

Maryland Rabbis Won't Take Van Hollen's Contempt Lying Down

By Seth Mandel

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'Today we write with a unified voice to urge you to change your rhetoric and actions'

It's possible that American Jewry is reaching the point at which its seemingly limitless patience reveals itself to be a finite resource. While the Jews of Berkeley were sitting-in and marching in protest of campus anti-Semitism, the rabbis of Maryland were taking the unusual step of rebuking a senator who has made anti-Israel rhetoric a centerpiece of his political agenda.

Chris Van Hollen is serving his first term as Maryland senator after representing parts of Montgomery County for seven terms in the House. Maryland is among the ten largest Jewish populations by state, and Montgomery County—very much including areas represented by Van Hollen during his House career—has more than 100,000 Jewish residents, accounting for 10 percent of the county's entire population.

A Jewish community of that size right next to Washington, D.C. should loom large in the political sphere, especially for its congressional representative. But Van Hollen is working hard to erase it from his constituency. A particular low point came in February, when Van Hollen stood on the Senate floor and accused Israel of intentionally starving Palestinian children. This was not only a lie but a lie in the mold of the classic blood libels. Van Hollen went on to call this invented tale of Jewish perfidy “a textbook war crime” and Israeli leaders “war criminals.” Just yesterday, Van Hollen tried to use these unfounded allegations to raise the specter of an aid cut-off to Israel during wartime.

Van Hollen's regular demagoguery was enough to provoke a letter from more than 70 Maryland rabbis from across the major Jewish denominations informing him that his vicious grandstanding is one thing they all can agree on: “We have differing opinions about some of the rhetoric and actions taken by the current Israeli government, but today we write with a unified voice to urge you to change your rhetoric and actions that we believe mischaracterize the current war and undermine America's support for the Jewish state.”

The rabbis do not pull punches. “Following the worst pogrom against Jews since the Holocaust, we here at home have faced the worst wave of antisemitism in our lifetimes,” they write. “Yet to our dismay, rather than standing with us, your efforts in the Senate have only stoked deeper divisions and further isolated Israel and our Jewish community.”

The rabbis, who say they are “aghast” at Van Hollen's

rhetoric, also use the letter to correct the senator's claims about Israel withholding food, though I doubt a lack of information is behind Van Hollen's smear.

Getting that many rabbis to agree on anything is an accomplishment, but the Montgomery County Jewish community's very existence is a testament to its tenacity. Land covenants that forbade Jewish ownership were common in the 20th century, though they didn't stop an influx of Jewish federal workers who came to the D.C. area as the century wore on. Eventually the covenants expired or were made to be dead letters, and Jewish organizational life followed its members from the District to the suburbs, ensuring Jews had social lives and leisure activities despite exclusion from some of the social clubs.

It's easy to see, then, why the thriving community would protest its erasure by Van Hollen.

Unfortunately, it's not just Van Hollen, although his oleaginous used-politics salesmanship leads the way. Van Hollen's replacement in the House has been a disappointment as well. A month into the Israel-Hamas war, Jamie Raskin became one of three Jewish Democrats at that early date to call for a ceasefire, breaking from President Biden's support for Israel and getting way out in front of Bernie Sanders. Raskin vigorously opposed censuring Rashida Tlaib for her amplification and defense of genocidal calls to destroy the Jewish state. In January, he joined Squadnik Ayanna Pressley to give credence to another unfounded accusation: that Israel was planning the forced displacement of Palestinians from Gaza.

In general, Raskin's unseriousness about the threat of anti-Semitism has been appalling. After GOP Rep. Elise Stefanik broke open the issue of campus anti-Semitism by forcefully questioning top university presidents at a hearing that has since led to the resignations of two college presidents, Raskin treated the whole thing as a joke. Stefanik, he said, didn't object when Donald Trump had dinner with Kanye West, “and yet somehow she gets on her high horse and lectures a Jewish college president from MIT.”

While Raskin and Van Hollen laugh it up at the expense of their Jewish constituents, they—especially Van Hollen—fan the flames of anti-Zionist sentiment and show resentment and disrespect for the Jewish community. The rabbis' letter to Van Hollen is an encouraging sign that they are not taking this disrespect lightly.

Letter is reproduced in the next article.

Scores of Maryland Rabbis sign Letter Chastizing Senator Chris Van Holland (D-MD)**By Rabbis of Maryland****<https://tinyurl.com/2ab2s6sk>****March 13, 2024****Setting the misguided U.S. senator straight on his mischaracterization of the war and responsibility for humanitarian situation.**

According to the onling publication jewishinsider.com, “The letter was organized by Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt of Congregation B’nai Tzedek in Potomac, Rabbi Chai Posner of Beth Tfiloh Congregation in Baltimore, Rabbi Adam Rosenwasser of Temple Emanuel in Kensington, Rabbi Dana Saroken of Beth El Congregation in Baltimore and Rabbi Shmuel Silber of Suburban Orthodox Congregation in Baltimore.”

Dear Senator Van Hollen,

We are rabbis across political affiliations and religious denominations, serving many community members throughout the State of Maryland. We lead and represent tens of thousands of congregants. We have differing opinions about some of the rhetoric and actions taken by the current Israeli government, but today we write with a unified voice to urge you to change your rhetoric and actions that we believe mischaracterize the current war and undermine America’s support for the Jewish state.

On October 7, more than 1,200 Israelis were ruthlessly slaughtered, raped, and brutalized by Hamas terrorists whose entire vision is to destroy and eliminate the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

Each day since that horrific Sabbath morning, we have been in deep pain. We’ve witnessed an entire country traumatized and grieving. Families are broken. Our congregants have relatives who were murdered. Our people, and the Jewish state, will never be the same.

