

# THE TAB

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ISRAEL & THE MIDDLE EAST

# The War Against the Jews

Some thoughts on the first pogrom of the 21st century

BY DAVID BLUMENTHAL

When we were in the exile, Jews in the exile, knew that we were not safe. Christians could complain to the Christian authorities and Jews would be drained of their wealth and then imprisoned or expelled. At times, it suited the Christian rulers to allow their Christian subjects to “riot,” that is, to enter Jewish homes and to rob, rape, and kill Jews at will, with no punishment by the rulers. There are heart-rending scenes depicted in Jewish poetry and prose—of women raped in the presence of their children and husbands; of children torn apart alive; of slit throats of children and parents in the presence of each other, of whole communities enclosed in synagogues and then burned alive. It didn't happen every day, or even every year. But it happened every once in a while. The word was “pogrom” and it meant a riot by Christians, the purpose of which was to kill Jews, in the cruelest ways, with the quiet sanction of the state.

To be sure, living in a society that preached that Jews were Christ-killers, demons, and sorcerers, the source of the plagues that killed large percentages of the population, and so on, ensured that Jews would be a target. Christian

education and preaching prepared the masses for the murder of the Jews. Jews in Christendom knew they were not safe.

Jews in Muslim lands were not much better off. There are searing narratives and poems that describe what it was like living in a society that forced Jews to cross the street when they encountered a Muslim; that did not allow public celebration of Jewish holidays; that made Jews pay a poll tax and get beaten publicly when they did; that invented the idea of special Jewish garb to single out Jews; that allowed Muslims to seize Jewish orphans and raise them as Muslims; that punished Jews for assaulting Muslims but not Muslims for assaulting Jews; and more. And then, there were the “riots” in which the masses were allowed, even encouraged, to roam through the Jewish community, raping, killing, torturing, and humiliating the Jews of all ages and genders.

The riots didn't happen every day, or even every year. But they happened every once in a while, and became part of Jewish reality. The word was “*sin'ut*,” Jew hatred, and it meant the long-term humiliation of Jews, mixed with the sporadic violent murder of Jews. To be sure, living in a Muslim society that preached that Jews were deniers, apes

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BY DAVID P. GOLDMAN



and pigs, dishonest, greedy, and sources of illness, ensured that Jews would be a target. Muslim education and preaching prepared the masses for the murder of the Jews. Jews in Islamic lands knew they were not safe.

Then, came the Enlightenment with the idea that humans are alike. “Liberty, equality, and fraternity.” “All men are created equal.” It wasn’t true. Women were excluded. Blacks were excluded. So were Jews. But, it was a dream which, very slowly, was extended until the declaration of human rights was understood to be universal.

European and American Jews were glad to live in the Enlightenment. There were still remnants of the old regime and they were called “antisemitic,” but we, Jews, believed them to be remnants of medieval Christendom that would fade away in the Enlightenment. The problem was that antisemitism had very deep roots in western culture and religion and, in their enthusiasm for the Enlightenment, the Jews of Europe forgot those roots. In time, the forces of deep Jew hatred reared their heads, and secular modernity also turned against the Jews. Jews were hated because they were Jews, again: greedy for world power, the source of the loss of the old traditional values, vermin, an inferior race, modern Antichrists. That resulted in the Holocaust, an almost-successful, systematic, mechanized, state-sponsored effort to annihilate all the Jews in Europe. The education of the populace by these forces, especially in the Nazi and communist states, prepared the masses for the murder of the Jews. Jews in the modern world learned that they were not safe.

The Enlightenment never came to the lands of Islam—not for the Jews, not for women, and not for others. Modern technology came, but not the Enlightenment. Rather, modern Islam borrowed the “antisemitism” of the Christian modern world, added it to Islamic antisemitism, and began to educate Muslims to murder Jews in the modern spirit and way.

The Jews responded to Christian, secular, and Muslim Jew hatred by creating their own state. It was to be a place where Jews could live without pogroms and *sin’ut*, where Jews could breathe freely. At first, Jews moved to the Holy Land and settled there with their own self-government. Then, they established their own state with the purpose of making it into a place where they could live without fear of pogroms and *sin’ut*. They had to fight for it. Many died, but it was worth it. They were free to live, to work, even to quarrel with one another. There were occasional incursions of Muslims and wars with them, but the Muslims were fought off. We paid a price, but we thought we were safe—even to have mass protests against

our own government. We knew that the Muslims hated us, but we held that at a distance and, when their hatred of us, welled up, we responded. A stalemate, but a livable one.

The “Hamas pogrom” changed all that. The invaders were of two sorts: untrained invaders who came across the border on motorcycles, bicycles, and even on foot. Their job was to kill, or take as hostages, as many people as they could, and then retreat into Gaza. They did this well. The other sort were trained special forces who were heavily armed. Their job was to invade communities and military bases, kill and seize hostages and equipment, and then move farther into Israel. Some of them stole Israeli cars, police and army uniforms from the dead, weapons, ID cards, etc. If needed, they had contacts in the local Palestinian community who will hide them. Some of these terrorists are still on the loose, which is why all apartment doors have to be locked and one never opens a door to anyone.

Suddenly, here were the Muslim masses overrunning Jewish villages and murdering Jews in their sleep, tearing babies apart, raping women, seizing the elderly, dragging our soldiers out of tanks and abusing them, burning whole families in their homes, and then putting up videos of all this, bragging to the world of what they had done. And the Islamic world saw this as a victory, and celebrated it. The old Christian and antisemitic secular worlds were quick to join in, celebrating the slaughter of Jews and blaming Israel for it all.

True, the Enlightenment world did rally, at least in words. Even minute segments of the Islamic world that understood the Enlightenment condemned the *sin’ut*. But, it was too late. We, Jews, learned from the Hamas pogrom that even in the land that we thought was more or less safe, we have been subject to a pogrom. We learned that even in the State of Israel, we are not safe. We also know, deep down inside, that it could happen again. We will strike back this time, but the reality of the resurgence of Jew-hatred even in the Jewish state is now upon us.

It is actually worse than that. The success of the Hamas pogrom has

reinforced Jew haters everywhere. Their hand has been strengthened by the Hamas pogrom. What will happen when the Jew haters in the U.S., Britain, France, South America, Germany, Poland, Russia, and elsewhere realize their power?

*Sin'ut* is a worldwide phenomenon with worldwide communication and funding. Many of the non-Muslims are still in the shadows, but they won't stay there long. Word of Hamas' victory will spread, as the blood libel that began in England during the Crusades spread, igniting Jew hatred everywhere. The right-wing Jew haters, the left-wing Jew haters, and the Christian Jew haters will join the Muslim Jew haters. Modern media will make this possible. After the Hamas pogrom, Jews are no longer safe anywhere. My European daughter-in-law says: "This feels like Brussels." We have reports from Texas that groups of Palestinians are turning up at gun ranges, learning how to shoot, and then buying guns. There are times when I feel that I am in a nightmare, one of those that makes you wake up trembling but, in the end, you know it isn't true. This, however, is no nightmare. It is our reality.

Therefore, a few words of advice: First, know that it is OK to be angry. It is OK to be outraged. Westerners have a tendency to be stiff-upper-lipped. Don't be that Westerner. If you run across a university president or a religious or political leader who is not outraged enough, call them out on it. Don't be shy. Second, know that it is OK to cry. Some things require tears. A person who does not cry is not quite human. Third, do pray even if it is not your usual custom and even if you don't believe, or are not sure of what you believe. Prayer, that is, turning to a Presence that is beyond us, is natural. Just say what comes from your heart. It doesn't hurt, really.

