

Israel Is Winning Battles, but Iran May Be Winning the War

By Reuel Marc Gerecht and Ray Takeyh

thefp.com

April 2, 2024

Balaam's prophecy.

Is there an ending to the Gaza war and all its complementary confrontations in which Iran and its proxies lose and Israel and the United States win?

On the surface, things look good for Israel. The Israeli Defense Forces appear to be demolishing Hamas—the most important Sunni member of Iran's mostly Shiite axis of resistance. Crushing Hamas in Gaza would be a significant accomplishment even if, as one retired Israeli general put it, the group survives and the victory gives the Jewish state only “three to eight years” of peace.

But “mowing the lawn”—Israel's periodic pummeling of its enemies in Lebanon, Syria, Gaza, and the West Bank—doesn't eliminate the Jewish state's foes. (Indeed, the IDF's reliance on that tactic may have contributed to the hubris that made Israel's vast intelligence failure of October 7 possible.) Still, Israel's aggressive counteroffensive in Gaza has introduced more concern in Tehran and Beirut about a full-scale war between Israel and Hezbollah and the possibility that Jerusalem just might finally strike Iran's nuclear program.

Moreover, Israel's determination to continue the war, despite the Biden administration's increasingly aggressive pressure campaign to stop it, makes Israeli deterrence in the Middle East more credible even though the devastation in Gaza is a public-relations disaster. The recent unintentional death of seven World Central Kitchen aid workers highlights how war in the Strip, where Hamas makes it excruciatingly difficult to separate combatants from civilians and even the best targeting intelligence perishes rapidly, will always play against Israel. Urban warfare produces ghastly mistakes.

But these short-term tactical victories don't fundamentally alter the Islamic Republic's advantages. And those advantages, alas, are many.

Israel Getting Bugged Down in Gaza: Advantage Iran

Separating tactics from strategy is nearly impossible in the Middle East. For Israelis, who live in a violent neighborhood with shifting alliances and no regional allies, accumulating tactical victories is a strategy. In other words, the country hasn't really developed a grand strategy toward its primary foe: Iran. Instead, it has hoped that accumulating tactical victories, combined with the still-enduring expectation that America will finally intervene militarily against the Islamic Republic, would save the day before the clerical regime went nuclear.

Under the leadership of Ali Khamenei, the Islamic Republic has pursued a grand strategy to achieve regional

dominance. It revolves around the development of aggressive Islamist proxies, a wide array of ever-improving missiles, and nuclear weapons.

For Iran, the Gaza war is a bonanza of possibilities: if tens of thousands of IDF soldiers get tied down in the Strip, since no alternative to occupation may work, that's a very good deal for Tehran. Armed resistance may continue for years, especially if the IDF fails to destroy Hamas's weapons stockpiles and tunnels. The fact that Israel just had to purge al-Shifa Hospital of Hamas terrorists after it had cleared the hospital earlier in the war is not a good sign of Israel's long-term plan.

There are further benefits to an ongoing war in the Strip from Iran's perspective. One of them is that the lasting Palestinian trauma in Gaza could roil the West Bank and oblige a large IDF presence there. This could greatly complicate an Israeli invasion of Lebanon, which is essential if Jerusalem intends to resecure its northern borderlands. Right now almost 100,000 Israelis from northern towns and communities have been forced to flee indefinitely thanks to Hezbollah rocket attacks.

The Death of Israeli-Sunni Normalization: Advantage Iran

Despite the still-fervent hopes of many in Jerusalem, Congress, and the White House, Israeli-Saudi normalization is probably dead. The Abraham Accords, which many Israelis and Americans thought beckoned Zion's acceptance among Muslims, don't look so epochal at the moment. In a single day—October 7—Sunni and Shiite Islamists unraveled an emerging Sunni-Israeli alliance. It turns out Hamas and Tehran had a far better grasp of “the Arab street” than did their enemies.

The Israeli approach to the Middle East has always been top-down—an understandable disposition. But even before the Arab Spring traumatized rulers throughout the region, Arab military juntas and monarchs were always wary of openly straying too far from popular opinion on sensitive subjects, and Israel has always been a live wire. But the Gaza war has forced a significant reset, a recalibration of risk versus gain. For the United Arab Emirates, a small concatenation of sheikdoms that happily trade with Zionists and Iranians, the profit from Israeli commerce is meaningful; for Saudi Arabia, a large country inextricably attached to its Islamic identity, the benefits of an Israeli relationship are less clear.

The Resilience of the Axis of Resistance: Advantage Iran

Iran's “axis of resistance” has proven impressively resilient. The last devastating Israeli intrusion into

Lebanon in 2006 may have reduced the Hezbollah leader, Hassan Nasrallah, to a mea culpa, but it did minimal long-term damage to the organization, which in the interregnum has seized control of Lebanon, in part by reducing the country to an ungovernable mess. Ditto Israel's assassination campaign against senior Iranian officials in the Levant. Taking out Iran's Revolutionary Guard general, Mohammad Reza Zahedi, and several of his associates in the Iranian embassy compound in Damascus is appropriate punishment; it's likely only to dent the clerical regime's strategy in the region.

Today, Hezbollah's missile stockpiles are larger and more lethal than in 2006. Its tunnel system and conventional capacity against the Israeli army are more extensive. Its stockpile of short- and medium-range missiles (some estimate 150,000 projectiles) may already be too much for Israel to handle. If a full-scale war broke out, Hezbollah might be able to pincushion Tel Aviv before the Israeli Air Force could suppress the launch sites. Add on bigger, longer-range missiles in Syria—the transport of which will become easier if a reelected Donald Trump removes U.S. forces along a major Syrian-Iraqi thoroughfare—and Israel's defenses could be overwhelmed.