Today, more than two hundred thousand Israelis are internally displaced. Many have no homes to return to. Entire communities were decimated. Children, parents, grandparents, husbands and wives are still being held hostage in horrifying and unimaginable conditions. We simply cannot comprehend their agony. Over 130 of the original 253 hostages taken by Hamas on October 7th, including some Americans, remain hidden away in the Gaza Strip.

Like you, we are also deeply pained by the suffering and death of innocent civilians in Gaza. We, too, care deeply for those who have lost their lives and their homes in Gaza as a result of Hamas’ actions and this terrible war, and we yearn to see the day that Palestinian lives will be prioritized by their leadership.

Following the worst pogrom against Jews since the Holocaust, we here at home have faced the worst wave of antisemitism in our lifetimes. Yet to our dismay, rather than standing with us, your efforts in the Senate have only stoked deeper divisions and further isolated Israel and our Jewish community.

While Israel fights against terror and threats of annihilation, we are aghast by your claims about war

crimes and your portrayal of Israel as the aggressor. President Biden has called for \$14.3 billion for Israel’s security, yet you’ve worked to condition the aid, and have even threatened to call for the total denial of certain military aid Israel needs to free both Israelis and Palestinians from Hamas’ tyranny.

In a recent Senate speech, you outlined why Israel should be solely blamed for the humanitarian disaster in Gaza. In our eyes, the culprit for the crisis is not Israel – it is indisputably Hamas and the tragic war they began on October 7

We need your leadership when it comes to telling the truth about aid to Gaza. While you falsely suggest Israel is deliberately withholding aid, the truth is that Israel inspects and transfers more than 150 truckloads of humanitarian supplies to Gaza daily. True, conditions on the ground (and Hamas interference) have made it extremely difficult to deliver sufficient aid to civilian populations. Why do you insist on laying the blame at Israel’s feet?

We need your leadership when it comes to telling the truth about UNRWA, the U.N. agency exposed to have employed over 1,400 Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorists. At least 12 UNRWA staff members directly participated in the killing and kidnapping of Israelis on October 7. Why haven’t you devoted time on the Senate floor calling out this abomination?

We need your leadership when it comes to telling the truth about what Hamas did to Gaza. For 16 years, Hamas subverted the resources it received as international aid into building a labyrinth of terror tunnels beneath the civilians in Gaza – deliberately siphoning money and materials away from Palestinian families to fuel its terror operation. When will you blame Hamas for the havoc they’ve wreaked on Palestinians in Gaza?

Hamas started this war. It promises more October 7 massacres. Violating international law, it holds Israeli and American citizens in captivity using them and Palestinians as human shields. Anything less than the removal of Hamas from power will only lead to more war, more violence, more civilians killed at the hands of the terrorists. We ask you that you take these threats seriously and stand up to hate in Maryland, Israel and around the world.

As rabbis, we represent many different communities and people. We don’t always see eye to eye, including about Israel. Yet we come together knowing that Israel and Jewish people have the right to exist and to feel safe – just as Palestinians do.

We urge you to stand against terror and hate in all places and all forms, and just as you support the Palestinians, we call on you to stand up for Jewish people and our ally, the State of Israel.

Signed by 74 Maryland Rabbis (See link for the letter and list)

To End the War, Israel Must Attack Rafah

By Jacob Stoil and John Spencer

We Jewish voters can be the difference at the polls. What Hamas learned from the last ceasefire.

Have you wondered why, despite the devastation in Gaza and massive diplomatic efforts involving many countries, Hamas continues to refuse a ceasefire? It has a lot to do with its initial strategy on October 7—and the United States.

When Hamas attacked and invaded Israel, it did so knowing there would be a massive response by Israel and an operation into Gaza. It knew many Gazan civilians would die, indeed they counted on it, referring to their population as a "nation of martyrs" and taking pride in their sacrifices to further Hamas's military goals.

The military strategy for Hamas' October 7 attack was to create the largest scale of atrocity possible and survive Israel's counterattack. Then, having survived, it intended to build up for many more October 7 attacks, all with the aim of achieving its grand strategic goal: the destruction of Israel and the death of the Jewish people.

Ghazi Hamad, a senior Hamas political leader, stated as much, saying, "Israel is a country that has no place on our land. We must remove that country ... the Al-Aqsa Flood is just the first time, and there will be a second, third, and fourth. Will we pay a price? Yes, and we are ready to pay it."

Hamas's hope is that repeated attacks like October 7 will eventually break the will of the Israeli population. To do that, Hamas would need to survive the war.

Hamas's defenses in Gaza were built to hold the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in the eastern areas of Gaza. The defense also relied on the hundreds of miles of tunnels that Hamas had built under the civilian areas, protected sites, and infrastructure of Gaza. In the offensive in North Gaza, the IDF achieved operational surprise and performed well on the battlefield. As a result, Hamas' defenses did not hold as well as they hoped, so Hamas embraced a temporary ceasefire and returned almost half the hostages. During that ceasefire, Hamas evacuated the remaining hostages and much of their leadership to hide among the concentration of civilians in the remaining uncleared areas of Gaza such as Rafah.

In the meantime, pressure at home and the suffering of Gazans led the United States to put pressure on Israel to change operations during the fighting in Khan Younis, in southern Gaza, by employing a much lighter force package. For the first time, Hamas could see a way forward.