Yesterday, my son Philippe went to see an older colleague who is one of the academic experts on Hamas. He has had a stroke and can no longer go out. I know him too and have read his book. He lives in Tel Aviv. Normally, I would have gone along, but no one needs an old man with a suprapubic catheter tagging along and

I did not want to leave my wife alone. So, I did not go. Then, Philippe went to see an old woman, a famous European businesswoman whose family fled here after Kristallnacht (1938). She, too, lives in Tel Aviv. It turns out that her Thai helper lost two people in the south: one who was killed and the other who is one of the known Thai hostages.

Then, Philippe went to two military funerals in the local cemetery. The first one was delayed because the coffin had been sent to the wrong place. So everyone had to wait, including the group for the second funeral. In Israel, bodies are buried in shrouds. If a coffin is used, it means the body has been severely mutilated. Both funerals were with coffins. Normally, at a military funeral, the commanding officer speaks. In these funerals, one commanding officer had been killed and the other is on the front line.

In one funeral, the deceased was a 23-year-old girl. In the other, the deceased was a 19-year-old girl who had just finished her training as an observer (these are the young women who watch the electronic cameras and pass on any dangerous information they gather). The Hamas terrorists carefully shot out the cameras, bombed the communications tower, and attacked the observation tower, raping, abusing, and killing these girls. She was one of those killed, from a Yemenite family of the community of my daughter-in-law Nili's parents.

Philippe remarked that you could feel the anger in the crowd of hundreds gathered for these funerals. Yes, they are angry, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Israeli commentators reflect this anger, promising a long war that will "eliminate" Hamas in Gaza—not Gazans or Muslims or Arabs, but Hamas. Upon objective reflection, such a goal seems hardly possible. In the long run, it would be useless because others will rise and take their place. Still, the Jewish anger is there. The more we read, the more we, too, feel that anger.

Many years ago, when I was about to write the concluding chapters of *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest*, I fell physically sick for several days. I'm beginning to feel like that now. There are a lot of Hamas documents that have been recovered showing that killing

civilians was the major goal and taking hostages next, plus a guide for how to take hostages. One article reports a document on how to torture hostages. American senators were forced to go to shelters because of rockets and a session of the Israeli parliament was suspended for 40 minutes for the same reason. Pro-Hamas demonstrations are multiplying all over the world. Antisemitic incidents are also multiplying all over the world. The Times of Israel and the Jerusalem Post are dedicating space to photos and write-ups of known hostages and victims.

We went to the mourners' services again this morning. The boy was 28 years old. He was in charge of the outgoing shift at the Sderot police station. He sent home two men early and, as the next shift arrived, he saw the attackers arriving. He warned the new shift to run away because they did not have the necessary heavy arms to fight, only pistols. He then engaged the enemy to cover their retreat.

One woman still in the station fled to the roof. She was shot in the hand. So, she smeared the blood on her face and played dead. She survived. Another policeman hid in a shaft for seven hours until help arrived. Our young policeman and about a dozen others were killed.

From the porch of Philippe's apartment, Ursula can hear the afternoon service from the parking lot next door. It is very moving.

Everyone agrees that this was a pogrom, a successful mass-killing of Jews, the worst since the Holocaust. The last tally shows: 1,300 Jews killed, 3,300 Jews injured, many of them seriously, and over 200 Jews and others taken as hostages. The Israelis have retaliated, killing uncounted numbers of Hamas and Palestinians, and reducing large parts of Gaza to rubble.

Now, the real war has begun. It is a second war—a war of words, blackmail, and standing in the world. It is the midgame battle in a larger chess game.

Israel, with the backing of many Jews and others worldwide, wants to "eliminate" Hamas. This cannot actually be done because there are too many Hamas members and way too many Hamas

believers, and because this would require a ground invasion that would cost many more Jewish lives. There are also the hostages to take into consideration, including those of Israel's closest ally, the United States. Nonetheless, after the Holocaust and "Never Again," the Jewish state, representing dead and living Jews, must make the price of killing Jews with the cruelty that only Jew hatred can evoke as high as possible. The world of Jew haters must know that any such action will evoke a very, very serious response in kind. Jew haters must learn that we will fight back, that we will punish severely such action against us, no matter what the price.

The Jew-hating world wants to recuperate as much as possible and to go on to plan the next step in the war against the Jews. They have two pieces to bargain with: the hostages and the devastation of what they present as innocent civilians whom the West, but not Islam, regard as precious. The center of this movement is Iran. It is the leader of the anti-Western and anti-Jewish world. Iran's leadership of this jihad is at stake. To win this midgame battle is to lose a few Palestinian pieces but to be able to advance to the next move toward an ultimate win. The rest of the Islamic world knows this well and is watching very, very carefully. So are the Jew haters in the West, on both the left and the right.

America has reason to be a loyal ally of the only democracy in the Middle East. This would restore America as the leader of the Western world and the Western values of human rights, especially after decades of defeats in the Middle East. The return to this position of power is politically crucial for America's leadership in the South China Sea, in the Middle East, and in Europe. Japan, Korea, Australia, Ukraine, NATO, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and others are watching very carefully.

So what comes next?

Israel can occupy the Gaza Strip. The Americans, who have long experience with the futility of such occupations, argue (correctly, I think) that such an occupation will not work. Israel could invade the Gaza Strip, destroy as much as possible of the Hamas personnel and

**"Jewish anger is there. The more we read, the more we, too, feel that anger."**

infrastructure, and then withdraw. But, the world of bleeding hearts and the world of Islamic solidarity will pour in enough money to rebuild that human and military infrastructure as well as the ideology of Jew hatred that motivates it.

The Americans could intimidate Iran and its proxies into refraining from intervening. That would result in a "check," but not a "checkmate." The Iranian Jew haters will then do what any chess player would do. They will strategically withdraw, and the dead Gazans will be declared martyrs who go to paradise while the surviving Gazans will be declared heroes who will live to fight again. The Iranians will then declare victory in a serious and successful preliminary battle. Make no mistake: This would indeed be a victory for Iran, and a major loss for the Americans and the Jews.

In the process, much fuss will be made over "freeing the hostages." The price demanded for freeing the innocent people who were unjustly seized will be high. There will be no justice; only bargaining over what the losers should pay for the lives of the women, children, grandmothers, strangers working in the Holy Land, and soldiers to "free" them, or their dead bodies. Not all of them will be released. Hamas is already claiming

that they do not know where all of them are. Whatever is agreed upon, no matter how unjust, the payment is a victory for the Jew haters. It is blackmail paid.

The reinforcement of the jihad against the Jews (and also against the Christians though Christians don't take this seriously, yet) will have the secondary effect of being the death of the "two-state solution." Why, after a great victory against the Jews, should the forces of Islamic antisemitism agree to a Palestinian state that would imply the recognition of the legitimacy of the despised Jewish state? The West will continue to "push" for the two-state solution but the success of the Hamas pogrom has torpedoed that forever. For that matter, what Jew would ever trust a Jew hater to agree to "peace"?

For the same reasons, the success of the jihad against the Jews probably means the end to "normalization." Who leads the Islamic world? If Iran wins the midgame chess battle by taking its Palestinian losses and withdrawing from further military action until the next move, Iran, not the United Arab Emirates and others, will be the leader, and normalization will have been an interlude.

Antisemitism, on the right and on the left, will grow. It is already spreading rapidly, particularly on college campuses. Sometimes, antisemitism is violent Jew hatred, and sometimes it is couched in equity, diversity, inclusion language which shrinks from declaring the killing of babies a crime against humanity.