In other words: a conventionally armed Iran and its proxies may already be deterring a nuclear-armed Israel. And Tehran's promises of another “forever war,” if the United States were to be so audacious as to attack the Islamic Republic, certainly has had a deterring effect in war-weary Washington.

Weakness in Washington: Advantage Iran

Do Joe Biden and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin signal fearsome intent when they fire missiles at Iranian proxies while telling Tehran the United States has no desire to escalate? When Secretary of State Tony Blinken says to Iran, “we would like to see them tell the Houthis to stop,” do you think Iran feels the heat?

The questions answer themselves.

Amazingly, some senior Biden administration officials give the impression that the supreme leader's supposed fatwa banning nukes just might be real—despite the history of Ali Khamenei driving the country's once-clandestine nuclear-weapons project. Nothing about the Islamic Republic's “peaceful” nuclear research since 2002, when the weapons program was first publicly revealed, makes sense unless one assumes the supreme leader's original objective remains.

According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, the regime currently has enough 60 percent enriched uranium for three nuclear weapons, which could rapidly be spun up to 90 percent, the ideal bomb-grade. The stockpile of 20 percent uranium would allow for several more. As it stands now, according to the Institute for Science and International Security, which closely monitors the Iranian nuclear program, Tehran could

produce bomb-grade uranium for one weapon in seven days; one month would give enough for six bombs; five months would allow for 12 weapons.

Washington went through a similar experience with North Korea. There, U.S. officials wanted to believe that there was a chance that Pyongyang could be bought off short of a nuclear test, and if it couldn't, then nuclearization was better than risking war on the peninsula.

Barring some monumental miscalculation by Tehran, Biden surely will be no more bold against the Islamic Republic than George W. Bush was against North Korea. The president's recent decision to release \$10 billion held in escrow for Iraq's electricity payments to Iran, combined with the not-so-secret indirect talks between U.S. and Iranian officials in Oman, strongly suggest that the White House is trying hard to appease Tehran. Washington wants the clerical regime to halt its proxy attacks on U.S. forces and its atomic advance short of a fissile test—at least before the November election.

So What Can Be Done?

Americans and Israelis have for decades shied away from militarily punishing the mullahs for their malevolence. This hesitancy—an unwillingness to escalate—has fed an Islamist appetite for violence. But diplomacy and its euphemisms, sanctions, and whack-a-mole retaliatory strikes have run their course. And what Jerusalem is doing right now—beating back Iran's proxies—will become a lot dicier once Tehran goes nuclear. Jerusalem might be obliged to accept as permanent a low-level, bloody duel with Iranian proxies. An insoluble Palestinian problem will gnaw at Israel from the West Bank, Gaza, and possibly from within Israel itself. Khamenei's vision for destroying the “Zionist colonial settler-state”—an approach that will surely survive his death—is to erode Israeli happiness and foreign investment, not a catastrophic nuclear confrontation. Iranian nuclear weapons, the ultimate check on Israel and the United States, are a means to that end.

We are way past time pretending that any other avenue than military action against Iran has a chance of checking an Islamist nuclear-threshold state that is close to dominating the Middle East. The Biden administration's preferred path—encouraging regime change in Israel, pining for a two-state solution, and importuning the Saudi crown prince to recognize Israel (while granting more sanctions relief to Iran and quietly sending emissaries to Oman)—is guaranteed to make a bad situation worse. As everyone in the Middle East knows, and as the Israelis momentarily forgot before October 7, hard power is the only coin of the realm.

Mr. Gerecht, a former Iranian-targets officer in the CIA, is a resident scholar at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. Mr. Takeyh is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

What the Demographics of Israel's Fallen Soldiers Reveal about the Country

By Rafi DeMogge

mosaicmagazine.com

April 8, 2024

Many on the Israeli right claim that the soldiers who fight and die for the country no longer belong to the old secular elite but to a rising national-religious one.

Are they correct?

When I began writing this essay in late February, 236 Israeli soldiers had died in the war on Hamas (and the data to be analyzed below are based on this number). Depressingly, by the time I have finished the number is even more: 260 and counting. Who these soldiers are, and what they represent—the identity of those who give their lives for the nation—has been a subject of heated dispute since the war started.

What is the dispute about? On one hand, large segments of Israeli society hold deep resentment against haredi Jews, who, like Israeli Arabs, are exempt from army service and therefore don't have to risk their or their children's lives in war. This resentment is especially strongly felt by secular Jews, most of whom fall on the center-left of the Israeli political spectrum.

Many on the Israeli right, on the other hand, have argued for years now much the opposite: that the people at the forefront of defending the state, and those who make the ultimate sacrifice for it, mostly belong to demographics associated with the political right. The seculars who tend to be the most bitter about haredi exemptions might not be draft dodgers, this argument goes, but they still tend to avoid the most dangerous combat roles, preferring technological and intelligence units that usually don't end up on the front lines. To take one example, in a recent episode of the conservative intellectual Gadi Taub's popular podcast Shomer Saf ("Gatekeeper"), it was noted that while during the Yom Kippur War kibbutzniks were around a fifth of fallen soldiers, today the secular elite they represented is no longer at the forefront of defending the Zionist project.

Taub's guest, Shay Klar, explained further that in his view this change signaled a wider changing of the guard in Israel. To belong to the country's elite, he argued, means being at the forefront of its major sectors: the economy, academia, the technology sector, the media, and the art world. But in Israel, he added, there is a further institution with a central role in forming the country's ruling ethos: the army. Historically, Israel's ruling elite was overrepresented not only in the economy and in academia, but also in the IDF. This has gradually changed, Klar claims, as that old elite is now withdrawing from service in combat roles. This means that the present situation is laden with tension. Elite status cannot be permanently decoupled from a form of public service as visible and central as service in the IDF's combat units.

Therefore, Klar argued, the old secular elite will soon be replaced by a more vigorous Religious Zionist elite, which is eager to risk its life for the nation and is losing soldiers well beyond its share in the general population.