If the United States could be made uncomfortable enough with the continuing of the war against Hamas, then it would put more pressure on Israel to wind down operations. Egypt, in part, was inadvertently aiding in Hamas' strategy when they closed their border to Palestinian civilians. This trapped Gazans in the combat zone and guaranteed that, despite Israel's and the

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international community's efforts with humanitarian aid, there would be little relief to Gazans' suffering.

While multiple countries joined Israel's efforts to increase the amount of aid going into different parts of Gaza, to include airdrops and now a seaport, there will always be limitations while Hamas continues to hold the hostages and attack the IDF. Hamas actions to limit the aid to Palestinians continues to increase the likelihood that the United States will demand further restrictions on Israel—especially on operating in Rafah.

So why has Hamas refused a ceasefire now in Gaza?

Simple: They think their strategy is going to work.

They believe the United States will keep Israel out of Rafah, or that if Israel operates in Rafah, it will risk a strategic rupture with its only ally in the United Nations Security Council. Either way, Hamas potentially walks away with a strategic victory.

Without operations in Rafah, Israel will be forced to accept outlandish demands for the return of the hostages. Moreover, Hamas will survive and emerge as the only Palestinian organization to defeat Israel.

As it becomes increasingly clear that the United States has little stomach for an Israeli incursion into Rafah, Hamas has no reason to negotiate the terms of a ceasefire. It does not care about the interest of the Gazans. Hamas can maximize its gains with faith that the United States will ultimately impose a ceasefire on Israel. In the unlikely event that the Hamas assumptions about the United States start to prove false, they could attempt further delays of the Israeli offensive into southern Gaza by coming back to the table.

Without the realistic threat of an Israeli operation in Rafah, Hamas has no reason to seek a ceasefire, and given Hamas' strategy, there can be no truly lasting ceasefire if Hamas can return to control Gaza.

As long as the United States seems opposed to an Israeli entry into Rafah, Hamas' leadership can sleep relatively soundly in their tunnels and refuse to negotiate.

Ultimately, Hamas' strategy and unwillingness to negotiate is entirely dependent on the United States acting as Hamas wants—an outcome that looks increasingly likely. This means that the key actor in determining whether Hamas will come to the table and whether a ceasefire is possible is not Israel but the United States.

In other words, while the road to a lasting ceasefire in Gaza may run through Rafah, its first stop is in Washington.

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Leadership, and Social Connection in Modern War and co-author of *Understanding Urban Warfare*.

The views expressed in this article are the writers' own. They are not necessarily the views of the Department of Defense, the Department of the Army, Army University, or the U.S. Military Academy.

Israel Is Expanding Its Domestic Arms Production—and That's Good News for America Too

By Sean Durns

washingtonexaminer.com

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Reducing Jerusalem's dependence on Washington.

The United States is facing a munitions crisis. America's defense industrial base is a shadow of its former self, and conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine have fed growing concerns about a rapidly depleting stockpile. Fortunately, our ally Israel has a potential solution.

The risk is clear: Were a major war to break out with China, the U.S. might well run out of munitions within the first few weeks of combat operations. Wars in Europe and the Middle East have already put pressure on an already stressed defense industrial base. And policymakers have taken notice.

In January 2023, Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro warned that if the U.S. defense industry didn't boost production, arming both the U.S. and Ukraine would become "challenging." Indeed, the U.S. is in such dire need of munitions that it has dipped into stockpiles in South Korea and Israel, among other places, to help arm Ukraine.

Various factors have contributed to the munitions shortage: bureaucratic red tape, a decline in the number of prime contractors, and a budget and appropriations process that discourages upfront investments that are necessary to strengthen the defense industrial base. It is a problem that won't be fixed overnight.

But Israel has pointed to a temporary solution that can help.

The Israeli government intends to ramp up its domestic manufacturing of important armaments, including munitions. In so doing, Israel will gain greater self-reliance, and the U.S. will get some much-needed breathing room to focus on its own munitions needs.

In January 2024, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that the Jewish state is "preparing the defense industries to disconnect from dependency on the

rest of the world." Netanyahu noted the recent war with Hamas had resulted in surging defense spending and that the Israeli government "will have to invest in a multi-year plan to free Israel from dependence on external purchases." It would be, he acknowledged, a vast and costly undertaking.

Yaakov Lapin, an Israel-based military affairs correspondent, recently highlighted that "Israel has begun shifting toward greater domestic ammunition production." Israel's Ministry of Defense has already begun reaching out to local defense companies to boost production. Artillery shells, sophisticated guided air-to-ground munitions, and interceptors for Israel's vaunted Iron Dome are all slated to be built domestically.

Yet not everything can be produced on Israeli soil. Numerous weapons systems used by Israel, including aircraft, will continue to be manufactured in the U.S., giving Americans jobs. And revolutionary defense technology developed in Israel with U.S. assistance, such as the Iron Dome, is often shared with Americans.

Israel's decision to bring some production home will create jobs for Israelis. It will also make them less reliant on the U.S. The Jewish state faces a precarious security environment, virtually surrounded by Iranian-backed proxies that seek its destruction. By having key armaments on hand, Israel will be better prepared for future battles and future wars. It will also grant greater flexibility to Israeli decision-makers.

The U.S. stands to benefit too.

By having key allies step up and take on more of the defense burden, Washington will be able to focus on growing threats in the Indo-Pacific.

Mr. Durns is a senior research analyst for the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis.

Don't Ignore the Religious Roots of Hamas's Brutality

By Alvin Rosenfeld

tabletmag.com

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The atrocities weren't a byproduct of war but an end in themselves.

