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Eastern Horizon: Israel and India's Unrealized Strategic Alliance

By Yeshaya Rosenman

The new geopolitical landscape following the October 7th terror attacks has highlighted a crucial yet largely unrecognized alliance between Israel and India. Increased Indian interest in the Jewish state should serve as a signal for Israel to broaden its diplomatic focus beyond its traditional allies in the West.

Never before Oct 8. had Israel been flooded with so many Indian reporters. Of the few thousand foreign journalists who rushed to Israel to cover the war, over a hundred arrived from India, including many of the most famous faces of Indian media.

I received multiple offers for reporting positions, and I chose Republic TV, India's most viewed and most right-wing TV network. When I traveled to the residence of President Yitzhak Herzog to request an interview with our anchor in Delhi, they informed me that they were not intentionally ignoring my channel's previous requests, but were simply swamped by inquiries from no fewer than 37 Indian outlets, each claiming it was the biggest in India.

Even more unusual than the sheer magnitude of Indian-focused coverage is the fact that Indian media was staunchly supportive of Israel. Excepting Communist-oriented media (such as the prestigious magazine 'Frontline')^[1] and most Muslim-Indian reporters, Indian media was so enthusiastic in their support for Israel that Qatari-owned outlets began calling them out for "Zionism" and "Islamophobia".^[2]

Israelis may take for granted the strength of Israel-India relations and the warm welcome they receive in India, but merely a few decades ago our relationship was completely different.

From the Indian Independence Movement to Diplomatic Relations with Israel

Full diplomatic relations between India and Israel were only established in 1992 following the Madrid Conference, on the heels of over forty years of hostility. Since the inception of the Indian Independence movement, its leaders – from both the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League – were hostile towards Zionism (though not Jews) for a variety of reasons.^[3]

Muslim leaders of the Indian independence movement such as Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who later demanded Pakistan as a state for Muslims, found themselves in the paradoxical stance of demanding the partition of India but not of Palestine. Mahatma Gandhi did not understand why Jews were coming to Arab Palestine in the first place. Both India and Pakistan voted "No" to the establishment of Israel.

Jawaharlal Nehru, who followed Gandhi as India's first Prime Minister, was a product of Cambridge education and a Socialist by conviction. He harbored idealistic, perhaps even unrealistic, views on foreign policy that shaped India's direction from 1947 until the 1990s. Nehru's vision included leading non-aligned nations in the post-colonial and Third World landscape, fostering a sense of fraternity with Asian countries like China and Russia, and harboring a strong aversion to American dominance and capitalist ideals. He also shared a close bond with Gamal Abdel Nasser, the secular Socialist leader and President of Egypt.

The only exception was V.D. Savarkar, godfather of Hindu Nationalism, the political creed of PM Modi and the BJP party. Savakar wrote an open letter congratulating Israel upon its founding.

It is the backdrop of the long-standing Nehruvian legacy that makes the current Israel-India relations so surprising.

Indian Economy and Political Power

Beyond mere friendship however, India is also accruing a newfound importance, to Israel and globally. From a country famous for masses living in abject poverty and neglect, hostile to USA and its allies, and with leaders famous for populism and corruption, India is finally being regarded as the rising global power it had always envisioned itself.

The initial economic liberalization that saved India from bankruptcy in 1992 has now led India to represent – as of 2022 – 7.2% of the global economy, with the 5th largest nominal GDP.

Pro-American sentiment is on the rise, even as Indian Minister of External Affairs, S. Jaishankar, plots a course in foreign affairs that is asserting Indian independence from Western dictates. The greatest trophy for this independent Indian foreign policy would be a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Although it would force India to take stances rather than remain silently “non-aligned,” it would further the narrative of India as master of its own destiny.

The Indian government is at ideological loggerheads with both Western progressives regarding nationalism and Islam, and with American Evangelicals over the proselytization of Hindus. But beyond the snarky moralizing exemplified in Western media, Indian officials enjoy ever-growing collaboration with the highest levels of Western governments.

Aside from the goal of containing China, the primary reason for this red-carpet-treatment is the influence of India’s most valuable export: Indian brainpower. India exports enormous numbers of its best, brightest, and most ambitious citizens, who have become leaders in the fields of STEM and management, including the current CEOs of illustrious tech brands such as Google, Microsoft, Adobe, and Palo Alto Networks. Indians and Israelis are the two most dominant minorities in Silicon Valley, and usually cultivate excellent work relationships, a sentiment echoed by former PM Naftali Bennet when speaking about his years as a high-tech CEO in the U.S.

Decades of elite immigration have led the 5-million-strong Indian-American community to supersede the Jews as the richest and most educated minority in the U.S. Yet a newer phenomenon is the Indian diaspora’s rising political power. Two Indian-originating Americans, Nikki Haley and Vivek Ramaswamy, are now contending for the Republican presidential nomination. Democratic Vice President, Kamala Harris, is half-Indian. There are five Indian Americans in Congress, ranging from radical ‘Squad’ member, Pramila Jayapal, to

Shri Tenadar, who has founded a ‘Hindu Caucus.’ Rishi Sunak, PM of the UK, is a proud Hindu, as is former Home Secretary, Priti Patel, both Conservatives. Leo Varadkar is the PM of Ireland. Indians also lead countries in the Indies and South America such as Trinidad and Tobago, and Suriname.

In the U.S., Indian-American advocacy organizations, such as the Hindu American Foundation (HAF), are collaborating with Jewish advocacy organizations like AJC and the Simon Wiesenthal Center, and are even candidly adopting their methods; For example, modeling the definition of “Hinduphobia” along the contours of the IHRA definition for antisemitism.^[4] As a conspicuous minority of non-white, non-Christian overachievers, Hindus have become targets of hate-crimes, and many Hindus, such as HAF leadership, are staunchly pro-Israel, as they are keenly aware that most of the anti-Hindu and anti-Israel hatred originates from the same sources, with near-identical motivations.

Israel-India Conservative Alliance

We now begin to understand the common interests of India and Israel. Some such interests are shared by Jewish and Hindu diasporas, and some are unique to their respective motherlands. Both share the existential threat of the global Red-Green Alliance of Progressives and Islamists. Many Hindus in the U.S. and UK were horrified by the post Oct. 7 pro-Hamas rallies and the dramatic spike seen in antisemitic attacks. Given a chance, these same mobs will come for the Hindus, as has already been the case in the UK.^[5]

This opens up the possibility of a global conservative counter-alliance, although some obvious difficulties would have to be overcome: Israeli conservatives publish primarily in Hebrew and are largely unknown in the Anglosphere. And like most Westerners, they are unfamiliar with modern India and its discourse.

Hindu conservatives (“Nationalists” is their preferred term) don’t get along with Evangelicals, and for all their deep admiration of Israel, they are generally unaware of the basics of Jewish and Israeli history and heritage. If a long-standing bridge is to be built, deeper foundations must promptly be laid.