Others on the right have likewise claimed that among Israel's fallen soldiers the share who belong to the so-called "periphery" demographics—meaning, roughly speaking, Jews from religious, Mizrahi, and poorer backgrounds, which tend to vote for the right these days—is also higher than that of the secular population.

How much of these narratives and arguments are true, and how much of them are folklore? In mid-February, the Channel 13 television network published some detailed data on the demographics of the soldiers who have died in the fighting since October 7 (not counting those who were killed in the massacre itself), which means we no longer have to rely on mere guesswork. What these data show is that the Israeli right's narrative is at least partially correct, but also requires important corrections and qualifications.

The Channel 13 report defines 29 percent of fallen soldiers as religious and 65 percent as secular. (It seems clear that by "secular," the report means "not strictly religious," a definition that includes both fully secular and loosely traditionalist soldiers.) Religious Zionists make up about 9 percent of Israel's total population, which means, if the 29-percent figure is correct, that they are slightly more than threefold overrepresented among Israel's fallen soldiers. Perhaps surprisingly, the non-religious group also appears to be somewhat overrepresented, by about 35 percent, since it makes up less than half of Israel's population, but, going by the Channel 13 report, 65 percent of its recent combat deaths. This should seem puzzling only for a moment. Once we remind ourselves that around 35 percent of Israel's population and 40 percent of its conscription-age men are conscription-exempt Arabs and haredi Jews, it becomes clear how both religious and non-religious Jews can be overrepresented among the fallen. (It's important to note that the Channel 13 data don't give us a further breakdown of what it means by "secular" or "non-religious" Jews; we can't gauge from them the relative balance of secular and loosely traditional Jews within that 65-percent figure.)

We get a similar picture from the soldiers' educational background, which gives another way of discerning religious identity. Forty-four percent of fallen soldiers studied in the state-religious system, and 55 percent in the state system. (Secular and traditional parents typically send their children to the state system, while religious ones send them to the state-religious system. The same core curriculum is taught in both, but in the state-religious system it's modified in certain respects to the needs of observant Jews, and there is much more emphasis on Jewish religious studies.) Since 14 percent of the total population went through the state-religious system, they are again around threefold (by 214 percent) overrepresented among the fallen. As above, the non-religious group is overrepresented as well: graduates of the secular state system, about 43 percent of the total

population, are overrepresented by 28 percent. Just as above, the overrepresentation of both groups is made possible by the near-complete absence of fallen soldiers who studied in either the Arab or the haredi school systems.

The educational background data reveal a number of further interesting details. The share of state-religious graduates among the fallen is 44 percent, which is about 1.5 times the share of religious Jews among the whole population. This much is hardly surprising and is to be expected in light of the widely estimated 30–40-percent lifelong attrition rate from the Religious Zionist sector. (Meaning, around a third of children who grew up in Religious Zionist households become secular or traditional as adults). The more interesting detail in the school data is that it shows that at least 16 percent of fallen soldiers are yotsim bi-sh'elah, formerly religious Jews who abandoned the religious way of life. (I write “at least” because this calculation assumes that all religious Jews among the fallen were educated in the state-religious system. If some of them are ba'alei t'shuvah, Jews who started in the secular world and then became more religious, then the share of yotsim is even higher.)

Since the share of ex-religious Jews in Israel's adult population is around 5 percent, ex-religious Jews appear to have the same overrepresentation among Israel's fallen soldiers that currently religious Jews do. And this gives indirect support to a frequently voiced conviction that is difficult to test by empirical means: that formerly religious Jews are different in important ways from non-religious Jews who didn't grow up Religious Zionists. According to this notion, there is something about the Religious Zionist mentality that stays with a person even after he takes off his kippah. The data about fallen soldiers confirms this idea. It also, somewhat strangely, means that the state-religious system is more reliable at producing combat soldiers than producing religious Zionists.

The same trend is apparent when we look at where the fallen soldiers lived. Settlers, of whom Religious Zionists form a major chunk, are 5.2 percent of Israel's population but 16 percent of its fallen soldiers, which gives again a roughly threefold overrepresentation. However, this figure masks an even higher overrepresentation of non-haredi settlers among the fallen, since 37 percent of all settlers are haredi Jews. This means that compared to their share in the general population, non-haredi settlers are nearly fivefold overrepresented among fallen soldiers. (It's important to note that not all non-haredi settlers are Religious Zionists; a significant minority are secular or traditional, and the 16 percent presumably includes some of them.)

So far, virtually everything I've written confirms the right's narrative. Religious Zionists, settlers, and graduates of the state-religious system are indeed heavily overrepresented among fallen soldiers, though one must consider that non-religious Jews and graduates of the state system are also moderately overrepresented.

There is, however, a further detail that fits the right's narrative less well. There is another group that is strongly overrepresented among fallen soldiers: kibbutzniks and moshavniks. Today, they make up 5.5 percent of all Israelis but 15 percent of fallen soldiers—a nearly threefold overrepresentation. Is this representation materially different from how it was the state's earlier years, as the narrative we're examining goes?

We know that in the Yom Kippur War, 18 percent of fallen soldiers were kibbutzniks, but only 2 percent of Israel's population, a ninefold overrepresentation. We cannot compare this to the data from the present war with exact precision because we don't know how many of the soldiers who fell since the start of the war were kibbutzniks and how many moshavniks. But we can say the following with a fairly high level of confidence: although kibbutzniks aren't as overrepresented among fallen soldiers as they were half a century ago, they are still heavily overrepresented to about the same degree as Religious Zionists and settlers.

One disclaimer to that estimate. Above I noted that not all non-haredi settlers are Religious Zionists. Here, I should similarly add that not all kibbutzniks and moshavniks are secular. Nonetheless, these types of communities are predominantly secular and heavily left-leaning.