Hamas' assault on Israelis on Oct. 7 was not an act of war as we normally think of it but something far worse. We don't have an adequate term for what occurred on that day, so people use words like "terrorism," "barbarism," "atrocities," "depravity," "massacre," and so on. All are correct, and yet all fall short of capturing the annihilationist fury set loose at the Nova music festival and in the kibbutzim and small towns of southern Israel. The

people attacked in those places were not only to die, but to die in torment. In addition to the merciless torture, killings, slashings, burnings, beheadings, mutilations, dismemberments, and kidnappings, there were gang-rapes and other forms of sadistic sexual assault, including, according to some reports, the cutting off of women's breasts, nails driven into women's thighs and groins, bullets fired into their vaginas, and even intercourse with female corpses. Unimaginable? For most normal people, yes. But before going into Israel, the Hamas assassins were

instructed to “dirty them” and “whore them.” And that’s precisely what many of them faithfully did.

If it were possible to encapsulate all the evil of that day in a single image, it would be that of the violent seizure of a young Israeli woman, Naama Levy, 19, barefoot, beaten, and bloodied, her hands tied behind her back, the crotch of her sweatpants heavily soiled, possibly from being raped, dragged by her hair at gunpoint into a Hamas car, and driven off to Gaza to suffer an unspeakable fate among her captors there. Her assailants filmed every second of her ordeal; and as one watches the clips of her being taken away, one sees crowds nearby loudly shouting “Allahu Akbar”—“Allah is the greatest”—a victory cry that offers religious sanction to the malign treatment of Naama Levy and countless others seized, slaughtered, and abducted on that horrific day.

All wars cause human suffering, but the cruelties visited upon Israelis on Oct. 7 far surpass what normally happens when armies go to war. Hamas’ actions had a different aim: not conquest but the purposeful humiliation of Jews by people who detest them and were sworn to degrade and dehumanize them before murdering them. For those familiar with Jewish history, the mass violence enacted against Jews in Kishinev in 1903 came instantly to mind, as did the Farhoud in Iraq in 1941 and Chmielnicki’s savage decimation of Ukrainian Jewish communities in the mid-17th century. With memories of those earlier massacres newly revived, Oct. 7 instantly evoked the word “pogrom.” With cause. But how could such a catastrophe occur in today’s Israel? The country’s military has been hailed as one of the strongest in the world and was regarded as invincible. And yet on Oct. 7, it failed to protect its southern border and prevent the ruthless assault on Jews in the Gaza envelope. Responding to Hamas’ bloody deeds, one Israeli woman summed up the reactions of virtually every Jew in the country and millions of others abroad when she said, simply and incontrovertibly, “Every Israeli’s worst nightmares have come true.”

All wars cause human suffering, but the cruelties visited upon Israelis on Oct. 7 far surpass what normally happens when armies go to war.

Oct. 7, 2023 was the most destructive day of mass violence against Jews since the end of the Holocaust. The carnage carried out on that day, far from being a by-product of war, was a religiously sanctioned, orgiastic display of unrestrained Jew-hatred. One cannot begin to understand it if one ignores the Hamas Charter and other Islamist teachings that make Hamas the organization it is and inspires it to do what it does.

Hamas originates as a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is and always has been a jihadist organization, which sees the existence of the State of Israel as an intolerable intrusion into the Domain of Islam (Dar al-Islam) and is committed to removing Israel by whatever means necessary. The preamble to the Hamas Charter declares that “Israel exists and will continue to exist until

Islam obliterates it, just as it obliterated others before it.” The “Palestinian problem,” it affirms, “is a religious problem” and is not amenable to a negotiated political settlement. The only way to “raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine” is through “jihad,” a holy war that is a “duty for every Muslim wherever he may be.”

As a result of their success in invading Israel on Oct. 7 and killing and capturing so many Jews, Hamas has incited the passions of many in the broader Arab and Muslim worlds and, alarmingly, well beyond. In doing so, it has made emphatic the Islamist reading of the Arab-Israeli conflict as essentially a Muslim-Jewish conflict. Most people in the West view the problem as basically political and territorial in nature. That is true, but only in part. As represented by Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah, the Houthis in Yemen, and the Islamic Republic of Iran (the sponsor of all the others), it is also religious, and at its heart of hearts there resides an annihilationist fantasy of killing Jews and bringing an end to the Jewish state. Hamas and its allies are not looking for a two-state solution but a repeat of the Final Solution. Their brutally successful killing spree on Oct. 7 was an extravagant rehearsal for that larger goal, a genocidal one.

Where does that leave Israel? Right now, at war with Hamas in Gaza and in a simmering battle with Hezbollah in the north that could rapidly explode into a full-scale and even more fearsome war. What is at stake, as most Israelis understand it, is nothing less than the survival of the state itself. Hamas spokesmen have said as much. On Oct. 24, Gazi Hamad, speaking as a representative of Hamas to a Lebanese television station, declared that the Oct. 7 attack “is just the first time, and there will be a second, a third, a fourth ... until Israel is annihilated.” Iran, long sworn to finish off “the criminal Zionist entity,” has inscribed some of its newest ballistic missiles with the words “death to Israel” in bold Hebrew letters. The Houthis in Yemen, well-armed with powerful Iranian-supplied missiles, chant “death to America, death to Israel, and a curse upon the Jews.” Iran itself, as recent reports indicate, continues its progress toward building nuclear weapons. As far back as 2001, Hashemi Rafsanjani, then president of Iran, boasted that “the use of even one nuclear bomb inside Israel will destroy everything.”