However, the recent wartime TV appearances of conservatives such as Douglas Murray are leading to a growing awareness and appreciation of Western conservatives, with whom Indians have had only a love-hate relationship since colonial times. And never before have so many Israeli experts and dignitaries appeared en masse on Indian screens.

Israel, India, and Islam

One major building block for further unity is the fact that Israel and India both share the common threat of Islamic terrorism, albeit from different terrorists and countries. India is already the Israeli defense industries' largest client, and it will take years more for India to fully modernize its defense forces. According to foreign sources, it was an emergency shipment of Israeli precise armaments that allowed India to triumph over Pakistan in the Kargil War of 1999. This was the watershed moment in India-Israel relations, long before the rise of PM Modi, in 2014.

The primary Islamic threat to India is from Pakistan, in which wild incitement against India is inculcated in public schools, madrassas, mosques, and media. The Pakistani military recruits terrorists to organizations such as Lashkar-e Taiba (LeT) for its cross-border attacks on Indian Kashmir, hidden behind a thin veil of plausible deniability. LeT was also responsible for the 26/11/2008 attacks on Mumbai, which killed 166 people, including four Israelis and two other Jews. Recently, Israel finalized its designation of LeT as a terrorist organization, and is lobbying for Hamas to be recognized as such by India.

Indian Muslims number an estimated 200 million, roughly 15% of the 1.4 billion Indians. The majority are not radical, except for known enclaves in places such as Kerala, West Bengal, Hyderabad, and Kashmir.

However, the Oct. 28 televised speech of Hamas leader, Khaled Mashaal, at a Jamaat-I Islami (India's Muslim Brotherhood) rally was an alarming development. The rally was part of a campaign titled "Uproot Hindutva and Apartheid Zionism." Hindutva, the ideology of Hindu Nationalists – here just a code word for Hindus – was equated with Zionism by Muslim Brotherhood leaders in a candid attempt to export Hamas ideology and methods to India. BJP leadership responded with outrage, but Kerala is governed by the Communist Party of India (CPI), who align with Islamists, and it is unclear just how the central government will deal with these clear threats.

Yet on a deeper level, here too, critical infrastructure is lacking: Although India has defense research and Pakistan experts, shockingly, for a country that will soon have the largest Muslim population in the world, it has almost no experts on Islam or the Middle East. This is due to both the Marxist-Communist orientation of Indian humanities faculties that dictated the downplaying of all religions, and to the weakness in foreign language instruction. Here, Israeli scholars can play a role and collaborate with various institutions, especially with the young up-and-coming right-wing Indian

intelligentsia, who are mainly STEM graduates who transitioned to humanities, and who have yet to fully find their intellectual voice.

Israel has few experts of South Asian Islam, no leading experts on South Asian Islamic terrorism, and almost no Urdu speakers. The Israeli intelligence community invests little effort in this part of the world, which is traditionally seen as lacking influence on Israel. I believe this assumption is incorrect.

Israel, India, and the Global Order

The most tangible, immediate dividends in Israel-India relations have been aptly demonstrated by recent geopolitical realignments.

The history of the subcontinent is inextricably intertwined with that of the nearby Arabian Peninsula, even more so since the rise of Arab Petro-economies. In the UAE, South Asians (2.8 million Indians, 1.29 million Pakistanis, and 0.75 million Bangladeshis) number around half of the population, filling every position, from bellboys to billionaire CEOs. The UAE is India's 3rd largest trading partner. Saudi Arabia (KSA) is itself home to 2.12 million Bangladeshis, 1.88 million Indians, and 1.81 million Pakistanis. Cold War politics placed India in the non-aligned, de facto pro-Soviet camp. Pakistan aligned with the USA, as did the KSA and UAE, who both needed American military protection, and, as Salafi fundamentalists, espoused a visceral hatred of the "Godless Communists."

Following the Cold War's thaw, India moved ever closer to the West and its competitive economies, while Pakistan never recovered from the Islamic extremism, violence, and economic damage inflicted by Gen. Zia Ul-Haq's Islamic reforms of 1978, and subsequent support for terrorism as a state tool. Gulf countries therefore increasingly courted India, while sending only nominal humanitarian aid to Pakistan. Subsequently, India-Israel relations hit a glass ceiling: India would not part ways with the rich Gulf states and had to maintain a delicate balancing act.

This changed dramatically with the Abraham Accords. Suddenly, India did not have to choose sides. On the contrary: if the UAE was warming up to Israel – and it was obvious the KSA had given a green light – India could join the party. This logic engendered the mini-lateral alliance of I2U2 (Israel, India, UAE, USA). Israel would bring tech and defense capabilities, India would supply skilled and menial labor, UAE would bring finance, and the USA would defend the alliance diplomatically and with its fleets. While the alliance remained amorphous, business boomed, as did defense and intelligence ties. Since the Arab spring of 2011, the UAE had become hostile to radical Islam, wiping out the

local branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (Al Islah) by 2014.^[6] As India legally integrated Kashmir in 2019, the UAE's response to Pakistani outcries was granting the Medal of the Order of Prince Zaid to PM Modi. Kashmir apparently did not constitute an Islamic cause. By the time the Abraham Accords were signed in 2020, the UAE had developed a vision of inter-religious tolerance, which resonates deeply with India.^[7] The rise of Mohammad Bin Salman (MBS) and his vision for the KSA hold a similar promise,^[8] though yet to be fully implemented. These developments led to various interfaith initiatives. Currently, both countries align with Israel and India in their battle against radical Islam.

G-20, IMEC, and Oct. 7

The showcase initiative announced at the Delhi G-20 Summit in September was the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC). IMEC is a proposed route for Indian goods to Europe that would cut transit times by 60%. Goods would transit from India's northwestern ports to the Jebel Ali port in the UAE, and from there to the Indian-owned port of Haifa via freight trains running through the UAE, KSA, Jordan and Israel, and finally from the Haifa port to Greece. New energy pipelines and communications lines would be laid as well.^[9]

This was India's first successful counter to Chinese encirclement, and posed a strong blow to Pakistan, further alienating it from the KSA and the UAE and cementing its status as a Chinese client.

Although G-20 delegates were careful not to mention it, it was clear that the corridor proposal carried with it implications of KSA normalizing relations with Israel. Messages of normalization were delivered in Western media months before the summit.

This was the working logic of the Abraham Accords in Israeli foreign policy: More Muslim nations were destined to join in, and KSA was to be the biggest catch. KSA is the leader of the Sunni world, and other Sunni states couldn't be more Catholic than the pope and would immediately follow suit. Shortly before the Oct 7 attacks, Foreign Minister Eli Cohen spoke of 6 other Muslim states that would normalize relations after KSA. The Palestinian veto on the Islamic world's normalization with Israel seemed over at last.