There is a concept called "moral injury" that we discovered among American soldiers returning from wars in the Middle East and Asia. It is not PTSD, for which there are established treatment protocols. Moral injury is the realization that one did something in a wartime situation in which the morality of the military protects one psychologically but which, when one returns to normal moral life as civilians, one realizes was terribly wrong. For instance: A soldier in the Middle East sees a pregnant-looking woman dressed in Islamic clothing walking toward him. He does not know whether she is pregnant or has a bomb under her clothing. He shouts at her several times in the local language to stop. He fires

into the air to deter her. But she keeps coming toward him. In the end, he follows standard instructions to protect himself and his unit, and he kills her. But she turns out to have been pregnant, and not a terrorist. After release from the army, he returns home and sees his pregnant wife walking toward him. The scene comes back to him and the soldier turns violent, or turns to drugs or alcohol, or commits suicide. This is “moral injury.” He did what he should have done in the situation but, in a normal context, he realizes it was a terribly wrong thing to have done. I think that, for many Israelis and Jews, the anger, indeed the rage, that we are experiencing now and our intense desire for revenge as we read the stories and watch the videos of this horror, are

going to become moral injuries as life moves forward.

Finally, remember that 2033 is the 100th anniversary of the rise to power of Hitler; that 2038 is the 100th anniversary of Kristallnacht; and that 2041-44 is the 100th anniversary of the Nazi death camps. The Jew haters know this, for sure. I won't be around to see this. Many of you won't either. But our children and grandchildren will.

In the end, it is my thinking that Iran will play it rationally. They will not risk nuclear war for Palestine. They will, therefore, take their Palestinian losses, restrain Hezbollah and other pawns from intervening, declare victory, and return to planning the next major step in their jihad against Jews, Christians, and the West. Israel will do

something in Gaza but will not be able to “eliminate” Hamas or Islamic Jew hatred. Hamas will suffer, will declare victory over the Jews, and will succeed in getting more money to rebuild. America will claim to have prevented another damaging war and will go on believing that it leads the free world in its march for justice and peace. Jews everywhere will grudgingly be forced to acknowledge that “there is nothing new under the sun”; that Jew hatred is here to stay. The Hamas pogrom will take its place, alongside other pogroms against Jews, as the first pogrom of the 21st century. Welcome to Jewish history. ■

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NEWS & POLITICS

# France's Nightmare Is Yours Now

How the Oct. 7 massacres in Israel gave birth to a global pogrom

BY MARC WEITZMANN

**W**hat am I watching? I was staring at my phone in blank incomprehension watching the worldwide demonstrations of enthusiasm that followed the bloodiest pogrom since World War II—the “gas the Jews!” of the pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Sydney, the “fuck the Jews!” in London, the Nazi salutes in Paris, the Nazi flags in New York. I was scrolling through footage from some of the most prestigious universities in America sinking further every day into their own shit—the Washington University pro-Hamas students yelling “fuck Israel!” and “you guys are all fucking gays!”; Columbia

students gathering to celebrate the massacre in Israel one day after a Jewish student was beaten with a stick outside the main library; the Cherry Hill East high school student who screamed his hatred to his Jewish fellow classmates in the hall; the antisemitic demonstrations at UCLA. There was the Stanford professor who forced his Jewish students to identify themselves before grouping them in a corner so that they could feel “what the Palestinians feel,” the UC Davis associate professor who warned the “Zionists journalists” that they should “fear us” (whoever that “us” is) because “we can find their addresses and their children’s schools,” and who ended her post with hatchets and blood-drip emojis. I was seeing “keep

the world clean” signs decorated with a Star of David pushed into a garbage can, exhibited by pro-Palestinian supporters in Washington Square Park and Warsaw. And, of course, I saw video of passers-by everywhere tearing down posters of Jewish kids kidnapped by Hamas in the hope of making the victims disappear, even while their murderers were being publicly celebrated in the streets. I was watching all of this from the viewpoint of a French Jew who for years has lived with the absolute conviction that if the shit really hit the fan in his own country, there would always be the U.S. It made no sense.

Then I came upon a video taken right after Oct. 7 that I had previously missed. It showed a professor at Cornell university named Russell Rickford, a Black Lives Matter supporter. Standing under the rain, among the signs, in front of the demonstrators, Rickford was screaming into his microphone: “It was exhilarating! It was exhilarating! It was energizing! I was exhilarated!” The “it” was the pogrom. Mentally, I immediately thanked Rickford for his unabashed honesty. I knew exactly where I was now.

The whole planet had become France, and Mohamed Merah had returned.

Merah was the 23-year-old killer of

Algerian descent raised and born in the city of Toulouse, France, who on March 19, 2012, entered the local Ozar Hatorah school with a Parabellum 9-millimeter and a .45 ACP and shot at close range one of the rabbis in the school along with his two sons, Gabriel, 3, and Aryeh, 6. He then chased little Myriam, age 9, across the courtyard, grabbed her by her hair, put his weapon's barrel against her head and pulled the trigger, before walking back quietly toward his scooter. Like the Hamas pogromists of Oct. 7 he had equipped himself with a GoPro camera so the slaughter could be filmed and widely seen. Since social media was still relatively new, he sent his videos to the offices of Al Jazeera, where—Qatar being Qatar—the journalists waited for the emir's orders to know whether they should air the images or not. Under pressure from the French government, the videos were not aired.

Merah's murders changed everything in France—for the worse. It also provided a sickening preview of how the massacre of Oct. 7 is likely to change the lives of Jews in other Western countries.

Since the end of the Oslo process in September 2000, and the stoning of French synagogues that ensued in October of that year, people of my generation—those from assimilated backgrounds, at least—have been experiencing a full-blown case of what could be called a latent uprootedness. If you worked in the media or academia, Sept. 11 left no doubt as to the moral bankruptcy of a cultural left eager to “understand” the event that the German musician Stockhausen had called “the greatest artwork ever produced.” In France, the elation people felt at watching the Twin Towers burn and fall prefigured what is going on today. At last, “something was being paid”—that is how Annie Ernaux, who shared the feeling after 9/11 just as she shares her support for Hamas now, put it in her book *Les Années*. But if you were Jewish, you knew better.

The antisemitic dimension of the left's response to 9/11 was not hard to locate. It could be heard in the urban legend that someone “told the 4,000 Jews working at the Twin Towers to stay home that day,” as the African American

“We thought that we were going insane, and in a way we were. Our perceptions of reality had clearly diverged from those of the people who had been our friends and colleagues.”

activist Amiri Bakara (formerly LeRoi Jones) wrote in his “poem” “Someone blew up America.” In France, that legend was traveling on the wings of the old anti-American tradition, from the *cites* to *Le Monde*—which printed a front page “scoop” revealing that the Mossad knew about the 9/11 attacks in advance. From *Le Monde* it traveled to the far right, where Le Pen's then-adviser for foreign policy, Aymeric Chauprade, an admirer of the pro-Iranian Russian ideologue Alexander Dugin, defended the theory of an Israeli-American plot to conquer the world (Chauprade today supports both Renaud Camus' “great replacement” theory and Putin's Ukraine war).

In such an atmosphere, Jews felt more and more isolated. 2003 saw the first murder in France of a Jew for being Jewish when the young DJ Sebastian Selam had his eyes removed by his childhood friend Adel Amastaibou in the basement of the building where they both lived, between the Belleville neighborhood and the Place de la République. This was only a few blocks away from the demonstrations where pro-Saddam Green activists and socialists gathered together with right-wing partisans of the French President Jacques Chirac, during which passersby who appeared to be Jewish were chased down and attacked. A police report showed that

right after committing his murder, Amastaibou ran out into the street, his hands covered with the blood of his friend and raised toward the sky, as he yelled “I killed my Jew!” Twenty years later, according to the tapes released by the IDF, one of the Hamas killers of Oct. 7 called his parents to brag that he had killed not one but 10 Jews, and that his hands were red with their blood.