What is new here are not the threats against Israel but the determination to carry them out and the capability of doing so. Hamas’ successful penetration of southern Israel and the extreme violence it displayed has no precedent in Israeli history. The country was traumatized on that day and remains traumatized, making Oct. 7 a date frozen right now on the national calendar. Most of the world has moved on, but to Israelis every day will remain Oct. 7 until all the hostages are returned home from Gaza, Hamas is militarily disarmed, and its aim of obliterating Israel is definitively nullified. Whether Israel can succeed in achieving these goals is an open question. What is clear is that Israelis today feel seriously let down by their national

and military leaders, less secure, and far more vulnerable than they did before Oct. 7.

Every Israeli's worst nightmares have come true.

Although the existential circumstances of Jews living outside of Israel are much different, on the emotional and psychological levels they, too, have been shaken by recent developments. The anti-Israel passions set loose in street demonstrations and on college campuses and social media have heightened already resurgent displays of open Jew-hatred and rattled a previously assumed sense of security. Academic scholars will continue to debate whether anti-Zionism and antisemitism are similar or separate phenomena, but to most others, the links between hatred of Israel and Jew-hatred are apparent. The reasons are clear: The widespread and unapologetic branding of Israel as an apartheid, genocidal, even Nazi state—defamatory accusations that were in wide circulation well before Oct. 7—are rapidly becoming normalized. The same is true for both verbal and physical hostility to Jews. As these impassioned animosities coalesce and go mainstream, Jews everywhere are experiencing an unease about their place in society that is new and unnerving for many of them.

Reactions vary: For reasons of self-protection, some feel it's best to be less visibly Jewish, set aside Jewish markers, and distance themselves from Israel. For reasons of pride and self-affirmation, others refuse to be cowed, step forward as strongly identified Jews, and publicly proclaim themselves in solidarity with Israel and other Jews. Oct. 7 has sharpened both responses, and what lies ahead remains to be seen, but the date's significance for how Jews see themselves and others see Jews is evident.

Also evident is the following: There will be no Jewish future worthy the name without the State of Israel. At present, something like 47% of world Jewry lives in Israel.

That's almost one out of every two Jews alive. Were Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, and their allies ever to succeed in liquidating Israel, the loss would be immeasurable and irrecoverable. Most Jews still alive elsewhere would be physically imperiled, psychologically traumatized, and spiritually enervated to the point of collapse. That might have been the Jewish condition after the Holocaust, were it not for Israel's founding only three years after the liberation of the death camps—an act of collective revival that demonstrated a level of national resilience and spiritual rebirth almost without parallel in history. But far from recognizing the Jewish people's reestablishment of national independence and political sovereignty in its ancient homeland in positive terms, some of Israel's neighbors have seen the existence of the Jewish state as an intolerable affront that needs to be reversed.

Hamas set out to reverse it as forcefully as possible on Oct. 7. Its murderous deeds on that day were meant to debase and kill Jews and rally others to collectively put an end to the Jewish state, a strategic objective that recalls some memorable words of the Hungarian Jewish writer and Holocaust survivor Imre Kertész: "The antisemite of our age no longer loathes Jews; he wants Auschwitz." Today's most passionate antisemites continue to loathe Jews and, for that very reason, want Auschwitz. If Israelis were not fully aware of those hateful passions before Oct. 7, they surely know them now. They also know that one Holocaust is one too many and are committed to doing whatever they must to make sure there will not be a repeat. They need and deserve all the support we can give them.

Mr. Rosenfeld is the director of the Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism and Irving M. Glazer Chair in Jewish Studies at Indiana University, Bloomington. He is the editor, most recently, of Resurgent Antisemitism: Global Perspectives.

Why an Israeli policy expert says talk of a two-state solution is dangerously premature

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

jta.org

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Not one to restrain Israel.

Whether it succeeds in its goal of destroying Hamas, or just deals it a devastating blow, it seems certain that following its war in Gaza, Israel will not accept the status quo ante.

What comes next, however, is impossible to predict. The Biden administration has been pushing for a two-state solution led by what the president has called a "revitalized" Palestinian Authority. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu remains fundamentally opposed to the idea, preferring to keep Gaza and the West Bank under Israeli control, with Palestinian population centers administered separately by local players unconnected to Hamas.

Meanwhile, Israel's far-right parties talk of the "voluntary migration of Gaza's residents" and returning Jewish settlers to the Gaza Strip, from which Israel withdrew in 2005.

With more than 100 Israelis still being held hostage and the war still raging, few in Israel are focused on what happens next. But some Israeli scholars and analysts are

looking beyond the day after. A few weeks ago I spoke with Nimrod Novick, a fellow at the left-leaning Israel Policy Forum, who believes that Israel needs to seize the initiative and work aggressively toward a two-state solution. If not, he predicts, his country will become a non-democratic state forever at war with the 2 million Palestinians in Gaza and 3 million in the West Bank.

For a different view, I recently spoke with Kobi Michael, a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) and an expert at the Misgav Institute for National Security and Zionist Strategy, two right-leaning think tanks in Israel. Michael accepts the logic of separation with the Palestinians, but feels that talking now about a Palestinian state is premature.

A former deputy director general and head of the Palestinian division in Israel's Ministry of Strategic Affairs, he said the Palestinian people are not yet ready to accept the idea of a nation state of the Jewish people. Nor does he think the Palestinian Authority under the leadership of its 88-year-old president, Mahmoud Abbas (to whom he

refers using Abbas' nom de guerre, Abu Mazen) has the will, capability or credibility to govern effectively in Gaza, let alone the West Bank.