Then came the Oct. 7 attacks. Muslim masses rallied emotionally behind Gaza, against Israel. The current Muslim popular sentiment is extremely anti-Israel, and some commentators have pronounced IMEC dead on arrival. While IMEC and Israel-KSA normalization may have been delayed, I firmly believe they will

materialize. Too many powerful parties are too deeply invested for it to fail.

In summary, IMEC represents staggering economic interests for all the involved parties, as well as the continuation of geopolitical realignments that began years ago – India realigning with the West and Israel, joined by a KSA and UAE inimical to radical Islam.

In this arena, China (which de-facto supports Hamas) is an anti-Western force that must be countered, as is the Progressive wing of President Biden's Democratic Party, which has rallied so shockingly for Hamas. If Israel-KSA normalization has been postponed, it may well happen under a Republican president.

Epilogue

I agree with our ambassador in Delhi, Naor Gilon, who stated that Indian love for Israel is "something I cannot fully explain."^[10] While the straightforward explanation posits the fascination of Hindu Nationalists with Israel as a paradigm of a high-functioning Religious-Nationalist state (contrary to secularist accusations of them creating "a Hindu Pakistan"), there does seem to be a deeper metaphysical connection, akin to our relationship with Evangelicals who view Jews as objects of veneration.

As Evangelical support is suffering a dramatic decline amongst young Americans^[11], one could only hope that Indian Nationalists fill the void, maybe even in the UN Security Council.

Although lacking the Biblical backdrop, and any in-depth knowledge of Israel, this newfound and unrealized strategic partnership must be fostered carefully. Israel must invest swift efforts to build a steady, direct, and mutual flow of information and expertise with India, unhindered by third parties such as the *New York Times* or the *Guardian*, who have become a steady source of hostile disinformation about both Israel and India. It is my hope that the recent peak of Indian interest in Israel may be leveraged to great effect in future times of peace.

^[1] OpIndia, 'Found your choice of interviewee sickening': Israel's Ambassador to India Naor Gilon slams 'The Hindu' for interviewing Hamas's Mousa Abu Marzouk', 10.31.23 <https://www.opindia.com/2023/10/israel-ambassador-to-india-naor-gilon-slams-the-hindu-for-interviewing-hamas-official-mousa-abu-marzouk/>

^[2] The New Arab, Dana Hourany, 'Why India is leading the pro-Israel disinformation campaign online' 10.24.23 <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/why-india-leading-pro-israel-disinformation-campaign?amp>

[3] For a full overview of the stances of the founders of India on Zionism see: Shimon Lev (Hebrew) (2018, גמא), שמעון לב, נהירין לנו שבילין דהודו

[4] For a magisterial overview of Hindu-Jewish advocacy partnerships by a writer who opposes both Hindu Nationalism and Zionism see: Jewish Currents, Aparna Gopalan, *The Hindu Nationalists using the Pro-Israel Playbook*,

28.6.23 <https://jewishcurrents.org/the-hindu-nationalists-using-the-pro-israel-playbook>

[5] The Indian Express, Vamsee Juluri, *Anti-Israel sentiment on American campuses is a warning for Hindus*,

11.1.23 <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/anti-israel-sentiment-on-american-campuses-is-a-warning-for-hindus-9007846/>

[6] Guido Steinberg, *Regional Power UAE: Abu Dhabi is no longer Saudi Arabia's Junior Partner*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) July 2020, Berlin, pp.12, 16 https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/research_papers/2020RP10_UAE_RegionalPower.pdf

[7] See: The New Mandala, Greg Fealy, *Selective moderation: Indonesia–UAE religious diplomacy*, 17.4.23 and the embedded links inside <https://www.newmandala.org/selective-moderation-indonesia-uae/>

[8] It has been pointed out that the ambitious 'Vision 2030' and other official documents have deliberately written the Wahabi legacy out of Saudi history and society See: 'Vision

2030' <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/>

[9] Jerusalem Post, Yeshaya Rosenman, *What are the Key Takeaways from the G-20 Summit in New Delhi?* 12.9.23 <https://www.jpost.com/international/article-758642>

[10] In an interview to ABP's Nayanima Basu, 18.10.23 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-IR1QEDtct4>

[11] Times of Israel, Jacob Magid, *Support for Israel among young US evangelical Christians drops sharply* — survey. 25.5.21 <https://www.timesofisrael.com/support-for-israel-among-young-us-evangelicals-drops-sharply-survey/>



Yeshaya Rosenman

Lover of Eastern Classics and politics: Jewish, Indian, Afghan, Persian, and a few others

Shlomo Avineri, dovish Israeli political philosopher and public intellectual, dies at 90

By Andrew Silow-Carroll



Shlomo Avineri at the Halifax International Security Forum in 2014. (Wikimedia Commons) Advertisement

Shlomo Avineri, a leading Israeli political philosopher, left-leaning former director-general of the country's foreign ministry and clear-eyed critic of both sides to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, died on Friday. He was 90.

Avineri was a longtime professor of political science at Hebrew University, where he produced important scholarship on Zionist thinkers Theodor Herzl and Moses Hess as well as the works of Karl Marx and G.W.F. Hegel. He applied his historical perspective as a frequent commentator in the Israeli and foreign media, and as a regular columnist for the Israeli daily Haaretz.

In 1975, the government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin appointed him as director-general of the foreign ministry, then headed by Yigal Allon. The right-wing Likud party, then in opposition, bitterly opposed the appointment of Avineri, who in 1971 edited a book that explored the possibility of negotiations with the Palestine Liberation Organization when such talks were still illegal. When Likud took office in 1977 with the election of Menachem Begin, Avineri submitted his resignation.

At the time, many in Israel thought Avineri would lead a dovish challenge to the humbled Labor party. "During his one year tenure at the Foreign Ministry he became a familiar face on Israeli television, to such a degree that aides to Allon complained that Avineri was upstaging his boss," the Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported in 1977.

Nevertheless, he returned to teaching at Hebrew University. He headed the political science department and devoted himself to researching the intellectual origins of Zionism. Even while producing more than a dozen books on 19th-century political thought, Avineri remained deeply engaged with current events in Israel. In a 2011 article for Haaretz, he urged Israelis to understand the Palestinian perspective, but also criticized the Palestinian leadership for denying essential facts about the founding of Israel.

The 1948 war should “not be taught as a battle between narratives. In the final analysis, there is a historical truth,” he wrote. “And without ignoring the suffering of the other, that is how such sensitive issues must be taught.”

Avineri was born Jerzy Wiener in Bielsko, Poland, in 1933. His family arrived in then-Palestine in 1939 and settled in Herzliya. He studied political science and history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he received his doctorate.