What lessons can we draw from these data? The Israeli right's dominant narrative consists of three claims. The first claim is that the “knitted kippahs”—the Religious Zionists—are now at the forefront of the Zionist project and give their lives for the country way out of proportion to their share in the general population. This is demonstrably true. The Channel 13 report is loud and clear on this score, and while many Israelis on the left don't want to hear it, there is no point in disputing such an obvious result. Moreover, not only are Religious Zionists themselves overrepresented, so are people from several ecosystems that are primarily built around and by them: settlers and graduates of the state-religious system.

The right's second much-repeated claim is that the old secular elite is no longer pulling its weight in the army, and if their children enlist at all, they flee from combat units, preferring technological and intelligence units. The Channel 13 poll doesn't confirm this claim. The poll doesn't distinguish between secular and traditional Jews, but the two groups together are moderately overrepresented among fallen soldiers, just not as much as Religious Zionists. Barring evidence to the contrary, it's reasonable to assume that secular Jews do pull their weight in the fighting, and while they aren't flocking to combat units, they aren't fleeing from them either. Moreover, a small but historically important demographic that largely (though not entirely) consists of secular Jews, namely kibbutzniks and moshavniks, is still significantly overrepresented at a rate comparable to that of Religious Zionists.

The right's third popular talking point is that Jews

from the periphery do most of the fighting for Israel, while Jews from the center are quietly withdrawing from their duty to defend the country. One problem here is the vagueness of the words “periphery” and “center,” which have no well-defined meaning, only geographic, socioeconomic, and ethnic connotations. And the Channel 13 survey poll doesn’t give enough information to determine the breakdown of fallen soldiers between the two. However, we have some reason to suspect that at least in one important sense, soldiers from the “center,” defined here as those from a higher socioeconomic background, are well represented among the fallen.

First, we have some independent data on the correlation between the socioeconomic status of various precincts and their party preferences. The bottom of the socioeconomic scale—people living in localities ranked from 1 to 4 on a scale of 10—is primarily made up of haredi Jews and Arabs. Next, non-haredi coalition voters—those who voted for the current conservative ruling government—are on average of somewhat lower socioeconomic status than non-Arab opposition voters. Religious Zionists are at 5.21 and Likudniks are at 6.05, while Yisrael Beytenu voters are at 5.90 and Meretz ones at 7.67. Since Haredim and Arabs are almost completely absent from the army, we can therefore assume that most fallen soldiers belong to the middle and upper-middle classes.

Second, residents of kibbutzim and moshavim tend to rank highly on the socioeconomic scale. Since soldiers hailing from such places are highly overrepresented among

the fallen, it follows that a portion of the center—of the middle to upper-middle class—is too.

I began this accounting with the often-cited view that public service, and the willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice for the country, are part of what it means to belong to the elite—at least in the Israeli context, where the army continues to be the most trusted public institution and an essential part of the social fabric. What are we to think, then, of predictions of elite replacement? According to the story told by the aforementioned numbers, Religious Zionists indeed excel at a crucial aspect of public service: risking their life for the Jewish state. Religious Zionists also have a respectable presence in academia, in the internal security services (between 2011 and 2013, both the head of Shin Bet and Israel’s national security advisor were religious Zionists); and as many readers remember, in 2021–2022 Israel also had its first Religious Zionist prime minister in Naftali Bennett. Still, Religious Zionists are only a minority of fallen soldiers, and are about as overrepresented as kibbutzniks and moshavniks, a traditionally left-leaning demographic. And while the world of the kibbutzim may have waned in its significance since the Yom Kippur War, its old elite continues to be important and to lead by example. In other words, while Religious Zionists lack the demographic weight to replace the old secular elite, they are in a strong position to join it, and in some respects have already done so.

Rafi DeMogge is the pseudonym of an Israel-based author and researcher who writes on political demography.

Germany Stands by Israel

By Jonathan Schanzer

Israel looks increasingly isolated on the world stage. But one country has stood unwaveringly by Israel’s side: Germany. It stands out as a model of support. Not because it gives Israel a free pass on every controversy. But because it has not buckled on its fundamental pro-Israel positions, even when international pressure builds.

First, let’s acknowledge that Germany’s strong pro-Israel positions are rooted in the country’s need to right historic wrongs. As Chancellor Olaf Scholz stated, “German history and our responsibility arising from the Holocaust make it our duty to stand up for the existence and security of the State of Israel.”

But Germany’s guilt over the Holocaust does not in any way call into question the principled positions that continue to stand in stark contrast to the bizarre behavior of some of Israel’s other Western allies, six months into a war that Israel did not start.

When the war began in the wake of the October 7 attack, Scholtz stated unequivocally, “Israel has our full solidarity and the right under international law to defend itself against terror.” When international anti-Zionism reared its ugly head, Scholz declared, “Hatred against Israel contradicts all the values to which our country is

commentary.org

April 8, 2024

committed. When false allegations of war crimes began to emerge, Scholz asserted, “Israel is a democratic state guided by humanitarian principles; I have no doubt and we can be certain the army will respect rules of international law.”

Germany has rejected calls for unilateral ceasefires, even when they come from other European states. As Scholz explained, “I don’t think the calls for an immediate ceasefire or long pause – which would amount to the same thing—are right. That would mean ultimately that Israel leaves Hamas the possibility of recovering and obtaining new missiles.” Even as it became clear that Gaza was experiencing shortages in aid, a German government spokesperson stated, “It does not make sense to us to demand a cease-fire when we must assume that one side will continue to launch its rocket attacks from Gaza.”

When Canada and other states vowed to curtail arms deliveries to Israel, the German government increased the volume of licenses issued for arms exports to Israel tenfold. This included a January report that Germany approved the supply of 10,000 tank shells for operations in Gaza.