"Nothing good can come out from the bilateral level between the Israelis and the Palestinians," he said.

Instead, Michael imagines an interim period of state-building, in which regional players like Saudi Arabia play a hand in rebuilding Gaza and creating a viable Palestinian leadership.

"The Palestinians should be part of this regional architecture," he told me, "assuming a reasonable Palestinian leadership that will be able to accept the right of the State of Israel to exist as the nation state of the Jewish people."

Our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Since the outbreak of the war the Biden administration has been advancing support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected this approach, saying it would be a "huge reward for terrorism." Do you think there is a possibility for two states, either in the long or short term?

There is a big difference between the Israeli approach to the two-state solution and the Palestinian approach. In Israeli eyes it means a nation state of the Jewish people, and Palestine is the nation state of the Palestinian people. This is not the Palestinian perspective, where Palestine is the nation state of the Palestinian people and Israel is the state of citizens without any religious, ethnic or national characteristics. This is the core problem of the conflict: the Palestinian refusal to recognize the right of the Jewish people for self-determination. They regard Judaism only as a religion. If there is no Jewish people, there is no right for self-determination.

You're saying that despite the Oslo accords, signed in 1993, in which the PLO "recognizes the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security," the Palestinians have not in fact recognized the legitimacy of the national rights of the Jewish people.

You have to see what is written in the curriculum of the Palestinian schools. And you have to listen to the things that are said by Palestinian officials and to the incitement in the Palestinian media, which is under the Palestinian Authority control.

Neither Abu Mazen nor any other Palestinian official has found time or opportunity even to condemn the attacks of Oct. 7. So the idea of a two-state solution is a very illusory idea, at least for the time being under the current circumstances. [Abbas said on Oct. 12, 2023 that "We reject the practices of killing civilians or abusing them on both sides," and on Oct. 15 that "the policies and actions of Hamas do not represent the Palestinian people."—Ed.]

Israeli policy expert

Kobi Michael is a senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv. (Misgav Institute)

You told CNN that Israel does not intend to remain in Gaza and to rule the population there. So if not a Palestinian state, what is the option for both Israel and the Palestinians?

A local technocratic administration will be built to govern the Gaza Strip. It will take time. There is a need for an interim period, where an international or regional trusteeship, or a combination of both, will have a mandate to control the territory and the population and to begin the reconstruction process of the Gaza Strip. And in parallel, they will train a local, practical administration that will be capable in controlling, independently, the territory and the population — control that will be transferred in a very gradual and responsible manner. That will take no less than five years. And the Palestinian Authority should go through a very significant reform process, bringing it to the status of a "Revitalized Palestinian Authority," to use President Biden's terminology. This will be conducted according to the regional architecture based on the normalization process between Israel and the Arab countries, mainly Saudi Arabia [which includes the Abraham Accords and signals from Saudi Arabia, outlined in 2023, of what it would seek in exchange for normalizing relations with Israel].

This imagines joint self-governance over the West Bank and Gaza?

The two entities, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, will be able to be reunited in a framework of a federation. Then, later on, maybe this federation will be part of a bigger confederation with Jordan, I don't know. But I do not believe that the Palestinian Authority is capable, under the current circumstances, to regain effective control over the Gaza Strip and the reconstruction process. I do not believe that any reunification between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank under the current circumstances will contribute something positive to either of the entities.

What about the Palestinian Authority makes it unfit at this moment to lead this process of reconstruction and unification?

They must go through a very significant process of change and reform. They have to build their institutions, they have to deal with corruption, the dysfunctionality caused by nepotism, they have to enforce the law, to build their economy, to build the civil society. For a functioning independent state, they're pretty far from that. They also suffer from a huge deficit of legitimacy among the Palestinian constituency. And they have to go through a very significant reform in their security apparatus because they are not able to curtail terror attacks.

And there must be personnel changes. The idea that Abu Mazen is the sole authority, the idea that the old guard of Fatah are in control of everything, must change.

There are other major changes that must be done in the Palestinian arena. The first one is a very significant change in the psychological infrastructure of the constituents, of society. Because we're talking about a poisoned psychological infrastructure that resulted from three decades of systemic indoctrination. The constant victimhood, the insistence on the right of return, which is the other side of the coin of their refusal to accept the right of the Jewish state to exist as a nation state of the Jewish people. Now we're talking about the fifth generation of Palestinians to be recognized as refugees, and this is the only population of refugees in the world that instead of decreasing is increasing. [UNRWA, the UN agency created to serve the displaced population, reported that 5.9 million Palestinians are currently registered as refugees. When the agency began operations in 1950, it counted about 750,000 Palestinian refugees.—Ed.]

And the other pillar of this indoctrination was resistance and terrorism. The Palestinian Authority supports terrorism, indoctrinates for terrorism, pays money to the families of terrorists. The Palestinian Authority glorifies terrorism.

So you mentioned this federation or confederation. How might that work? If not two states, what is a federation?

It is two states, because a federation is a state. But the idea for the region is that the district of Gaza and the district of the West Bank will not be connected geographically — at least under the current circumstances. The idea of federation is that each entity will be governed by a local government, and there will be a federal government that will be responsible for foreign policy and security and so on.

What's the role of both Israel and the United States, as its closest partner, in nurturing what you say could be a five-year process of transition?