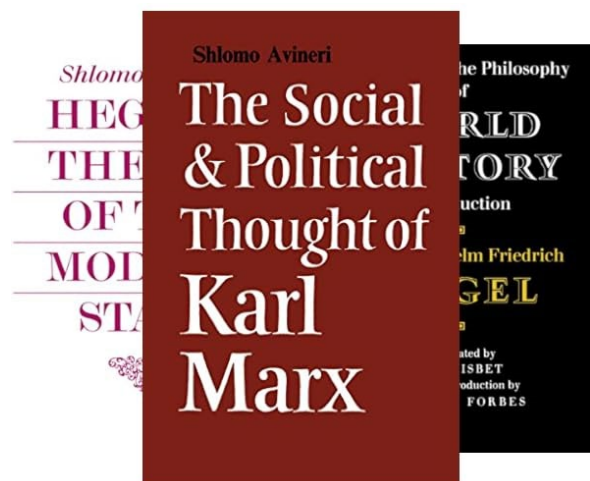
As a visiting scholar he held appointments at Yale, Cornell, the Cardozo School of Law in New York and Northwestern University, among others. He was also a visiting scholar at the Wilson Center, the Brookings Institution and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, he advised Eastern European nations about democratization, and in 1989 he served as an observer to the elections in Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

Avineri was awarded the Rubin Prize in 1969 for his research, the Naftali Prize in 1971 and the Present Tense Award from the American Jewish Committee in 1982. In 1996 he received the Israel Prize, the country’s highest honor, for political science.

Avineri is survived by his daughter Maayan. His wife Devora (Nadler) Avineri died in 2022.

JTA, December 4, 2023



Henry Kissinger, influential first Jewish secretary of state, dies at 100

By Ben Harris



Former United States Secretary of State Henry Kissinger visiting Fox Business Network at FOX Studios, Dec. 18, 2015, in New York City. (John Lamparski/Getty Images)

Henry Kissinger, the first Jewish secretary of state and the controversial mastermind of American foreign policy in the 1970s — orchestrating the U.S. opening to China, negotiating the end of the conflict in Vietnam and helping ease tensions with the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War — has died.

Kissinger died at his home in Connecticut on Wednesday at 100, according to a statement posted to his website. He had celebrated his 100th birthday in June with a party at the New York Public Library featuring luminaries from throughout his long career in politics and public affairs, including his current successor, Jewish Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Regarded as a brilliant diplomatic strategist, Kissinger was one of the most influential Jewish figures of the 20th century, leaving an enduring imprint on global politics as secretary of state and national security advisor to two U.S. presidents and as an informal advisor to several others. With his rumbling German accent, iconic black glasses and legendary charm, he was also a socialite and an unlikely 70s-era sex symbol, dating a string of movie stars and famously quipping that power is “the ultimate aphrodisiac.” Despite fleeing his native Germany as the Nazis rose to power in the 1930s and losing several members of his family in the Holocaust,

Kissinger evinced little sentimental attachment to Jewish interests, telling a friend in the 1970s that Judaism “has no significance for me,” according to Walter Isaacson’s 1992 biography. The negation of Kissinger’s Jewish identification may have been necessary for a man who rose higher in the executive branch than any Jew before him, and did so under a president, Richard Nixon, known to harbor deep anti-Jewish animus. Others saw it as emblematic of Kissinger’s Machiavellian streak and embrace of realpolitik, the hard-nosed approach to diplomacy that eschews moral concerns in favor of raw assessments of national interests. After Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir pressed Nixon in 1973 to address the plight of Soviet Jews, Kissinger issued a blunt dismissal.



Golda Meir and Henry Kissinger in Israel in 1974. (William Karel/Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images)

“The emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union is not an objective of American foreign policy,” Kissinger said, according to Oval Office recordings. “And if they put Jews into gas chambers in the Soviet Union, it is not an American concern. Maybe a humanitarian concern.”

After the recordings were released in 2010, Kissinger apologized for the gas chamber remark in a Washington Post op-ed but maintained his critics were taking it out of context. Kissinger went on to claim credit for the 100,000 Soviet Jews who emigrated thanks to Nixon’s “quiet diplomacy.”

Other elements of Kissinger’s record similarly suggest a more nuanced verdict on his approach to Jewish concerns. At the height of the Yom Kippur War in 1973, Nixon ordered an emergency airlift of resupplies to a struggling Israeli military, and memos from the period show Kissinger pushing back against the Pentagon’s reluctance to carry it out.

Later, Kissinger’s efforts to end the war gave birth to the term “shuttle diplomacy.”

Two years later, as Kissinger grew increasingly frustrated with Israeli intransigence in withdrawing from areas of the Sinai conquered in the 1967 war, he pushed Ford to conduct a

“reassessment” of relations with Israel. That precipitated a deep crisis between the White House and the Israeli government, but it ultimately yielded an Israeli-Egyptian agreement to resolve outstanding disputes peacefully, which in turned paved the way for the peace treaty that followed four years later.

“There’s no way you could tell the story of Camp David and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty without mentioning Kissinger and the 1973 shuttle diplomacy,” said historian Gil Troy. “If you want to buy into the tough love rather than the love-love approach to U.S.-Israeli relations, the best example would be the March 1975 reassessment.”



Secretary of State Henry Kissinger meeting with U.S. President Richard Nixon, White House, Washington, D.C., USA, photograph by Marion S. Trikosko, March 22, 1974.

(Photo by: Universal History Archive/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

Troy also records a less glowing incident about Kissinger in his 2013 book “Moynihan’s Moment.” As the U.S. Ambassador Daniel Patrick Moynihan waged a very public battle against the Zionism is racism resolution at the United Nations, Kissinger pushed back hard, fearing it would undermine his efforts to ease tensions with the Soviet Union, at one point grumbling, “We are conducting foreign policy. ... This is not a synagogue.” Nixon loved to rib Kissinger about his Jewish origins and his accent. The president later recalled that he told Meir they both had Jewish foreign ministers, referring to Kissinger and Abba Eban. “Yes, but mine speaks English,” Meir rejoined, to Nixon’s great amusement. After leaving office, Kissinger appeared to shed some of his reluctance to be perceived as Israel’s champion, stating in a 1977 speech that, “The security of Israel is a moral imperative for all free peoples.” In the decades that followed, he publicly defended Israeli interests, arguing that the absence of Mideast peace was the product of Arab intransigence and expressing skepticism of efforts to conclude a nuclear deal with Iran.