Germany has taken strong positions against the UN

Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which has been exposed countless times now as a partner to Hamas terrorist activity in the Gaza Strip. German politicians from across the political spectrum called for a cut in UNRWA funding, with one member of the Social Democrats vowing, “there cannot be a status quo ante with UNRWA.” That cut came in late January. Admittedly, Germany did contribute €45 million to UNRWA in March for “work in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and occupied West Bank,” but funds for Gaza remained suspended.

After the South Africans hauled Israel before the International Court of Justice, alleging that Israel was carrying out genocide in Gaza, Germany stepped in. On January 12, the Germans announced they would “intervene as a third party” and strongly rejected the charge of genocide—noting that Germany had experience in such matters, and that it knew better than most how to differentiate between a defensive war and genocide.

None of this is to say that Germany has been one-sided. The country continues to talk about the need for a two-state solution and it has expressed concerns about the humanitarian situation in Gaza, providing financial assistance to support responsible players in this space. Germany’s foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, spoke privately with Netanyahu (she did not chide him publicly) to challenge some of his statements opposing a two-state solution. Germany has even stated that it supports the notion of a Palestinian state.

As reports of a humanitarian crisis in Gaza emerged, Scholz called upon Israel to “do everything possible to better protect Gazan civilians,” but he also was quick to noted, “war can end immediately if Hamas ends its inhumane activities,” including the release of Israeli hostages. The German government supports an Israeli

operation in the town of Rafah, but has warned against “forced displacement.” Scholtz tweeted last month, “As a friend of Israel, I expressed my concerns to Prime Minister @netanyahu,” calling upon Israel to allow for more aide to enter Gaza.

As the humanitarian challenges mount in Gaza, the statements of concern issued by the German government have taken on an increasingly urgent tone. The World Central Kitchen Debacle elicited a response from Germany, too. And Germany quietly welcomed the recent UN resolution calling for a ceasefire through the end of Ramadan. Remarkably, even as it struck this balance, Germany must now defend itself from charges that it is “facilitating the commission of genocide” in Gaza. This insane charge has been brought by the government of Nicaragua.

But even as the mess compounds, there is no ugly war of words between Germany and Israel. There are no leaks from the Chancellor’s office implying that a full rupture between Jerusalem and Berlin is possible. There are no threats of cutting off support to Israel amidst the country’s multi-front battle with Iranian proxies spanning from Gaza to Lebanon to Yemen.

Contrast this with the shrill tone and language coming out of the White House right now. Biden’s repeated and public broadsides against Israel have heaped additional tension and challenges upon an already tense and challenging situation.

Germany will not likely ever be Israel’s most important strategic military partner. That’s America’s traditional role. But it may be time for Germany to step in and remind Biden that, election season notwithstanding, there is a moral obligation to stand with Israel. In an era of resurgent anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, few other countries will.

Does Biden have a Jewish voter problem?

By Jacob Kornbluh

Some prominent Democrats are worried that President Biden’s increasingly harsh rhetoric over Israel’s military campaign in Gaza is going to repel Jewish voters, a small but key constituency in a tight presidential race.

After his stalwart support for Israel after Oct. 7, Biden in recent weeks has more explicitly and strongly criticized the war and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. On Thursday he called for a ceasefire, and in a phone call to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu indicated that American aid to Israel could be conditioned on the steps it takes to protect Palestinians in Gaza. And last week the U.S. abstained over a U.N. Security Council ceasefire vote instead of vetoing it.

The change in tone follows a series of successful campaigns to encourage Democratic primary voters frustrated with Biden’s failure to pressure Israel for a ceasefire to cast “uncommitted” or blank ballots. The president’s mounting criticism of Israel may shore up his

forward.com

April 3, 2024

support among Arab and Muslim voters. But could it cut into his support among Jews?

“I believe that this administration, because of its political season, is taking American Jews for granted or has written us off,” said Abe Foxman, the former head of the Anti-Defamation League who in 2020 broke his tradition of not endorsing political candidates to back Biden. “If they’re worried that the Arabs in Michigan will vote with their feet, they need to worry that Jews can also vote with their feet.”

And former Sen. Joe Lieberman, in a statement published after his death last week and co-authored by Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz, warned that “pro-Israel voters have alternatives to simply staying home.” Dershowitz shared the statement — a response to the Security Council abstention — in *The Wall Street Journal* on Thursday and wrote that Lieberman approved its wording.

If history is a guide, however, Jews will flock to Biden in November. They have long favored Democrats, and voted for Biden over former President Trump by a 3-to-1 margin in 2020.

Halie Soifer, chief executive of the Jewish Democratic Council of America, said Jewish voters don't view Israel as a higher priority than abortion rights and the fight to preserve American democracy, which many believe that Trump — the presumed GOP presidential nominee — threatens.

"This is not a typical election between two equal candidates," she said. "I think that Jewish voters will rally behind Biden in the same or even greater numbers than they have in the past."

Still, many Jewish Americans are watching Biden closely over his dealings with Israel, which is defiant in the face of global condemnation over the war in Gaza.

A recent survey commissioned for the Democratic Majority for Israel indicated that 44% of American Jews were more likely to vote for Biden because of his staunch public support of the Jewish state.

And a recent online survey of 800 American Jews conducted by the Jewish People Policy Institute showed that 69% of those intending to vote for Biden think Israel should enter Rafah to eliminate Hamas, despite Biden's warning against it.

Biden bends on Gaza

After Oct. 7, when Hamas attacked Southern Israel and killed 1,200 people and took 240 hostages, supporters of Israel praised Biden's outrage on Israel's behalf, and his promise to stand behind the Jewish state.

But the war's quickly mounting casualties outraged Muslim and Arab voters and many progressive Democrats who diminished Biden's wins in recent Democratic presidential primaries.

The "Listen to Michigan" campaign garnered more than 300,000 voters in key swing states, including Michigan, Minnesota and Georgia.