In 2006, there was the abduction, brutal torture, and eventual killing of Ilan Halimi. By then, according to a report commissioned and soon shelved by the government, spontaneous anti-Jewish aggressions in the streets and in schools had forced a growing number of Jewish families to leave the cities they lived in and regroup—a sort of inner exodus. Jewish families removed their kids from public schools and enrolled them in Jewish schools in order to ensure their safety, even though French Jews remained largely secular.

Amastaibou was diagnosed to be schizophrenic and paranoid, and therefore not legally responsible for his actions. Halimi's killers were judged way too dumb to be capable of a structured, politically motivated antisemitic murder. As for the random aggressions, well, they were random, and who could conclude anything from random things? Neither the media nor the public seemed to grasp what seemed, for France's Jews, instinctively obvious.

When the historian George Bensoussan tried to raise the alarm in his edited collection of essays, *The Lost Territory of the Republic (Les Territoires Perdus de la République)*, he and the authors that had participated in writing it were almost unanimously judged to be “reactionary” or “neo-conservatives.” That Bensoussan was Jewish did not help. (It is in those years that the word “neoon” became a code word in France for any intellectual of Jewish origin.) As for assimilated Jews like me who had never experienced anything like this before in our lives, everybody told us that we were going insane. We thought that we were going insane, and in a way we were. Our perceptions of reality had clearly diverged from those of the people who had been our friends and colleagues, to the point where it was only



barely possible to communicate with them, by suppressing feelings of rage.

Mohammed Merah changed all that. What I remember best about those days is the shame that France felt that it was now the one country in Europe since WWII where Jewish kids could be killed in broad daylight simply because they were Jews. The worse part was the feeling of recognition that this realization entailed. Our nightmarish fantasy, which we had buried away somewhere, as part of the process of becoming adults and leading normal French lives, had come true before our eyes. It was a shock, but in a sick way, it wasn't a surprise. It was a scene that we all recognized. Only this time, it was real.

How naïve we were. In retrospect, only the second feeling—the recognition—still makes some kind of sense. Here is why.

Like today's global pogrom, Merah's 2012 murders in France gave narrative form to what had expressed itself until then as a babbling impulse. It provided the random aggressions and free-floating hatreds with a narrative and gave them meaning. In a word, it was an epiphany—an epiphany of murderers. Here it is! Here is what we've been trying to do all along, without even knowing it!

Jailed in Toulon for burglary, a petty delinquent named Mehdi Nemmouche watched, transfixed, the night police captured Merah on TV. "Merah's the greatest guy France ever produced," he is reported to have said the next day. "I feel great this morning, I could shoot a little Jew girl today."

Nothing was the same in the country after that. 2013 saw an insane viral epidemic of the "quenelle," the antisemitic Nazi salute in reverse popularized by the Black, Tehran-backed comedian Dieudonné. The gesture became so popular that people actually invited TV show audiences to do it live in front of the cameras. January 2014 saw the "day of wrath" demonstration during which far-right, anti-abortion activists, Salafis, and royalists united to do the quenelle and chant "Jew, France is not yours." Five months later in Brussels, Mehdi Nemmouche, back from

Syria where he had joined ISIS after being released from jail, killed three people in the Brussels Jewish Museum. Meanwhile, random antisemitic incidents were hitting the roof. France counted more than 800 antisemitic incidents in 2014—more than two a day. Then began with the *Charlie Hebdo* and the Hyper Cacher kosher market killings on Jan. 7, which marked the start of a terror wave that would culminate with the Bataclan massacre.

In other words, lots of people in France felt "energized" and "exhilarated" by Merah's murders, just like the Cornell professor Rickford did after the Hamas pogrom. This month, in France alone, the number of antisemitic incidents has reached an astonishing 650, 30% higher than the total for all of 2022. Jews in France now remove mezuzas from their doors and hide their Jewishness to whatever extent they can. They've learned that killing Jews provokes an enthusiasm that tends to become strangely contagious.

This is now the 21st century. The cameras at the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001, showed only the towers falling. Merah filmed his murders. And if we are to believe the IDF's accounts, Hamas' killers filmed the rapes, the tortures, and the murders, then tried to send the pictures to their families using the victims' cellphones.

Make no mistake: This timeline does not diminish the ground-breaking aspect of what happened on Oct. 7. To the contrary. Pogroms are old news, of course. What makes this whole sequence new is that these killers publicized their actions live, in real time.

And it worked. During one of the first pro-Palestinian rallies in Times Square, shortly after Oct. 7, a demonstrator proudly exhibited on his iPhone screen the ravaged, naked body of one of the Israeli victims—a woman of course. (That women paid and continue to pay the heaviest price for the events of Oct. 7 is a fact that should be examined more closely; in France, some days ago, a Jewish feminist student was surprised to discover a tweet from one of her activist friends justifying the rapes.)

In 2015 in France, ISIS's most gory videos were also the most efficient ones at motivating jihadi recruitment. In the same breath, would-be terrorists would deny that atrocities were happening in Rakka (it was all Western propaganda) and feel enthralled by those same snuff films because they were proof that "it was really happening." As it turns out, the public performance of sadistic acts is the most efficient way to break down every moral barrier across the world. By duplicating and diffusing the terror and the horror, and by making this duplication part of their "military" strategy, Hamas aims at controlling the narrative of what's going on as it happens, winning admirers and gaining new supporters and recruits, who commune together in a worldwide social media loop of Jew-lynching, backed by proof that it is really happening.

I know exactly what this looks like for Jews in France, and for the rest of the country. The specific nature of the horrors it will produce when enacted on a global scale remain to be seen. ■

*This article was originally published on October 30, 2023.*

 **PODCAST**



**Ep. 387: The Age of Apocalypse**

This week on Unorthodox, we're continuing our travels Across the JEW.S.A. We head to Miami, where newer communities are redefining Jewish life in Florida. Across the JEW.S.A is created with the support of the Jewish Federations of North America.

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## THE REST

→ A top **UAE official announced on Monday that the “Abraham Accords are there to stay,” referring to the 2020 diplomatic agreement that normalized relations between Israel and several Arab states.** Despite the war in Gaza, “the Accords are our future,” said Ali Rashid Al Nuaimi, chairman of the Defense Affairs, Interior and Foreign Affairs Committee of the UAE Federal National Council, during an online briefing organized by the European Jewish Association and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. Among the many reasons behind Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack on Israel was Iran’s interest in derailing Israeli-Arab normalization, in particular attempts to bring Saudi Arabia into the Abraham Accords. The Saudi government has publicly distanced itself from Israel since the attack, but U.S. senators told *The New York Times* after a visit to Riyadh last week “that Saudi leaders would still like to recognize Israel when the right moment arrives.”

→ **Hamas’ tunnel network hides enough food, water, fuel, medicine, and ammunition for the group’s 35,000 to 40,000 militants to fight without resupply for three to four months,** according to a Lebanese official quoted in *The New York Times*. As the international community, including the United States, pressures Israel to relieve the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, “Hamas’s stockpiles,” the *Times* notes, “raise questions about what responsibility, if any, it has to the civilian population.” Hamas’ answer to those questions? “None.” As Mousa Abu Marzouk, a member of the Hamas politburo, explained in an Oct. 27 interview on Russia Today TV, “It is the responsibility of the U.N.” to protect Gazan civilians, and “it is the responsibility of the occupation [i.e., Israel] to provide them with all the services, as long as they are under occupation.” In other words, Hamas’ position, apparently shared by much of the Western press and NGO sphere, is that Israel must subsidize Hamas’ war effort by relieving the terrorist group of the burden of feeding its own people.