That in turn helped secure his embrace by the Jewish mainstream. In 2012, he received Israel's highest civilian honor from President Shimon Peres for his "significant contribution to the State of Israel and to humanity." In 2014, he received the Theodor Herzl Award from the World Jewish Congress. At the award presentation, WJC President Ronald Lauder recalled Kissinger telling Meir that he was an American first, secretary of state second and a Jew third. According to Lauder, Meir responded that was fine since Israelis read from right to left. "He was very insecure," said Troy. "The trauma of being a survivor, and the trauma of being an immigrant, of being an outsider. The 1970s was not a very Jewish decade. It was strange to have Jews in power, and strange to have Jews in Republican circles of power. Given his own ambivalence, and given the hostile environment that he was in, it's not surprising that he would be pretty screwy on the Jewish question." Kissinger's legacy remained deeply polarizing decades after he left public office. Despite winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1973 for his work ending the Vietnam War — a deeply controversial choice at the time — many regard Kissinger as a war criminal, responsible for the deaths of thousands of civilians in the U.S. bombing of Cambodia and myriad other human rights violations in Argentina, East Timor and elsewhere. His role in directing the controversial war in Vietnam dogged him for decades. After he left office in 1977, hundreds of students and faculty opposed Columbia University's decision to offer Kissinger an endowed chair, with one student demonstrator likening it to asking Charles Manson to teach religion. The author Christopher Hitchens called for Kissinger's indictment in a 2001 book, "The Trial of Henry Kissinger," which was later made into a film. On a 2001 trip to Paris, a French judge sought unsuccessfully to get Kissinger to testify in connection with the 1973 disappearance of five French nationals during the reign of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. Kissinger tried mightily to shape the public narrative of his years in office, penning multiple memoirs totaling thousands of pages. But even in his 90s, he could barely appear in public without inviting protests. In 2015, protestors disrupted a Senate hearing where Kissinger was testifying with chants that he should be arrested. And in 2016, Kissinger's address to the Nobel Institute's Peace Forum in Oslo was met with protests and a petition with 7,000 signatures demanding his arrest for violations of the Geneva Conventions. Heinz Alfred Kissinger was born in Bavaria, Germany in 1923. His father Louis was a schoolteacher and his mother Paula a homemaker. In 1938, the family fled the Nazis for London and

later New York, where they settled in a German Jewish immigrant community in Washington Heights. Kissinger studied accounting at City College before being drafted into the army in 1943, serving as an intelligence officer and seeing combat in the Battle of the Bulge. After the army, Kissinger enrolled at Harvard University, where he earned his bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees in political science. As a faculty member in the university's government department, Kissinger served as an advisor to multiple government agencies. In 1969, Kissinger was sworn in as Nixon's national security advisor. He became secretary of state in 1973 and continued to hold both positions following Nixon's resignation and Gerald Ford's assumption of the presidency. As the chief architect of U.S. foreign policy during the period, Kissinger pioneered the policy of detente, helping to defuse tensions with the Soviet Union and paving the way for Nixon's groundbreaking 1972 summit with Chinese leader Mao Zedong and the resumption of relations between the two nations, eventually leading to the full normalization of ties in 1979. In Vietnam, Kissinger and Nixon attempted to wind down the conflict by withdrawing American troops and supporting the South Vietnamese Army in its efforts to repel Communist forces. In support of that effort, Kissinger helped orchestrate a secret bombing campaign in Cambodia against Vietnamese Communist forces based there, killing tens of thousands. Kissinger left office with Jimmy Carter's election in 1976, but scarcely faded from view. He remained a fixture of the Washington scene, teaching at Georgetown, consulting for New York financial firms and delivering high-priced corporate lectures. In 1982, he founded Kissinger Associates, a secretive New York consulting firm that has advised major multinational corporations. Kissinger backed out of his appointment by President George W. Bush as chairman of the commission investigating the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks after Congress requested that he disclose his client list. Kissinger was a recipient of the 1977 Presidential Medal of Freedom. In 1980, he won a National Book Award for the first volume of his memoirs, "The White House Years." In 1995, he received an honorary knighthood from Queen Elizabeth. He was also the first person to be named an honorary member of the Harlem Globetrotters basketball team. Kissinger is survived by his wife, Nancy Maginnes; two children from his first marriage to Ann Fleischer, whom he divorced in 1964; and five grandchildren.

JTA, November 29, 2023

Masha Gessen will receive Hannah Arendt Prize after all, following controversy over Gaza essay

By Andrew Lapin



Masha Gessen speaks onstage at the 2022 CPJ International Press Freedom Awards at Glasshouses on November 17, 2022 in New York City. (Dimitrios Kambouris/Getty Images) Advertisement

The writer Masha Gessen will still receive a prestigious award named for Hannah Arendt, after the German foundation that administers the prize had initially said it would pull its support due to Gessen's recent writing on Gaza. Gessen, a Jewish writer for *The New Yorker* magazine, published an essay last week comparing the Gaza Strip to Nazi-era Jewish ghettos, sparking backlash from Jewish and pro-Israel activists in Germany. That led the Heinrich Böll Foundation to say that it would no longer support a ceremony for Gessen receiving the award named for Arendt, a 20th-century German Jewish thinker and author. But on Friday, the foundation told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that Gessen will still get the award, including 10,000 euros in prize money, and that the author should still be honored. "We want to make it very clear that we do not want to strip Masha Gessen of the award, or deny them the prize, and that we honor the relevance of their work," the foundation said in a statement. "Gessen deserves great merit for their unconditional commitment to democracy and to debating uncomfortable issues. We greatly appreciate Gessen's critical work, their

demonstrated passion for freedom and commitment to defy any autocratic tendencies." The award is given annually to political theorists who continue the philosophical tradition of Arendt. Gessen is a refugee from the former Soviet Union and the descendant of Holocaust survivors. They have been widely acclaimed for their writing on the Russia-Ukraine war and LGBTQ issues.

The foundation's initial objections, and those of the German city of Bremen that co-administers the prize, stemmed from a Dec. 9 *New Yorker* essay by Gessen entitled "In The Shadow Of The Holocaust." In the piece, Gessen critiqued modern German, Polish and Ukrainian approaches to Holocaust memory, and also castigated Israeli policy toward Gaza. "For the last seventeen years, Gaza has been a hyperdensely populated, impoverished, walled-in compound where only a small fraction of the population had the right to leave for even a short amount of time—in other words, a ghetto," Gessen wrote. "Not like the Jewish ghetto in Venice or an inner-city ghetto in America but like a Jewish ghetto in an Eastern European country occupied by Nazi Germany." They added: "The ghetto is being liquidated." Following the essay's publication, the German-Israeli Society's Bremen chapter criticized Gessen's comparison of Gaza to Jewish ghettos, which society chair Hermann Kuhn wrote could have "only one explanation: a deep-seated and fundamental negative prejudice against the Jewish state." Kuhn also took issue with Gessen's stance on Germany's approach to the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement against Israel, which the German government has defined as antisemitic.

In an open letter calling on the prize's administrators to refrain from honoring Gessen, the society wrote that giving them the award "would honor a person whose thinking is in clear contrast to Hannah Arendt's." Founding members of the prize also campaigned against Gessen receiving it due to their "statements about the Middle East conflict," in a letter quoted by the German newspaper *Die Zeit*.