Biden has felt the pressure.

He acknowledged the protest vote in a recent interview with MSNBC. His campaign has reached out to critics of Israel's response to Oct. 7. And last week the U.S. abstention allowed the Security Council's first ceasefire resolution on the Gaza war to pass.

It was followed by the president's endorsement of Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's speech calling for new Israeli elections, which drew strong condemnation from Israel's advocates and prominent Jewish organizations. Then, on Tuesday, Biden stepped up his critique of Israel, expressing indignation over the deaths of seven humanitarian workers from World Central Kitchen caused by an Israeli airstrike.

"This conflict has been one of the worst in recent memory in terms of how many aid workers have been killed," Biden said.

The president's growing public anger at Israel

"strengthens our enemies because they see our most important ally distancing themselves every single day," Foxman said. "If you start worrying about the Arab community not voting in Michigan," Foxman said, "you should start worrying about Jews not voting in several states, which could make a difference."

Jewish voters are estimated between 1% to 3% of the electorate in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Arizona, Georgia, Nevada and Wisconsin — states that Biden won in 2020 by less than 3%.

Jeremy Ben-Ami, president of J Street, called it Republican "wishful thinking" that Jewish Americans will switch parties because of Israel. "The president, standing against some actions and policies of the Netanyahu government even as he supports Israel and its people, only further aligns him with the Jewish electorate," said Ben-Ami.

A federal official with strong ties to the White House, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the president's strategy, rejected the notion that Biden crafts his Gaza policy to please either Jews or Muslims.

The issue resonates with a broader range of voters, including evangelicals, he said. "There isn't a clear path to what the best politics are."

Trump eyes Michigan

While Biden may struggle to please both stalwart supporters of Israel and stalwart opponents of the war, his Republican opponent seems to have avoided the problem.

Though Trump lost the Jewish vote in 2020, Jews who traditionally vote Republican and have supported him in the past see him as an unwavering friend of Israel.

That gives Trump an opportunity to capitalize on Biden's vulnerabilities in Michigan. "You win Michigan, you win the election," Trump said during a campaign stop in Grand Rapids on Tuesday.

Since Oct. 7, Trump has said little on the war in Gaza, raising speculation that he is trying to outflank Biden from the left to win over Arab and Muslim voters in Michigan. In a recent interview with the Israel Hayom newspaper, Trump said Israel should "finish the job" in Gaza quickly for the sake of peace. And he criticized the war's handling as a public relations disaster, without addressing the issue of hostages.

An October survey of 500 Arab American voters showed that while support for Trump has increased by 5% since the 2020 presidential election, support for Biden has plummeted from 59% in 2020 to 17%.

John Zogby, who conducted the poll for the Arab American Institute, said Trump's practical approach to Gaza could attract some Arab voters. But more importantly, he added, the number of Arab voters Biden has already lost is "enough to do damage" to his prospects.

Fred Zeidman, a Houston-based Republican donor who advised former GOP presidential candidate Nikki Haley on Israel, said Republican Jews ought to be "more

vocal” in their support of Trump to dissuade him from catering to the critics of Israel.

“We’ve got to jack it up a little bit,” Zeidman said. “I think if he’s seeing no support from the Jewish

community, it is not giving him near to a reason that he’s got to support Israel.”

Mr. Kornblub is the Forward’s senior political reporter.

President Biden’s Awful Silence about American Hostages

By Nachama Soloveichik

commentary.org

April 08, 2024

Joe Biden knows something about accusations of dual loyalty. In 2016, then-Vice President Biden delivered a speech at Dublin Castle heralding the “progress” Catholic Americans have made since John F. Kennedy made the trek to Ireland 50 years ago and was “attacked for being too close to a pope.”

Now, as five American-Israelis languish in Hamas captivity, Biden is turning his back on that progress.

This Sunday marked a grim milestone—six months since Hamas terrorists took hundreds of Israelis hostage on Oct. 7, including six American citizens—hopefully five still living—who remain in Gaza. But Americans can’t be blamed for forgetting. Joe Biden is more likely to call on Israel to accept an immediate ceasefire than to call on Hamas and Qatar to release our own citizens. We hear more about humanitarian aid for Gazans than about American citizens being killed and tortured in Gaza.

At a time when the president’s party insists we “Say his name!” or “Say her name!” Biden has not mentioned dual citizens Edan Alexander, Omer Neutra, Hersh Goldberg-Polin, Sagui Dekel-Chen, or Keith Siegel. The president released a statement about Itay Chen on March 12, five months after the attack. This was only after his murder was announced, which supports Dara Horn’s poignant observation that dead Jews are more beloved than living ones.

The White House talks regularly about Evan Gershkovich (70-plus hits on the White House website), the Jewish Wall Street Journal reporter being held on false charges in Russia, as it did about Brittney Griner (more than 200 hits), a basketball player imprisoned by Russia until she was released in a controversial prisoner swap.

The six Jews whom Hamas kidnapped are as American as Gershkovich and Griner are, which raises the question: Why does the White House ignore these Jewish U.S. citizens?

It seems that Alexander, Neutra, Goldberg-Polin, Dekel-Chen, Siegel, and Chen are only half-American. One of the oldest anti-Semitic tropes in history is that Jews are only in business for themselves and their homeland. They just pass through countries without any sense of loyalty. They weren’t European enough in the Middle Ages, not German enough to the Nazis, and not American enough for the Biden administration to “say their names” and move heaven and earth to secure their release.

In today’s society, we like to pretend these disgusting sentiments are a relic of a less enlightened time. Stop pretending. The accusation of dual loyalty is a go-to attack on both the left and the right.

“They forgot what country they represent,” Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.) wrote on Jan. 6, 2019 of those opposing the anti-Semitic boycott-Israel movement. Less than two months later, Tlaib’s sister-in-hate Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.) said about AIPAC, “I want to talk about the political influence in this country that says it is OK for people to push for allegiance to a foreign country.”

