enough and came with strings attached. The Soviets were in no hurry to supply the sophisticated Sukhoi planes. Reinforcements were thus expected only in the 1974-75 time frame. So far, so good for the *konzeptzia*.

But there were two problems not fully accounted for – surface-to-surface SCUD missiles and the fact that Sadat, if desperate enough, could reach a decision to go to war even before his arsenal was adequately stocked.

Various elements within the intelligence community were locked in an argument about the SCUDs – have they been shipped, are they controlled by the Soviet instructors accompanying them, what will the rules of engagement be once they are declared operational? Differing views were debated and weighed. Finally, a higher probability was assigned to the SCUDs not being available to the Egyptian military just now.

That turned out to have been wrong. SCUDs had been in Egypt since early summer 1973 and were cited publicly by Sadat during the war to warn Israel against striking his cities. But it is the height of simplicity to ascribe to this factual error Meir's momentous mistake in downplaying the risk of refusing to moderate her diplomacy strategy.

Strategically, Sadat's decision to go to war was no secret. He ceaselessly declared, warned, threatened that if pushed to the wall he will order it, regardless of cost and consequences. In addition to public speeches, he sent messages via visitors who traveled from Cairo to Jerusalem. Meir was unmoved. Meeting Nixon and Kissinger on March 1, 1973, the most she would concede in an eventual agreement with Egypt was to redeploy a few dozen kilometers east of the Suez Canal. But Sadat did not care about the distance as long as an eventual full withdrawal from the Canal was guaranteed. Rather than negotiate that, Meir presided over a Labor Party platform which vowed to permanently hold onto the eastern third of Sinai.



An Israeli supply convoy crossing one of the bridges to the west bank of the Suez Canal. Photo credit: Ron Ilan, GPO

Sadat's plan required initial Egyptian gains, though Israel could then be expected to recover and throw its might at the invaders – if the war would not be stopped diplomatically, by either the UN or mutually acceptable mediators like the Shah of Iran (yes, it was a different Iran in those days) and Kissinger.

For the initial gains, Sadat needed operational surprise. Israel had only one army division in Sinai, against five in the invading force. Mobilizing reserves and driving them over 250 kilometers from the country's center to the Canal would take time, while the air force would be torn between the two fronts. Secrecy must be maintained, hopefully helped by deception, but if the Israelis get word of the imminent attack

and mobilize, no harm done – he could abort, ridicule the Israelis as panic-prone, wait for another opportunity and then generate global pressure for a peaceful resolution through the specter of a crisis or two (oil embargo, superpower confrontation).

Thirty-six hours before the Yom Kippur War started, the Israeli leadership – Defense Minister Dayan, Chief of Staff Elazar, and later that day Meir and several cabinet colleagues – did away with the intelligence assessments. They did not know for a fact that war was a mere day and a half away, but they suspected that it could be and adopted that suspicion as their working assumption, overriding the intelligence assessment of a “low probability” guesstimate.

The national leadership chose a mix of maximum diplomacy – asking the US to plead with the Arabs and the Soviets to de-escalate – and minimum deployment. The standing force was to put on full alert (it wasn't) but to avoid any movement to the front. Reserves were not to be called up. "The regulars will block" was the motto.

This, then, was the real *konzeptzia*, having to do not with an assessment of Sadat's probable moves, but of their outcome should he show such chutzpah as to provoke the IDF to hit back.

In the halcyon days of summer 1973, the Meir government and the IDF General Staff believed Israel could keep the 1967-won territories and even enlarge them if attacked (hence, only offensive plans west of Suez). This illusion of omnipotence had a component of omniscience, based on AMAN and Mossad assessments, but this was the minor *konzeptzia*, undeserving of the opprobrium heaped on it by the Agranat Commission.

In sum, at the heart of Israel's initial failure in the Yom Kippur War was a form of groupthink. But it was about the ability of Israel's standing army to repel a joint attack regardless of the circumstances and a corresponding lack of urgency in negotiating territorial concessions. It was more of a political *konzeptzia* rather than a purely intelligence one, despite the allegations of the Agranat Commission.