→ **The IDF plans to use experimental “sponge bombs” to clear Hamas’ tunnel network in Gaza,** according to a report in the United Kingdom’s *Telegraph*. The weapons, which have been tested and used in training exercises but never before in combat, are **designed to seal off tunnel entrances with an explosion of foam that rapidly expands and then hardens, preventing ambushes while soldiers move through the tunnel network.** Hamas’ dense, sophisticated network of underground tunnels, which allows for the movement of fighters and supplies without exposing them to Israeli surveillance and fire, is one of the group’s primary military assets in defending Gaza against invasion. As John Spencer wrote in a recent article for West Point’s Modern War Institute, “This expansive underground complex is the wicked problem—one for which no perfect solution exists—awaiting Israeli ground forces.”

→ **Dual nationals and some injured Palestinians began evacuating into Egypt Wednesday via the Rafah border crossing, in a deal negotiated among Israel, Egypt, the United States, Hamas, and Qatar.** Seventy-six critically injured evacuees entered Egypt on Wednesday, while buses carrying more than 330 people arrived at the border crossing. Under the terms of the deal, beginning Thursday, 1,000 foreign nationals and Palestinians working for international organizations will be allowed to leave through the Rafah crossing every day. A State Department spokesman said that there were about 400 U.S. nationals in Gaza “who have expressed a desire to leave” and that they would begin evacuating in the coming days.

## THE BIG STORY

**On Monday, English-language social media was buzzing in excitement and horror at a leaked draft of a policy paper from Israel’s Intelligence Ministry, which recommended the transfer of the entire civilian population of Gaza to Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula, and perhaps also to Greece and Spain for good measure...**

In reality—and *The Scroll* says this without excusing the irresponsibility of the proposal—the Intelligence Ministry paper is a nonstarter. The Intelligence Ministry, as Anshel Pfeffer explains in *Haaretz*, “has zero influence over any of Israel’s intelligence services (which are run either from the Prime Minister’s Office or the Defense Ministry) and its sole purpose is to provide disgruntled Likud politicians with a ministerial title.” Moreover, as Pfeffer, no friend of Netanyahu, writes, while the transfer proposal has “the appearance of a serious document, no one who has even a fleeting acquaintance with this government is taking it seriously.”

The more serious problem is that Israel really does face a series of dilemmas in planning for the future of a Hamas-free Gaza, and it is unclear if the current government has any idea how to solve them. Any extended occupation of Gaza will be a major drain on the IDF’s resources, and if Israel does not wish to rule directly, it has no alternative but to eventually reach an agreement with the PA.

—Park MacDougald

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# Ivy Leaguers, Find Your Spines

I spent my years at Columbia ignoring my common sense in the face of a glaring double standard. Now my classmates cheer on murder and I'm sitting with my shame.

BY ANI WILCENSKI

A picture of a killing, shared proudly with a “heart eyes” caption. Who posted this on Facebook to revel in mass rape and torture, four days after Hamas slaughtered 1,400 people? A devoted member of Islamic Jihad? A commander of Hamas? Nope, this is a girl who graduated alongside me from Columbia University, a girl who was a regular guest in the house where I lived, a girl with whom I had several mutual friends.

She wasn't an actual antisemite, these friends said. Scribbling Israel off any map she saw and vandalizing Jewish event posters with “fuck Israel” graffiti? No, she was simply voicing her legitimate objections to the Jewish state. The incident in sophomore year, when she crashed Holocaust Remembrance Day to chant “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” over the names of the murdered being read aloud? That's normal, they said, in the arithmetic of decolonial theory and the higher math of relative oppression.

We don't want to take sides, they said. Forget the screed she just posted on Twitter about annihilating the Jews—she might feel left out if we don't invite her to come to our house party to glare at me over a Solo cup. Oh, and would I mind bringing her to my room so she could cool off from the sweaty dance floor in front of my AC unit?

I should stress here that these friends were not coming from some sort of radical activist Columbia scene. I was in arguably the most vanilla squad on

campus. My friends were all in fraternities or sororities, the Moncler-wearing offspring of lawyers and bankers who financed their six-figure private high school educations. Nearly all of them moved along to work as investment associates or junior consultants (my favorite example is the wealthy, half-Lebanese girl from Greenwich, Connecticut, who constantly railed against Israel's geopolitical evils before moving to Qatar to work for McKinsey Doha, presumably to participate in the firm's renowned activism on behalf of the oppressed).

My experience was just “the vibe,” as they say, everywhere at Columbia, all the way from the zealous radicals to the normies like me and my friends. Simply being physically present on campus, let alone actively participating in any element of campus life, meant being surrounded by people with a zero-tolerance policy for any sort of oppression, who would distance themselves from anyone and loudly condemn the first sign of racism ... except, of course, if that person seemed not to love the Jews. In that case, they'd make a bunch of excuses for his or her bigotry and invite them around anyway.

Out of concern for my blood pressure, I have generally tried to avoid thinking about this particular girl. But recently, I've had no choice but to think of her, because she's been plastered across my Twitter timeline and Instagram feed, in a Canary Mission video from a pro-Hamas rally in Times Square held 24 hours after the terror group slaughtered, raped, and butchered over 1,000 Jews.

In the video, my former houseguest is yelling into a megaphone:

“Our resistance stormed illegal settlements and paraglided across colonial borders ... The resistance fired more than 5,000 rockets and shells, reaching Tel Aviv ... Our heroic resistance ... There is only one solution! Intifada revolution!”

She looks downright gleeful. At a few points she needs to pause reading because she's so animated by the cheers of the crowd that she can't stop smiling.

I would like to return now to the Facebook photo at the beginning of this article, which careful observers will note is a still from official Hamas footage. Putting aside the idea that the jack-booted terrorist putting his foot on the neck of a corpse is justified in his behavior because this soldier is a settler colonialist, or any other excuse-for-murder-masked-as-moralism, the picture has a direct comparison which should be immediately apparent to any of my Ivy League peers: It looks very similar to the photo of George Floyd lying lifeless with a knee on his neck, the horrifying footage which sparked a seismic global movement against racism. Here are some of the things my Columbia classmates did in response to that image during the spring of 2020:

Made a game of “Class Privilege at Columbia” bingo, with squares like “Traveled abroad for fun: \$20” and “Own Stock: \$40,” which you were meant to tally up and donate the subsequent total to a bail fund or BLM.

Went through our 2,000-person class of 2020 Facebook group and publicly tagged people, asking them if they'd donated yet and forcing them to post the receipts as proof.

## COLLECTION

### Hamas' War on Israel

All of Tablet's coverage of the October 2023 attack on Israel and the world's response.

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Encouraged people to join accountability groups where they could confess, or people of color would directly tell them, the myriad ways they'd committed microaggressions (I was invited into Artists for Anti-Racist Accountability, where we were instructed not to use phrases appropriated from Black culture, including "That's how I roll").

Personally reached out to suspected wealthy white people and advertised who they'd contacted, so everyone else could hold them accountable for "doing the work," to ask if they'd donated, protested, initiated conversations about whiteness, questioned their inner biases, sought out unfamiliar reading materials, and made space for Black people.

I could go on and on about the bizarre climate that took hold on our campus in 2020. But for now, I am raising these examples to illustrate only one thing: the flagrant disparity between the way my learned classmates treat injustice, suffering, and pain when it belongs to any other marginalized group, and the way they treat injustice, suffering, and pain when the victims are Jews.

Just the other day, my brother, a senior at Cornell, was sitting on his couch with a friend, who made exactly this point about a swastika-emblazoned car that was terrorizing people in his hometown (an incident which barely cracked the non-*New York Post* news). But my brother and his friend, like most people, are making such points in private, grousing among confidantes and then going back to their campuses or workplaces or friend groups like all is well. The unfairness is so endemic that to even point it out is to launch headlong into a brick wall of condescending and moralizing dismissal.