Subsequently, Bremen's Senate announced it would be pulling out of a planned ceremony for the award, and the foundation said it would no longer sponsor it. But then it backtracked and attributed its decision to a lack of a venue for the ceremony. Later, on Friday, it said that it objected to Gessen's characterization of Gaza but that they should not be stripped of the award.

"We disagree with this statement, and fully reject it," the foundation said regarding Gessen's comparison of Gaza to a Nazi-era ghetto. "The award ceremony would not have been an appropriate place for an earnest dialogue on the culture of remembrance, which is why we are

trying to find another format with Masha Gessen in which a more substantive discussion can be had.”

The awards ceremony, originally scheduled for Friday, has been postponed to Saturday in light of the foundation’s departure, but will reportedly still be presented on a smaller scale. According to Gessen, it will also lack many of the trappings usually associated with the award, including a promised lecture at Bremen University.

Gessen did not respond to multiple JTA requests for comment, including about the foundation’s statement on Friday. They told Middle East Eye in an article published earlier Friday that the New Yorker essay, which quoted Arendt, accorded with Arendt’s writing and thought.

“Hannah Arendt wouldn’t have gotten the Hannah Arendt prize if you applied those kinds of criteria to it,” Gessen said. “She was very insistent on comparing the Israeli policies and Israeli ideologies to the Nazis. And her project was very much what I’m building on, which is you have to compare in order to identify dangerous similarities.”

In an interview prior to the prize controversy, Gessen told the same German paper that Arendt was a major inspiration for them. Gessen was also recently placed on a wanted list in Russia and accused by the Kremlin of spreading false information about the Russian Army, accusations which American journalism institutions have said are meritless.

The Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at the City University of New York, where Gessen teaches, said in a statement Monday, “We categorically reject the criminal investigation of Professor Gessen,” adding that Russia’s “persecution is part of the broader effort to stifle independent journalism.”

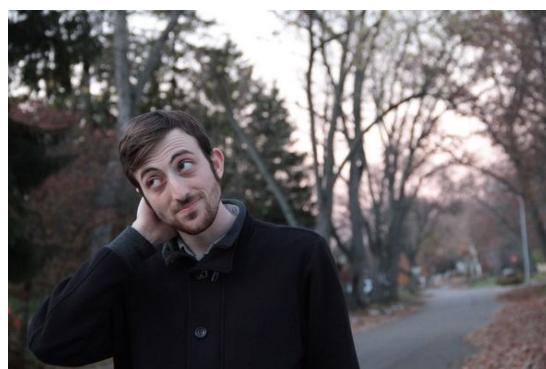
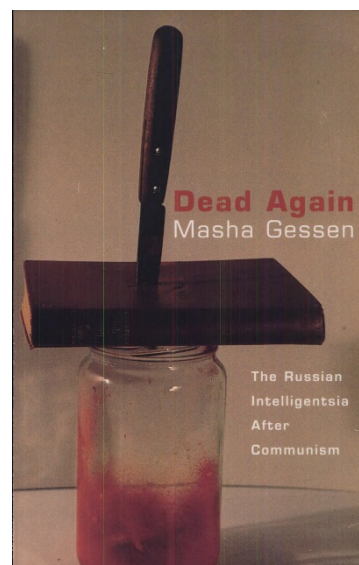
Controversy over responses to the Israel-Gaza war has caused turmoil across the world of arts and letters. Last month, a Jewish sponsor pulled out of the National Book Awards after learning that nominees planned to issue a statement criticizing Israel and calling for a ceasefire during the ceremony. The incident followed a controversy at the New York City Jewish cultural center 92NY in which it canceled a planned talk by an author who had signed a letter critical of Israel’s actions in Gaza, leading to resignations at the center; a similar sequence of events unfolded at the magazine Artforum.

Gessen’s Holocaust essay also criticizes Germany’s formal policy of considering the BDS movement antisemitic. They report that German officials have frequently gone after intellectuals and activists who invoke the campaign. Gessen also criticizes Israel’s own alliances with far-right factions in Germany and Poland and its refusal to overtly align with Ukraine in that country’s war against Russia.

At one point, the essay quotes Arendt’s own 1940s-era writings that compared future Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin’s political party to the Nazis. Germany’s policies combating antisemitism have been criticized by some left-leaning intellectuals for being overly harsh toward critics of Israel.

The Heinrich Böll Foundation is allied with Germany’s Green Party and has offices in Tel Aviv, Ramallah, Washington, D.C., and other locations. On its Israel website, the foundation backs a two-state solution, condemns the Hamas attacks and notes “the disastrous humanitarian situation in Gaza” and “the suffering and pain of the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.”

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A Tour of Hell With the Israeli Army in Gaza

The only way for Western journalists to access Gaza currently is through tours led by the Israeli military. Reporters encounter streams of refugees and rubble from the destruction, but to what extent does it really deepen their understanding of the war?

By Jonathan Stock

Gaza, on this particular morning, is still little more than a promise. We won't just be seeing rubble, the buildings, the tanks as has thus far been the case, says the press spokeswoman. No, today, for the first time, we'll be seeing people, real refugees, Palestinians. "Exciting," says the spokeswoman.

Three television teams are waiting in the mud next to her, along with a reporter from the *Guardian*. They have all put on their protective vests and are holding their helmets. One of the journalists passes around sunblock. It's hot in Gaza. Good thing it rained, says one of the camera operators, noting that it helps keep dust out of the lenses.

The journalists are waiting on the outskirts of the Be'eri kibbutz, so close to the Gaza Strip that children here used to have nightmares of terrorists attacking them in their bedrooms. Until October 7, when they actually did, slaughtering 108 people in the kibbutz, filming themselves as they did so. They even tortured pets. Be'eri has since become a base for the Israeli army. The fighting is still ongoing in Gaza; no cease-fire has yet been agreed to.

Doron Spielman arrives and begins shaking hands. He is wearing an assault rifle around his neck and has a can of Pepsi in his hand. Spielman is the press spokesman who will be coming along on the tour. He begins explaining what the group could encounter today: bombs, snipers, rockets, booby traps, gunfire. The journalists listen quietly. Three Israeli soldiers will be killed on this day, and two more injured. Spielman later says that his entire family plays a musical instrument, but his métier just happens to be words. He also says that he believes the Ark of the Covenant from the time of Moses will still be found.

Spielman, from Detroit, speaks slowly and clearly, pausing at all the right moments. Television broadcasters love his English. He says

that during the tour in the Gaza Strip, everyone will have to follow the instructions of a soldier who has received a medal for courage. The soldier, says Spielman, overpowered a terrorist with his bare hands. "We have Rambo," he says in summary. The soldier is from the Jerusalem Brigade, which fought in Jerusalem when Israel captured control of the Temple Mount and the Western Wall. He's now fighting in Gaza.