The United States, the international community and the regional countries must clarify to the Palestinians that without the changes I described nothing will come out. And I think that if they try to impose a Palestinian state they will reach just the opposite results. A Palestinian state cannot be imposed on Israel. Israel has to enable the conditions for such a process, and the mandate of this international jurisdiction should be to enable this federation to make progress towards an independent state.

But the United States and the more significant European countries — mainly Britain, Germany, France — can play a significant role together with the Saudis, the Emirates, Jordan and Morocco. Such a coalition could be built even without the United Nations because the UN is not, I would say, a positive element in this regard. And we have to ensure that Qatar and Iran not be part of this traditional regional formation because these two countries are very problematic.

You've talked about the new regional architecture. What's in it for Saudi Arabia and the Sunni Arab world to be part of this process?

Once there is a regional architecture, that will be a counter-axis to the Iran axis. We can establish a security alliance and we will be able to enlarge in a very dramatic way economic cooperation, infrastructure cooperation, and new routes can be opened from India through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority and Israel regarding energy, water, agriculture, tourism, industrial zones and so on and so forth. The labor markets in the Gulf countries could be opened to educated Palestinians who will be able to go to work there and to send money to their families, money that will enable the Palestinian entity to be developed. It will open new opportunities and will enable both sides, the Israelis and the Palestinians, to have a broader basis of flexibility.

Nothing good can come out from the bilateral level between the Israelis and the Palestinians. But when we're talking about regional architecture, we're talking about the multilateral level, with new players, new agendas, new interests and new resources coming in.

What will be demanded of Israel under a confederation or federation? Do you imagine there will be territorial compromise and retreating on some of the settlements?

Yes, of course. There will be territorial compromises but under very strict security conditions that will enable the Israel to defend itself by itself and prevent the possibility that anything like Oct. 7 will occur once again.

So just so I don't mischaracterize your position: Your disagreement with the administration calling for a Palestinian state is really about the timeframe and conditions imposed on the Palestinians, not around the idea of separation.

I think separation is a must. Any sort of engagement with the Palestinians is a recipe for a very chaotic and dangerous situation. I prefer to have very high fences, but with the time and under the regional architecture, maybe the need for such defenses will become less great.

And you're saying that pressing hard for a Palestinian state during or in the immediate aftermath of the war is both premature and needs a lot of these other factors in place for anyone to even think about it.

Yes, of course. How can you talk about a Palestinian state when 82% of the entire Palestinian society supports the massacre of Oct. 7? [A December survey from a respected Palestinian polling institute found that 72 percent of respondents in Gaza and the West Bank — including 85 percent in the latter — believed the Hamas attack was “correct” given its outcome up to that point.—Ed.]

I know it's hard to talk about optimism at a time like this while the fighting is going on. Do you find yourself optimistic?

I'm very optimistic. I think at the end of the day Israel will become much stronger after this war. And I think that the vast majority of Israeli society is much more sober with regard to the Palestinians and the reality that we live in. I think that the Israeli consensus is much broader now. The

resilience is very impressive, and I think that the Jewish people and the State of Israel will be able to repair itself

and prosper and to live in security for the next eight decades.

War Has Changed, but Territory Still Matters

By Meir Finkel

A painful loss for Israel's enemies.

Until the 1980s, the occupation of territory and transfer of the war into enemy territory for the purpose of removing the threat of invasion into Israel were central components in the IDF's perception of warfare. But combat against guerrilla warfare in the security zone in Lebanon, and against terror and guerrilla warfare in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, caused a shift in this perception. The holding of conquered territory that contained an enemy population prepared to conduct guerrilla warfare was perceived as a liability rather than an advantage.

The transition of enemy behavior to a pattern of stand-off bombardment of Israeli territory, and the development of an Israeli response of counter-fire and active defense implemented in limited "rounds" in Gaza, almost completely removed the occupation of territory from Israeli military and public discourse. This diminished the IDF's focus on maintaining the military capability meant to implement occupation: the ground maneuver.

This trend can be seen in IDF strategic documents over the years. In the IDF Operations Concept document of Chief of Staff Dan Halutz (2006), for example, an emphasis was placed on developing the capability of operational-level fire against armored fighting vehicles as an alternative to the strategy of occupying territory when fighting enemy states. Occupation was perceived as an unacceptable burden because of the guerrilla warfare to which occupying IDF forces would be subjected.

The prolonged influence of the IDF's experience in Lebanon is evident here. In the IDF Strategic Concept document of 2015, written almost a decade after the Second Lebanon War, a return to ground maneuver capability was stressed, with two components: the "focused maneuver" against key political and authoritative centers and the "distributed maneuver" against dispersed enemy artillery units and military infrastructures. However, occupying territory to be used as a diplomatic bargaining chip was not defined as an objective.

The Victory Concept authored by Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi had three pillars: long-range fire strikes, ground maneuver, and defense. With the ground maneuver emphasizing "neutralizing capabilities" – in other words, maneuvering for the purposes of destroying specific enemy assets: artillery, combatants, and military infrastructure, but not for the purpose of occupying territory.

Israel's operations in Gaza clearly illustrate the IDF's preference for stand-off fire and defense. The offensive maneuver was activated during Operation Protective Edge

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only to neutralize the threat of the attack tunnels. Ever since the Second Lebanon War, the IDF has immediately withdrawn from every territory it conquered, forfeiting any achievement provided by the occupation of territory. In all documents and operations, occupation was meant to neutralize artillery fire or tunnels but was not viewed as an objective unto itself.

This is a narrow view, as occupying territory serves multiple purposes on all levels of warfare. On the tactical level, it can be used to capture advantageous positions from the enemy. On the operational level, it can disrupt enemy formations. On the strategic level, the enemy's capital can be occupied for the purpose of regime change. On the diplomatic level, occupied territory can be a bargaining chip for negotiation.