That was me at Columbia, swallowing my frustration and hurt at how unfair it felt that I was stuck chilling with a girl who shouted over Holocaust commemorations, while everyone else got to receive the balm of immediate social action at the slightest whisper of feeling unsafe. Now, I see that same girl grinning with bloodlust at rallies in the city where we both live, as the campus we once shared erupts into unrest and my brother informs our family chat that Cornell's Jewish Center for

**"The unfairness is so endemic that to even point it out is to launch headlong into a brick wall of condescending and moralizing dismissal."**

Jewish Living is under lockdown while the FBI investigates online threats to "follow Jewish people home and slit their throats."

As it turns out, the double standard I tolerated, to my shame, was not just a pesky social inconvenience: It was a sign of the deep, insidious rot within institutions from which I was supposed to derive a sense of self, as well as a sense of belonging to something higher and better. As Natan Sharansky, the human rights activist and former Soviet refusenik noted, the double standard is a defining feature of antisemitism. It applies to the Jewish state—when Israel is singled out for harsh criticism while glaring human rights abuses in other nations are flatly ignored (did you know that, since April of this year, over 1 million refugees have fled an ongoing mass genocide in Sudan, which is fueled by weapons shipments from Arab countries?) It also applies to the Jewish people, to whom my peers either apply their moral principles more harshly or abandon them entirely when they are confronted with Jewish victims. Today's double standard comes from elite universities, which found immediate moral clarity in their statements about every other tragedy on Earth yet couldn't conjure up a few sentences to condemn the horrific terror of Hamas,

and their superstar professors, who etch their syllabi with "intersectionality" and "equity" yet cheer on Jew-murdering terrorists as "exhilarating" and pen open letters "recontextualizing" Jewish rape and torture as "exercising a right."

What's most disturbing, for me, is that this double standard is also coming from my peers, my friends, my former housemates, who find the time to unlearn every bias and atone for every sin—except for their biases and sins leveled against Jews, who are apparently the world's only deserving victims. If Jewish babies are slaughtered, then the sickening photographs of their corpses are obviously propaganda. If a missile hits a hospital in Gaza, then it must have been fired by Israel—regardless of what any intelligence service or geolocation data says. How can anyone believe the forensic evidence of Israeli women, including young teenagers, being raped before they were executed, when Hamas denies it?

Over the past few weeks, I have thought about my tolerance of this double standard until my rage made me sick—the number of times I, and Jews across Columbia's campus, had to grin and bear the reality that our social worlds were governed by an entirely different set of permissions and sensitivities than everyone else's. I want so badly to travel back in time, whip out a bullhorn at those parties, and scream in everyone's faces that three years later, this girl who "just really didn't like Israel" would go on to call the monsters who put babies in ovens and raped teenage girls the "heroic resistance."

But I can't. All I can do is promise myself that this will never happen again, at least not in my own life. I would also encourage everyone—and I know there are many of you—who has felt

## ISRAEL & THE MIDDLE EAST

The Jewish State and its neighbors at [tabletmag.com/sections/israel-middle-east](https://tabletmag.com/sections/israel-middle-east)

this unfairness gnawing away at your bones to make the same promise. We are not the ones ripping down missing posters or celebrating deranged murderers, but our uneasy silence has allowed those people to monopolize our public squares until we no longer have space to mourn our dead. The past three weeks are what happens when we stay quiet and let others set the alarming temperature of the air in the elite institutions we

inhabit. Because to take a stand would make it harder to enter certain rooms. It would interfere with the work—the increasingly difficult, uncomfortable, queasy-making, indeed disfiguring work—of belonging.

I see clearly now who occupies those rooms—the moral arbiters of our generation, with their “pristine” ethical codes riddled with hypocrisy, their jargon-bloated excuses for antisemitic

hate, their hollow pontification about empathy and justice delivered in the same breath with which they rationalize the murder and torture of people who might be my brothers, sisters, parents, grandparents, cousins, or friends. I don’t want to contort myself to be in those rooms anymore. Do you? ■

*This article was originally published on October 30, 2023.*

NEWS & POLITICS

# Never Again Is Now

A call for a mass rally in Washington in support of Jewish students and Israel

BY NATAN SHARANSKY

**T**wenty years ago, upon returning to Israel from a trip to American university campuses as the minister in charge of combating antisemitism, I reported my opinion to then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that U.S. colleges had become the beachhead of the battle for the next generation of American Jewry. For the first time, in an atmosphere of growing political opposition to the state of Israel, more and more Jewish students at leading universities—Harvard, Columbia, Rutgers, and others—told me in private conversations that they were afraid to voice their sympathy with the Jewish state, out of concern that doing so would damage their academic success and future careers.

At the time, I was startled and deeply concerned to see such self-censorship—not in the Moscow of my youth, but in the most powerful country in the free world. I was also surprised then that few Jewish organizations felt a responsibility to get involved in the life of students on campuses.

Much has changed since then. Today, practically every serious American

Jewish organization runs programs designed to prepare Jewish students for campus life, including giving them the tools to fight against antisemitism, and to strengthen their connection to Jewish identity and Israel while they are there. In addition, Israeli *shlichim*, or fellows, have been added to strengthen Hillel teams at almost a hundred universities across the country.

Nevertheless, anti-Zionism—the new antisemitism—is a permanent feature of daily life at American colleges. What is more, Israel’s opponents are equipped with new intellectual weapons: post-colonialist and other “critical” theories, wokeness, microaggressions, and various other ways of conveying the simplistic neo-Marxist idea of a permanent struggle between oppressors and oppressed, in which the oppressed are always right and oppressors wrong, and should be silenced and attacked by any means possible. In this narrative, “white colonial” Israel is always the oppressor, while the Palestinians are always oppressed.

There were many efforts over the past two decades to fight the expressions of this pernicious narrative at universities. They included opposition

to the constant flow of resolutions supporting BDS and a push to recognize the connection between anti-Zionism and antisemitism. There were ups and downs, successes and failures, but the struggle continued.

Despite these long-standing realities, however, no one was truly prepared for the reaction of leading American universities to the horrific events of Oct. 7, when Hamas sent its jihadi terrorists into Israeli territory to kill some 1,400 people, mostly civilians, and take over 230 more hostage. Just as Israelis were shocked by the failure of our intelligence and political leadership to anticipate and prevent such a catastrophe, American Jews and their allies have been shocked by the failure of university leaders to unequivocally condemn the rape, torture, mutilation, and brutal murder of innocent children, families, and elderly people by an organization that has made no secret of its genocidal intentions against the Jewish people.

Instead of unanimous condemnation, what we have heard from college campuses is the full justification of this pogrom—the worst in modern memory—in statements by campus organizations and in demonstrations celebrating Hamas. According to the worldview

## ARTS & LETTERS

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that guides these deplorable responses, voiced repeatedly by students and their professors, Israel must be blamed for everything because fighting against the Zionist oppressor is how the worldwide struggle against colonialism begins.

With this, the parallel between these contemporary critical theories and the Marxism-Leninism of my Soviet youth has received new proof. Recall that the major pogroms in Eastern Europe started in 1881, when Tsar Alexander II was killed and his murder blamed on Jews. The organization behind the murder, Narodnaya Volya (the People's Will), was a predecessor of the Communist Party, with both an extremist wing responsible for the killing and a more moderate wing that spread propaganda to the people. When the awful pogroms started, the latter tried to defend these aggressions by explaining that this was how the social movement of the masses—and with it the worldwide revolution—would begin. They argued that their target was not the Jews per se, but an entire oppressive system, which their movement sought to overthrow in the name of justice and liberation.