In late December, Tucker Carlson said that Jewish podcaster and Daily Wire co-founder Ben Shapiro doesn’t care enough about the United States and is too “focused on a conflict in a foreign country as their own country becomes dangerously unstable.”

Carlson’s code words are not subtle. “Conflict in a foreign country” is Israel’s war against Hamas, which Washington has designated a terrorist organization for 27 years. In Carlson’s perverted mind, a proud Jewish American can’t simultaneously support defeating Hamas and worry about the immigration crisis on the southern U.S. border.

This canard is a tale as old as time. Century after century, it rears its ugly head. In 1894, Jewish French military captain Alfred Dreyfus was accused of not being sufficiently loyal to France and was falsely charged and convicted with giving French military secrets to Germany. Nation of Islam leader and chief Jew-hater Louis Farrakhan questioned Joe Lieberman’s loyalty to America in 2000 when Al Gore selected him as his vice president pick.

If Alexander, Neutra, Goldberg-Polin, Dekel-Chen, Siegel, and Chen were American citizens only, Joe Biden would leave no stone unturned to bring them home for the simple reason that America would have demanded nothing less.

It has been six months since Oct. 7. Six months since Israelis and Americans were raped, tortured, burned alive, and taken hostage by Hamas. Six months since our fellow citizens were last heard from.

Joe Biden isn’t a president for some Americans and not for others. He is the president for Alexander, Neutra, Goldberg-Polin, Dekel-Chen, Siegel, and Chen, too. It’s time he started acting like it.

Israel was the number one cyber attack target in 2023

By John Jeffay

israel21c.org

According to a new report, Israel was targeted by more hackers and hacktivists than any other country

April 10, 2024

in 2023.

The massacre of 1,200 people by Hamas, and the

subsequent war in Gaza, prompted a huge spike in attacks by hacktivists – hackers with an activist agenda – according to a Global Threat Report published on March 25 by cybersecurity firm Radware.

In 2023 Israel suffered 1,480 Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) cyberattacks, in which hackers try to overwhelm a computer system with a flood of internet traffic. As such, it was the victim of almost one in eight of all DDoS attacks globally during the year. India was second with 1,242, followed by the US, Ukraine, Poland and Germany.

The biggest single DDoS attack was on 7 October, the day of Hamas's attack on Israel, when hacktivists targeted websites and mobile apps which were supposed to alert civilians to rocket attacks.

New tactics first introduced in 2022, after Russia invaded Ukraine, spread widely during 2023, the report says.

"Israel was the country most targeted by hacktivists in 2023," said Ron Meyran, cyber intelligence manager at Radware. "In the first half of 2023, Israel was the target of pro-Islamic hacktivists. These groups, drawing motivation from pro-Russian hacktivists' activity in 2022, targeted Israel."

In the second half of 2023, Israel became the target of pro-Palestinian hacktivists following the conflict between Israel and Hamas, said Meyran.

Hactivist-driven DDoS activity hit record levels in October of 2023, as an immediate response to events in Israel and Gaza; globally the number of DDoS attacks, and the level of their sophistication, is growing at an alarming rate.

The pro-Russian NoName057(16) was the biggest single bad actor, responsible for over a quarter of all DDoS attacks last year, according to the report, followed by Mysterious Team, Anonymous Sudan, Team Insane Pakistan and the Cyber Army of Russia.

Radware's report noted that hackers whose first motivation was ideological are now realizing there's big money to be made, and are selling their services to the highest bidders.

"Throughout 2023, we observed a significant growth in DDoS-for-hire services on Telegram," said the cybersecurity firm. "A good portion of these new services are Russian-speaking."

Government websites were the single biggest target, with 2,694 claimed DDoS attacks, according to Radware's analysis of Telegram traffic.

Were There Arab Jews, and Did They Speak Judeo-Arabic?

By Philologos

mosaicmagazine.com

April 10, 2024

Jews in Arab lands spoke much the same Arabic as their neighbors. But the notion that they thought of themselves as Arab Jews, pushed now in some circles, is a historical absurdity.

"Judeo-Arabic" is said to be the language spoken by the large number of Jews who inhabited the Arabic-speaking lands of the Middle East before leaving them after the establishment of Israel. But although the term is widely used, did such a distinct language actually exist? Not according to Ella Shohat, Professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at New York University, as argued in a recent essay "Judeo-Arabic and the Separationist Thesis," published by her in the newly founded Palestine/Israel Review. [Essay can be accessed here: <https://scholarlypublishingcollective.org/psup/pir/article/doi/10.5325/pir.1.1.0002/385739/Judeo-Arabic-and-the-Separationist-Thesis>]

Shohat's argument is straightforward. While the speech of Jews in Arab lands, she contends, may have had certain peculiarities not shared with Muslim and Christian speakers of Arabic, these were minor features that caused neither Jews nor non-Jews to feel that Jews spoke anything but the ordinary colloquial Arabic of their region; moreover, these features were regional themselves, so that what was true of the speech of a Jew from Baghdad was not necessarily true of the speech of a Jew from Cairo, and the "Judeo-Arabic" of a Moroccan Jew was different from the "Judeo-Arabic" of a Yemenite Jew. The idea, writes Shohat, that there was ever a "Judeo-Arabic" common to

all Arabic-speaking Jews and setting them apart from Arabic-speaking non-Jews is a myth propagated, for ideological reasons, by contemporary Jewish linguists.