In April 1974, Golda Meir resigned from office in the aftershock of the Agranat Report's release. The Israeli public had refused to narrow the blame for the *konzeptzia* to the career ranks. *

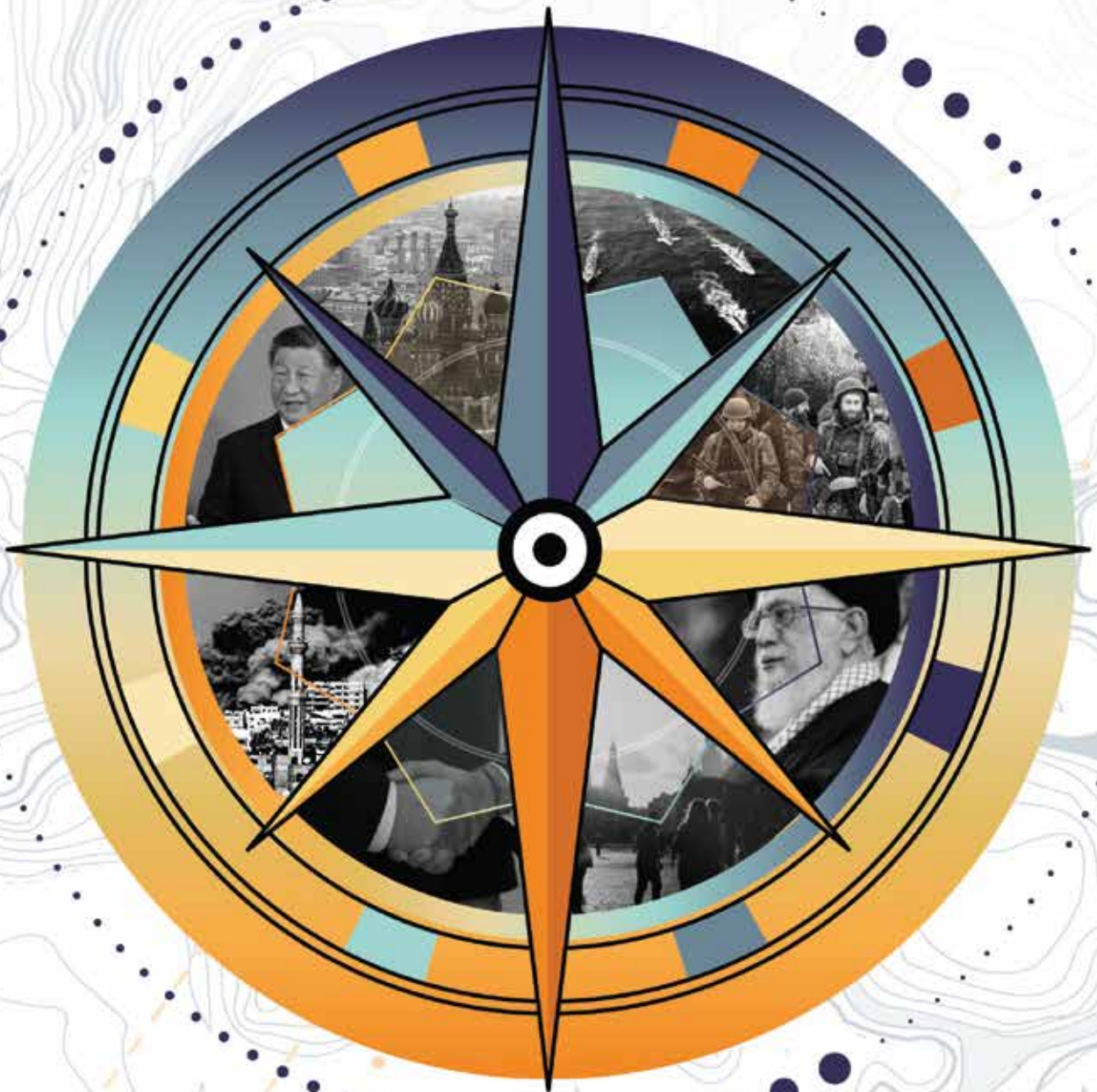
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