The rationalization of today's Hamas sympathizers on campus are remarkably similar to these. And if the connection seemed largely theoretical before, today it is practical, articulated and even acted upon not by extremists but in the heart of the academy. While Jewish organizations were busy fighting tactical battles against BDS and other localized affronts, we failed to see that terrorism received an intellectual rehabilitation in the most prestigious segments of American society. Consider the words of prominent feminist scholar Judith Butler, who in 2006 proclaimed at the University of California, Berkeley, that "understanding Hamas [and] Hezbollah as social movements that are progressive, that are on the left, that are part of a global left, is extremely important."

Even the presidents of leading universities—unlike the president of the United States—have refused to denounce Hamas's evil, speaking instead about violence on both sides. Those who protest microaggressions are unable or unwilling to differentiate between the

**“The struggle for campuses is a struggle for an America that is liberal, that supports free speech and human rights, and that protects all of its citizens, regardless of race or creed, from vicious, lawless assault.”**

most awful forms of pogrom and the legitimate self-defense of the attacked.

As a result, if 20 years ago to be openly and proudly pro-Israel was bad for students' careers, today it is a threat to their physical safety. The number of antisemitic events, including physical assaults, has skyrocketed since Oct. 7, and campuses are now flooded with the slogan "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free." For those unfamiliar with geography, this means that there is no place for a Jewish state on the world map.

Israel is currently fighting a war for its survival. We realize that Hamas crossed a red line on Oct. 7 and that for the state to continue to exist, we have to win. In fact, we know that we are fighting not only for ourselves but for the future of the free world, to preserve the values of democracy and freedom in the face of an organization that would destroy them completely.

In a different way, the United States is also fighting a war for its survival. American universities crossed a red line in the aftermath of Oct. 7. The struggle

for campuses is therefore a struggle for America and its values—for an America that is liberal, that supports free speech and human rights, and that protects all of its citizens, regardless of race or creed, from vicious, lawless assault.

In 2015, following the terrorist attacks on the *Charlie Hebdo* newspaper and on Jewish targets in Paris, I asked the French philosopher Alain Finkielkraut whether he thought there was a future for Jews in Europe. He responded that he could not answer my question directly, since he was not part of the organized Jewish community, but that he worried there may not be a future for *Europe* in Europe—that is, for a Europe that cherishes liberal values and is willing to defend them in the face of barbaric assault.

If there is to be a future for America in America, it is time to step up in defense of its core values, and in this American Jews can play an important role. Let us start with a March of One Million: students, parents, Jewish organizations, and allies coming together in support of academic freedom and against a primitive ideology that silences truth and justifies murderous rampages as a form of liberation.

We have done this before: In 1987, hundreds of thousands of Jews marched to Washington, D.C., to support their brethren in the Soviet Union, chanting the slogan "Let my people go." In 2002, thousands rallied in front of the U.S. Capitol in opposition to terrorism and support for the Jewish state.

Only this time we will be fighting not only for our own people, but for America as well—for the values it represents and for its continued role as a beacon of light around the world. ■

*This article was originally published on October 31, 2023.*

## COMMUNITY

Our shared Jewish life, at  
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# Preparing for an Emergency

In northern Israel, Galilee Medical Center is already moving patients, canceling procedures, and training doctors in anticipation of a second front opening

BY HILLEL KUTTLER

**O**n the morning of Wednesday, Oct. 25, a patient at Israel's Galilee Medical Center emitted deep, painful sighs as a medical professional administered treatment.

The "patient" was a mannequin, and the dozen doctors, nurses, and administrators gathered around its bed were learning from the scenarios presented there and at two adjacent beds: patients with an airway obstruction, difficulty breathing, and a circulation problem. The presenters were emergency-department doctors and nurses running the simulations to train colleagues in other departments.

The drill was held to prepare for an emergency.

Here in the coastal town of Nahariya in northern Israel, that emergency would be a second war front opening, as residents and analysts expect, given the Lebanese terrorist organization Hezbollah launching raids and missiles at Israeli military and civilian targets with greater frequency while piggybacking on Hamas' Oct. 7 massacre of Israelis 110 miles to the south.

Should Hezbollah's attacks escalate to war, large numbers of Israeli soldiers and civilians would be brought to the Nahariya hospital.

The simulations were held in a shock-trauma wing of the fortified emergency department, which was opened in 2012 to withstand missile attacks. The late physician Shaul Shasha, the hospital's director general at the time, pushed for the fortification.

"They called Dr. Shasha a mad man,"

Tsvi Sheleg, a physician and the hospital's deputy director general, said of the fortified wing. "He was a visionary."

Stepping into both the emergency department and an underground makeshift hospital is like entering a bank vault—two sets of vault doors, actually, each threshold about 1 1/2 feet thick. The fortified department was built because of the hospital's vulnerability during the Second Lebanon War, in summer 2006, when Hezbollah shot 4,000 rockets at towns and communities in northern Israel. Back then, patients were brought to what was the only fortified area: the underground bunker. As a result, no one was harmed in the strikes.

Within hours of this month's Hamas massacre, too, all patients were moved underground. The 775-bed hospital canceled all elective surgeries to free beds for trauma patients—soldiers and civilians—should war return to the north.

The basement vault, which until Oct. 7 was empty, has become the hospital writ small. It's drab and no-frills, but functional and clean. During a reporter's visit, some patients sat in bed speaking on their phones, while others chatted with visiting relatives, as they would in normal times. Printed paper signs delineated the departments of thoracics, oncology, obstetrics, pediatrics, internal medicine, and dialysis.

The three simulations practiced on Wednesday were adapted from cases emergency-department professionals treated in the south on Oct. 7, said Khaled Atalla, a physician who heads the department. In Nahariya, he

anticipates treating patients with blunt trauma and crushed body parts from collapsed buildings that might result from Hezbollah missile attacks.

Fifty health care professionals from Hungary were due to visit the hospital this week to train in mass-casualty scenarios. Their visit was canceled.

"Now, we're just *doing* it," Atalla quipped. "We hope we're training and training and training but won't need to treat actual people because that would be our family. Everyone—every soldier, every civilian—is like family."

In the past three weeks, the emergency department has actually treated fewer patients than normal, said Atalla. One reason is that fearful residents are remaining home, leading to fewer road accidents, he said.

The hospital's slower pace reflects the changed reality of Nahariya, an already quiet town of 60,000 residents. Only about half of all stores were open on the main commercial drag, HaGaaton Street, on Wednesday. Traffic has been far lighter on roads and sidewalks. Downtown has been ominously inconsistent: calm-before-the-storm-like one day, people filling outdoor tables at Aroma Café the next.

Digital signs at HaGaaton and Weizmann streets, like billboards countrywide, now feature Israeli flags and read, "Israel will be victorious" and "We are all in it together." On some summer nights, and on the night of Yom Ha'atzmaut (Independence Day), stages dominate that intersection as bands entertain crowds packed shoulder to shoulder on the closed streets.

Employees of the Galilee Medical Center like to say that it is the country's closest hospital to any border and take pride in its treating a diverse population of 660,000 Galileans—Jews, Christians, Muslims, and Druze—a rainbow of cultures that's also apparent in the hospital's staff.

In the hospital, one room was transformed into a day care center, its shelves and tables chock full of crayons, markers, puzzles, and board games. Several little girls sported face paint: an Israeli flag, a rainbow, a butterfly. In a corridor, boys kicked a ball and shot baskets at a 3-foot-tall hoop. The day before,



workers nailed low rows of hooks for the children to hang their backpacks.

Dorit Itah, who heads the occupational therapy department, explained that 80 children ages 3-14 come in each day. With no patients now and with many schools closed since the war's outbreak, she and others were re-assigned so their colleagues can continue working.