Meeting Rambo

The man they call Rambo is named Nitai Okashi. He is a captain, a small, friendly man who is quick with a smile. He doesn't talk much, and his voice is quiet, but when he does say something, his men spring into action. How was he able to eliminate the terrorist with his bare hands, the journalists want to know? Those are just stories, Okashi says modestly, adding that he loves his country. "In my heart," he says, "I'm not that brave."

The last tours were taken into Gaza in armored vehicles, but now, everyone is sitting in the beds of Humvees, protected from the outside world only by a mosquito net. The cameras are clicking as five vehicles move out, each armed with a machine gun affixed to the bed. Captain Okashi rides in the front.

"I can't guarantee that nothing will happen," he said before we boarded the vehicles. Up ahead, says one of the photographers, is the border fence to the Gaza Strip – where the terrorists streamed into Israel on the morning of October 7. Okashi now drives into Gaza through that the same blown-up fence.



Captain Nitai Okashi, aka "Rambo"
Foto: Ziv Koren / DER SPIEGE

Tel Aviv

"I grew up in Wedding," says Arye Shalicar, referring to the district of Berlin. "You always need a quick answer there." Like Spielman, Shalicar is an army press spokesman. He is primarily responsible for German journalists and politicians. He has led German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock around Israel and is on television almost daily. This morning, he had a

meeting with the Air Force over coffee in Tel Aviv, and now he is heading to the site of a massacre, a place where terrorists cut off the heads of children. He doesn't do much thinking on the two-hour drive to the south. He just keeps talking and always has something to say, no matter what the topic. "Arye," his assistant sometimes admonishes from the backseat, "you have to be careful."

Hardly ever has a war been as closely examined by the media as this one, hardly ever a conflict with such divergent interpretations, where opinions are so entrenched and uncompromising. Shalicar is a combatant in this war over perception and meaning. It is his job to tell the story over and over again that justifies the Israeli army's offensive in Gaza and to show the destruction wrought by Hamas in Israel. It is a story illustrated by bodies in refrigerated containers and by horrific video clips showing an old woman in a wheelchair being shot, her whimpering clearly audible; a man being beat to death with a garden hoe; piles of children's bodies. There is the folder full of abhorrent pictures of people burned to a crisp. Today, Shalicar has Uwe Becker along with him, the anti-Semitism commissioner for the German state of Hesse and former mayor of Frankfurt. "Uwe," says Shalicar, "a lovely man." Becker, who enjoys his walks along the banks of the Main River, is on his way to Kfar Asa today, one of the kibbutzim attacked by the terrorists. Becker says he is extremely unsettled by this conflict and also wants to visit places that are uncomfortable. The car winds its way through the Tel Aviv traffic down into the Negev Desert. Becker still needs a protective vest and a helmet. Kfar Asa can be seen from Gaza and there is still some gunfire in the area. Shalicar says that he was recently standing at the border when a journalist came up to him and said the Israelis should be happy that they still have homes, a luxury that those in Gaza don't have. "We don't build any tunnels," Shalicar responded. Ultimately, he says, people just don't know any more who is Ernie and who is Bert. Who is who, and who started it all, what is going on: Nobody understands it anymore. This is how he summarizes the Middle East conflict. For him, though, it's clear.

Raised in Berlin

His parents used to live in Iran but moved to Germany to escape the anti-Semitism back home. He grew up as a Jew in Wedding in Berlin. All he wanted to do was play soccer. But as the only Jew on his street, he was hated. So he fled the anti-Semitism to Israel. And now they're being attacked again. "What are we supposed to do?" he asks.

The sirens from Ashkelon can be heard inside the car – a rocket alarm somewhere. They have learned from history, he says, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. That's the mentality around here, he says. They went and got Adolf Eichmann back then, the Nazi responsible for planning the murder of 6 million Jews, he says, and they will also bring the Hamas leader to justice. Columns of smoke can be seen rising up in the distance. "There's a lot going on ahead of us," says Shalicar.

The problem, says Shalicar, is that people forget. To justify what's going on in Gaza, people like Shalicar have to keep the images alive. The efforts undertaken to do so can sometimes seem almost desperate – when yet another tour to yet another kibbutz is offered. The parachute journalists have already left. Few are still interested in pictures from the massacre. A stop is made at an army base near the kibbutz. The Armenian ambassador is there, along with a bus full of orthodox Jews. A last pitstop before heading to the site of the massacre. The ambassador pulls out a protective vest for the German reading "Israeli Foreign Ministry." He asks if it's a problem for Becker. "No problem," Becker responds. He carefully dons the helmet and pulls on the heavy vest. Kfar Asa is still in a military exclusion zone due to its proximity to the Gaza Strip. Normally, in his main job as state secretary for federal and European issues, Becker deals with things like air traffic problems and local political questions. But suddenly, he finds himself in a war zone.

"That Was Close"

A politician from the British House of Lords also pulls on a protective vest and takes a couple of selfies with his companions. His name is David Wolfson, the Baron of Tredegar. Last year, after Boris Johnson's Partygate scandal, he resigned from his position as undersecretary of state for justice. He's now here to take a closer look at the destroyed kibbutz. But before the tour starts, he wants to take a couple of photos with Uwe Becker, who doesn't seem to know quite what is going on.

The baron, the Armenian ambassador, the orthodox Jews and Uwe Becker then all drive together past blocks of concrete and flowering hibiscus before a yellow gate opens as they approach the destruction. Shalicar stops at a parking lot and walks through the gate into the burned-out ruins. He turns around. "What do you need?" he asks Becker.

The images from Israel and Gaza are also decisive for this war. The footage broadcast by television news channels influences decisions about aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean, shipments of medical supplies from Germany and

votes in the United Nations Security Council. Images of dying newborns from the Shifa Hospital in Gaza are set against images of the burned bodies of children from the kibbutz. Pictures of babies against pictures of babies.



The Jerusalem Brigade in Gaza City
Foto: Ziv Koren / DER SPIEGEL

The result is fragmented realities, rival narratives. People in the same room see different versions of the same war. Everyone tries to focus attention on their own suffering to generate international sympathy and support. In Palestinian schoolbooks, the 1972 attack on the Israelis at the Munich Olympics is played down and terrorists are portrayed as heroes. In Israeli schoolbooks, the Nakba – the displacement of 700,000 Arab Palestinians in 1948 – is not even mentioned. Only very few are prepared to see things through the lens of the other. And every distortion, every mistake is immediately magnified on a global scale.

But Israel finds itself facing a dilemma. The country's war cabinet has said the aim is to destroy Hamas. But the price for doing so keeps growing – with every civilian killed, with every child who dies. The Israeli army claims to adhere to the rules of war. And Israel has a right to defend itself for as long as rockets continue to be fired into the country from Gaza, for as long as Hamas and Islamic Jihad don't release all of the hostages they are holding. But international humanitarian law also requires that the number of casualties is proportionate to the military gain. Harm to civilians must be kept to a minimum. But what, exactly, does that mean: to a minimum?