There are three reasons why it is a serious mistake to devalue the achievement of occupying territory.

The first reason is at the diplomatic and strategic level: It's the land, stupid. Losing territory is a painful loss for Israel's enemies. Hamas in Gaza wants to "return" to Jaffa, Ashdod, Ashkelon (Majdal), and indeed the rest of the State of Israel, either through direct occupation, by exhausting Israel until it collapses, or by exerting enough political pressure to force the "right of return". Hezbollah is fighting for the Galilee foothills, and the Rashidun force wanted to conquer the Galilee. Territory remains as important to Israel's enemies as it ever was. Therefore, Israel's occupation and holding of enemy territory constitutes a serious loss for those enemies.

Holding territory is also a bargaining chip in diplomatic negotiations. This was the case with Egypt and Syria in the agreements on the separation of forces at the end of the Yom Kippur War, and later in the framework of the peace agreement with Egypt, which insisted on the complete return of Sinai.

This will always apply when Israel occupies territory. Hamas's claim that it will return the captives as long as the IDF withdraws from Gaza's population centers proves that occupied territory is once again a diplomatic bargaining chip.

The second reason is at the operational level: The occupation of territory gives the IDF a clear asymmetrical advantage. This exploits enemy vulnerabilities and maximizes the IDF's strengths. Only the IDF can occupy territory, clear it of the enemy, defend it against counterattack, use it to reduce the threat of infiltration, and hold it as a bargaining chip for diplomatic negotiations. None of Israel's enemies can occupy territory and hold it for more than a few hours.

This asymmetry is especially important when it comes to firepower. Though the IDF is reluctant to admit this, a sort of symmetry has emerged between Israel and Hezbollah. Hezbollah has built a vast arsenal containing statistical rockets, short-range rockets, precision missiles, 120mm mortars, and drone-delivered explosives. The IDF has a highly sophisticated air force with precise intelligence-guided targeting capabilities on a world-class scale. The problem is that a symmetry has emerged. Both sides are capable of inflicting significant damage on the other, and victory in this operational space will be by points.

It has been argued for many years that occupying territory is not worth the price it will cost in terms of heavy casualties and exposure of IDF troops to guerrilla warfare. The “Iron Swords” war demonstrates that both these risks are limited in scope. It appears that with adjustments, territorial occupation can be restored during a future war in Lebanon. This can be done with relatively low attrition ratios (harder to achieve in Lebanon than in densely built Gaza) and with the evacuation of the local population from the battlefield area (easier to achieve in Lebanon than in Gaza).

Territory captured in a future war must be cleared of military infrastructure. Residents should not be allowed to return until Israel’s desired diplomatic arrangement is achieved, even if this means the IDF maintains a security zone for months or years in the enemy’s territory. I stress that preventing the return of the population is not for the purpose of punishing them. Rather, it is for the same reason that they were evacuated before the war: to minimize the chances of their being harmed. Territory captured during ground combat will remain largely destroyed and will lack any basic electricity or water infrastructure, and it will be filled with ruins and explosive remnants. Fighting is also likely to continue to occur in the area, even if only sporadically.

The third reason is that warfare changes constantly, both globally and regionally. Unlike advanced science, which progresses forward, the phenomenon of warfare sometimes returns to old motivations and patterns. When Israel was perceived as the stronger side against Hamas, the limitations placed upon it were severe. The Western world expected Israel to defend its citizens solely with active defense systems and counter-fire, without resorting to ground action. In terms of internal legitimacy, the cost of occupying territory was believed to outweigh the benefits when each round of conflict ended with relatively minor damage.

But on October 7, 2023, both Israel’s and the world’s understanding of the conflict with Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran changed completely. In response to Hamas’s brutal, genocidal massacre and mass hostage-taking, the State of Israel declared a comprehensive war. After a long period of “wars of choice” in which Israel was the stronger side, the Jewish State has returned to an era of “no-choice wars”. In a comprehensive multi-front war, which will include fighting against Hezbollah and Iran and possibly other elements, Israel will have to utilize all means at its disposal to defend itself. This includes occupying and holding territory.

Occupying territory in Lebanon – for the fifth time

Without attempting to broadly speculate on how the next war in Lebanon will unfold, we will consider a situation in which Israel has decided to enter Lebanon on the ground. In such a scenario, a defensive zone would be established and held as a security belt to protect the northern border settlements from surface-to-surface fire and ground attack until a diplomatic arrangement is reached. The conquered territory would remain “sterile”, with neither an enemy presence nor returned local residents, in order to protect those residents from the fighting that is likely to continue in the area as the enemy attempts to reconquer the territory or attack IDF forces.

Israel has a great deal of experience in Lebanon. During Operation Hiram in October 1948, the IDF captured 14 villages in the eastern sector. Israel withdrew half a year later as part of an agreement with the Lebanese government, but in Operation Litani in 1978, the villages were recaptured. In the First Lebanon War in 1982, they were captured a third time; in the Second Lebanon War in 2006, they were captured a fourth time. If we were to capture them a fifth time, as well as other areas along the border for a fourth time, we will need to ensure as much as possible that that will be the last time they pose a threat to the border settlements.

The way to do this, given the history I have described, is to gain internal and international legitimacy by turning these rural areas into a security zone under Israeli control. They should remain under Israeli security control until an agreement is reached that ensures that if Israel withdraws, the areas will no longer pose a threat.

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