This myth, Shohat maintains, was associated with Zionism and with Israel's conflict with the Arab world, which made it seek to "de-Arabize" Arabic-speaking Jews by insisting on "the inherent distinctiveness of the Jewish [form of Arabic] from the Arabic language [spoken by non-Jews] and its assumed connectivity to other Jewish languages in other places." On the one hand, that is, placing the speech of Jews in Arab lands on a par with truly distinct Jewish languages like Judeo-German (Yiddish) or Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) served to create the false impression that they lived in a state of social separation from their non-Jewish environment, as did Yiddish speakers in Eastern Europe and Ladino speakers in Turkey and the Balkans; on the other hand, it conveyed that they had nothing linguistically in common with their new neighbors in Israel, the Arabic-speaking Palestinians. This "separationist thesis," as Shohat calls it, was thus intended to drive a wedge, historical and present-day, between Jews and Arabs in the name of Jewish uniqueness.

Needless to say, Shohat, who grew up in Israel, to which her family came from Iraq, and who calls herself an "Arab Jew," has her own ideological ax to grind—and she grinds it far more tendentiously than did such proponents of "the separationist thesis" attacked by her as the eminent Hebrew University linguists Joshua Blau (1919–2020) and Haim Blanc (1930–1984), both given prominence in her

article. Still, one must not be blinded by her anti-Zionism and lack of linguistic training into dismissing her argument out of hand, because it is not entirely baseless.

This is so because, although the question of what distinguishes a language, what a dialect, and what a mere regional or ethnic variety of standard speech is a vexed one that indeed often involves political and ideological issues, the issue of mutual intelligibility is invariably at its core. Where such intelligibility exists to a high degree, separate languages do not—and Shohat is correct in saying that speakers of the ordinary Arabic of the various regions of North Africa and the Middle East, and speakers of these regions' "Judeo-Arabic" variants, never had any trouble understanding one another.

To this statement, it is true, two caveats need to be added. The first is that, prior to modern times, Arabic-speaking Jews wrote Arabic in Hebrew characters that non-Jews could not read and were unable themselves, for the most part, to read Arabic characters; the written Arabic of each group, therefore, was a closed book to the other. The second caveat is that, though its grammar, syntax, and general vocabulary were no different from those of ordinary Arabic, "Judeo-Arabic," like Jewish speech nearly everywhere, made extensive use of Hebrew and Hebrew-derived words that non-Jews were unfamiliar with.

Neither of these points, though, carries critical weight. Writing Arabic in the Hebrew alphabet does not mean that its writers were writing a different language any more than Serbian and Croatian are different languages because Serbs write Serbo-Croatian in Cyrillic characters and Croats in Latin ones. And while a Moroccan Jew who said "Simossilinu" (from Hebrew Hashem yatsilenu), "God help us," to a non-Jew in speaking of some predicament would have met with a blank stare, this is precisely why he would have been unlikely to say it, just as a New York Jew would not generally say to a non-Jewish colleague, "Do I have tsuris!"

Moreover, even when Jewish speakers pronounced Arabic words or used Arabic grammatical forms differently from their neighbors, such pronunciations and usages were rarely uniquely Jewish. If the Jews of Baghdad, for instance, said kultu, "I said," rather than gelt, as did their Muslim counterparts, this was because kultu was the standard form, still widely used in the Arab world, that they had preserved as one of the city's oldest communities, whereas non-standard gelt was brought to Baghdad by rural and Bedouin migrants. And conversely, if the Jews of Cairo said leysh, "why," in place of Cairene ley, this was because many of them could trace their roots to Syria and Lebanon, where leysh was the accepted usage. When Baghdadis heard kultu from Jews, or Cairenes heard leysh, they were not hearing anything felt by them to be foreign to Arabic.

Such examples help demonstrate why Shohat is right. But they also demonstrate why she is wrong, because the very fact that Jews wrote Arabic in Hebrew characters, or clung to usages that were not the rule among the non-Jews in whose midst they lived, indicates that, even if "Judeo-Arabic" was not very different from non-Jewish Arabic, it was the product of a tightly knit and inwardly oriented community that did separate itself from its surroundings. Linguistically speaking, such things could only have happened in an environment in which Jews socialized mostly or entirely with themselves and had relatively little social contact with non-Jews. While Jews and non-Jews in the Arabic-speaking world might have enjoyed good neighborly relations, done business together, and been on superficially friendly terms, clear boundaries existed between them. An Arabic-speaking Jew was always a Jew, just as an Arabic-speaking Arab was always an Arab, and this distinction was never lost on anyone.

This is why the term "Arab Jew," with its implication that the Jews of Arab lands traditionally thought of themselves as Arabs in much the same way, say, that the Jews of America think of themselves as Americans, is a historical absurdity. On the contrary: in the traditional Arab world, a Jew could not be an Arab and an Arab could not be a Jew; the two categories were mutually exclusive. It was only in the 20th century, with the rise of an ideology of secular Arabism that sought to fit all Arabic speakers, irrespective of religion, under a single nationalist umbrella that the term "Arab Jew" came into being—and then, too, it was largely restricted to left-wing intellectuals in urban centers like Cairo or Baghdad who were out of tune with popular sentiment. Apart from them, it would be hard to find Jews even in 20th-century Arab lands who spoke of being "Arab Jews."

Blau and his disciples may indeed have gone too far in their insistence on a distinct "Judeo-Arabic" language. They were justified, however, in stressing that the peculiarities of Jewish speech in Arab lands, however relatively few, testified to a powerful sense of Jewish identity that drew a clear line between Jews and non-Jews. As Blau wrote in a 1968 paper titled "Judeo-Arabic in Its Linguistic Setting":

True, the cultural symbiosis . . . of Jews and Arabs was very close, unexcelled in some respects until our own day. Nevertheless, it was the symbiosis of two separate cultures, which remained separate despite their basic similarity and mutual contact. One must always keep in mind this basic difference between medieval [and later] Arabic-speaking Jews and modern Western Jewry living in the post-Emancipation era.

This is something that Ella Shohat has failed to do. *Philologos*, is a renowned Jewish-language columnist.