"It's not the dream of my life to be doing arts and crafts with kids," Itah said. "It's like a big family in crisis time. You have to help where you can and contribute."

The children in the room were speaking Hebrew, Russian, and Arabic.

In the lobby upstairs, Bahir Sirhan, an emergency-department physician and a Muslim who lives in the Jewish-majority town of Karmiel, spoke of treating four construction workers injured the previous week in a Hezbollah missile attack on a moshav along the border. Three were his relatives; all survived. The fourth man died.

Hezbollah's missiles don't recognize

nationality or religion, as Hamas' knives and bullets didn't distinguish on Oct. 7 between Jews and Muslims, native Israelis and foreign field workers.

On matters of life and death, those in Israel, as the billboard proclaimed, are all in it together.

In what normally is the hospital's thoracic surgery department, Rona Spector sat at a conference room table. On Wednesday, the department's corridors were dark, the nurses station was empty, no patients walked the halls, no beeping monitors sounded, no orders echoed.

Upon learning of Hamas' attack, she and several other Boston-area Israeli doctors exchanged text messages inquiring about opportunities to volunteer at hospitals in their homeland.

A week later, she flew to Israel. Spector will remain until the end of the month, forfeiting her Tufts salary. Her bosses and colleagues supported her desire to fly to Israel to lend a hand, Spector said. She led one simulation the

other day and will run one next week on opening chest airways. Spector said she's here to help and likely won't have time to visit her parents or in-laws in the country's center.

The hospital has only one thoracic surgeon on staff, Moshe Lapidot, who happens to know Spector from when they both did a fellowship in Boston.

Spector's presence "is very important" both for her medical expertise and as a morale boost, Lapidot said.

During the interview, a hospital spokesman told Spector "*kol hakavod*" (kudos) for coming to volunteer. She demurred.

"Not '*kol hakavod*.' It's my duty," she said. If the war is prolonged, as experts predict, Spector said she'll return to Nahariya for another stint. "My heart is here, and Israel is my identity. I prefer being here. The minute you land, you feel a sense of relief. I'm where I'm supposed to be. I'm with my people." ■

*This article was originally published on October 27, 2023.*

## COMMUNITY

# Why Israel Feels Like Home

I've lived in places all around the world. But since the Hamas attacks, I've realized why this is where I want to be, and where I want my kids to grow up.

BY TANYA MOZIAS SLAVIN

I say "just in case" to my kids a lot lately.

*Why are there eight cans of tuna in my sock drawer?*

Just in case.

*Why did you put this wooden board with a hole in it under my bed?*

Just in case.

*Why do we have to go to the safe room if the Iron Dome protects us from the rockets?*

Just in case.

My kids and I live in Israel, and like everyone else here, after the horrific attacks by Hamas on Oct. 7, we've had to learn to exist in the narrow space between unimaginable heartbreak, fear, and uncertainty.

In addition to stocking up on canned food and bottled water, we have acquired wooden boards that could block the door to the safe room—which

doubles as my kids' room—from the inside, in case armed men try to break in to kill us. Two carpenters worked for six days in a row to make wooden boards (with a hole in the center for the handle) for the entire city, for free.

Maybe the wooden board is overkill. I don't know. We don't know what to be scared of anymore. I've never been this scared in my life.

But, paradoxically, I've also never been this grateful to live here, and not anywhere else in the world. After living abroad for 16 years, I came back to Israel four years ago, but until recently, I still considered myself a "citizen of the world" more than Israeli. The events of the past three weeks have changed that.

I grew up in the Soviet Union, in a Russian town with virtually no Jews but plenty of antisemitism. My parents, my three siblings, and I were routinely harassed for being Jewish. The wall of our building had the graffiti *Bey Zhidov* ("Kill the Kikes") permanently

written on it. Once, at a dark train station, a stranger approached my father and addressed him using a generic Russian name: “Hey, Vasia, do you have a cigarette?” But when the light of the approaching train illuminated my dad’s non-Slavic looks, he erupted in a diabolical laughter: “Hey you’re not a Vasia, you’re Abram! Abram!!!” Luckily, the doors of his train opened and my dad was able to get in, unharmed.

I grew up with my grandmother’s stories about the Holocaust that she would tell us in all the gory details: how one day, Nazis came to the village of Novopoltavka in Ukraine, where most of my grandfather’s family lived, ordered all the Jews to strip naked, led them across the town, made them dig their own grave, and then shot them one by one.

I had nightmares where some unquestionable authority would show up, tell us all to strip naked, and take us out of the apartment, out of the building, past the graffiti and the playground with the broken swings, to our death, with all our neighbors looking on. In this nightmare, however, we were the only ones who’d be killed. All our neighbors, I had no doubt, would consider it justified, or at least not that terrible.

I knew that my childhood nightmares were just that, nightmares. We children lived in a different world. My parents would often say, “so-and-so is Jewish” about someone, meaning “He is one of ours and so could be trusted.” The assumption was that, by default, if they weren’t Jewish, even if they weren’t overtly antisemitic, sooner or later they would say something to give their true feelings away, even if it was something relatively inane like “You’re a good person ... even though you’re Jewish.” I considered that kind of distrust on my parents’ part over-the-top. Sure, I knew that some people were antisemitic, but nobody was really out to harm us. So when my family moved to Israel when I was 15, it didn’t register, for me at least, as a major exodus to the land of our ancestors. It was just something that Jews did at the time. In the mid 1990s Russia was a mess, and antisemitism was only one of its many problems. It’s not like ethnic Russians wanted to stay in Russia, either.

“I watched the gradual demonization of the term ‘Zionism,’ the term that simply refers to the idea that Jewish people deserve their own country.”

Seven years later, after attending high school and university in Israel, I got married. At the time, the Second Intifada was in full swing. I’ll never forget that dreadful feeling after each suicide bombing, of holding your breath as you do the “head count,” calling all your family and friends to make sure they’re still alive.

That was one reason we decided to leave Israel. But the main reason was that my husband and I wanted to go to graduate school, and doing so abroad seemed like the most reasonable next step. So we moved to Canada.

When I left, I was convinced that I would feel at home everywhere. It never crossed my mind that my Jewish or Israeli identity would be something that I’d have to hide.

During the next decade in academia, I watched with dismay the ever increasing obsession with Israel and the steady growth of anti-Israel sentiment on campuses.

I watched the discourse shift from “Against Israeli Occupation” (reasonable, even though I suspect that 90% of people opposing didn’t know what exactly was occupied and where) to “Boycott Israeli Apartheid” (a slogan that didn’t leave a space to debate whether or not there was such a phenomenon as

“Israeli Apartheid”) until it suddenly became mainstream to debate Israel’s “right to exist.”

I watched the gradual demonization of the term “Zionism,” the term that simply refers to the idea that Jewish people deserve their own country. It doesn’t mean a country that is populated exclusively by Jews. It means a country where Passover and Hanukkah are national holidays, just like Christmas is the national holiday in many countries where large portions of the population don’t celebrate it.

Still, I thought it wasn’t that bad. After all, my everyday life was largely unaffected by anti-Israeli propaganda. I didn’t talk about politics with friends, and while I hoped that most of them didn’t support the destruction of Israel, I forgave them in advance for anything they might be thinking, because after all, they were just well-meaning, left-wing people who wanted everybody to live in peace, and who never in their life had to do a “head count.”

And when out and about, there were ways to avoid the upsetting sights. If you could just cross the street when you see people distributing “Boycott Israeli Apartheid” leaflets, if you could temporarily turn off (or put on mute) the Jewish or Israeli part of yourself, if for those few minutes you could just decide to be an unaffiliated human mammal going about your business, then it would sort of be tolerable.

When I made the decision to move back to Israel in 2019, it was mostly for social reasons. I missed my family.

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