Northern Gaza Strip

A black balloon, full of surveillance instruments, is hovering in the sky above Gaza. But that is the only visible sign of Israel. Dust patters down on the journalists as they try to keep their heads down. Dogs can be seen along the road, but no people. The unit from the Jerusalem Brigade heads through the second border fence as well. For a long time, this border was thought to be one

of the best-secured frontiers in the world, a barrier worth billions of dollars. Today, it is little more than a hole in a fence. Nobody says anything as the column crosses into the Gaza Strip.

Here, in the eastern part of Gaza, all is quiet. Even the dogs. You hear no birds, no yelling. The vehicles head through a territory that many people compare to a prison – the Gaza Strip is half as big as the German city of Hamburg, but it is home to 2.3 million people, almost half of them children. More than three-quarters of Gaza Strip residents have been displaced.

From the Humvee, it is only possible to see sand, debris, a dried-out riverbed and vehicle tracks. "They make their own roads here," says one of the military handlers accompanying the journalists. The passengers feel wind in their faces. The reporter from Sky News tries to record a segment but gives up. The convoy struggles up the sandy road, past an "IDF D9," the Monster, as they call it here – one of those grilled bulldozers that move out ahead of the advancing military because the armored blades can usually withstand the explosives.

Black Earth

A mound of gravel juts up in the distance, black earth. No trees grow around here, just a bit of grass. Otherwise, the ground is bare. After crossing the Wadi Gaza, the convoy passes the shot-up buildings of Juhor ad-Dik before stopping in front of a destroyed yellow building. Okashi's men jump out and secure the area, moving carefully. Something explodes not far away. The journalist from the *Guardian* says: "That was close."

The contents of the yellow building are piled up on the dusty ground out front. Scrawny cats prowl past children's jackets and a pair of pink women's shoes. A white dove is sitting improbably in front of the rubble. Next to it is the business card of a bridal fashion shop and English homework for schoolchildren: "W as in watch." The sentence "I want my scalps" has been scrawled in red on one of the walls inside. The journalist from the *Guardian* points to some chickens running around and says: "Details." Behind the house, in a former orange grove, Captain Okashi indicates a hole in the ground. All of the journalists look down at it. It is really little more than a small slit in the mud, perhaps large enough for a child to squeeze into. "An airshaft for the Hamas tunnel system," Spielman says. "The hostages are being held somewhere down there." The journalists look around at the dead landscape. Somewhere here below ground, 200 people are apparently being held, including a 10-month-old baby, a Holocaust survivor and a woman who was separated from her oxygen tank. Spielman says that at the moment, there is

nobody down below. The soldiers lower explosives in a plastic bag and cover the hole with an old metal door as the journalists take cover behind a pile of dirt. A short time later, a roar goes through the landscape, the door is blown into the air and a column of smoke pours out of the hole. Over there, Spielman says pointing behind the black smoke, is Gaza City. That's where the tour is heading next.



*The Jerusalem Brigade blowing up an air shaft
Foto: Ziv Koren / DER SPIEGEL*

In the Kfar Asa Kibbutz

Shalicar and Becker are waiting in the parking lot to be shown the Kfar Asa kibbutz. It is over 70 years old, founded by refugees. The people who used to live here say they believed in peace, and that the place was 99 percent paradise. But 1 percent hell. Becker was already here once this year, in May, and he begins looking around for things he might recognize. "The dogs and the children used to run around here," he says. Now, it's the body collectors. More than 50 people were murdered here, and more than a dozen taken hostage.

Back in May, Becker met the sister of a young man who was home with his parents in Kfar Asa on the morning of the attack. First, the father was shot to death, says Becker. The young man and his mother then fled into the bedroom, which also served as the safe room. Then, his mother was shot, and he curled up in his mother's blood under the bed and played dead for seven hours.

"Complete Destruction"

Becker begins walking through the snarl of the roads. Only occasionally can a flourishing garden be seen behind the wreckage of the homes. "It's pretty shocking," says Shalicar as he walks around wearing the green uniform of the Israeli army. "Look at this here, Uwe, complete destruction."

He walks past dog food, beneath metal roofing full of bullet holes, along bloody carpeting and

shot-up walls. Residents leaned mattresses against the broken windows in a desperate attempt to protect themselves.

"Then perhaps we should take a look inside the children's room," Shalicar suggests, "to get an impression." Becker pulls out a selfie-stick. Artillery fire from the Israeli army thunders not far away. The rocket siren suddenly sounds and a voice in Hebrew echoes over the sound system: "Red alert! Red alert!" Becker pauses briefly, continues running, staggers slightly, but manages to keep the selfie-stick in his hand. "Get away from the buildings, get down!" Shalicar shouts. The anti-Semitism commissioner for the state of Hesse and Shalicar are now squatting on the lawn under a palm tree as the voice continues emitting from the speakers. They duck down and quietly count to 15. Becker, wearing a blue shirt, looks up into the blue sky. Then comes the all-clear.



*Shalicar in the Kfar Asa kibbutz
Foto: Jonas Opperskalski / DER SPIEGEL*

Men from the group of Orthodox body collectors approach Becker, praying. One says that they just scraped out the remains of a girl from the ceiling, after more than five weeks. Becker nods.

In the back room, his team found the bodies of three adults and two children clutched together and burned to death on the floor of their safe room. In another home, he found a child of around six years of age with a knife embedded in its head.

"What company are you from?" the man asks Becker.

"The Hessian state governor's office," says Becker.

The Baron of Tredegar is looking for his glasses, which he has lost. Becker is carefully balancing over a garden gnome that is lying face down on the ground.

The Armenian ambassador shouts that they should perhaps hide behind a tree, noting that Gaza still has snipers who can hit targets from as far away as two kilometers.

Shalicar ignores his concerns.

You can see the gate from here through which the terrorists entered. Over there, says Shalicar, straight ahead, is Gaza. The neighbors.

In July 1942, during the Africa campaign, the Nazis formed a task force under the leadership of SS Obersturmbannführer Walther Rauff. After the conquest of Palestine, all the Jews living there were to be killed. That was the Nazi plan: to kill all the Jews living in what is today's Israel. A hadith is quoted in the founding charter of Hamas from 1988: "The Day of Judgment will not come about until Moslems fight the Jews and kill them. Then, the Jews will hide behind rocks and trees." The ideas are similar: The Jews of Israel must die, there must not be a state of Israel.

The Death of Ideas

It is often said these days that ideas cannot be killed, not even those of Hamas. It makes it sound as though there is no choice but to accept a situation in which terrorists rule a country. But ideas can also die or become so weak that they no longer have any effect. The Islamic State and the National Socialists ultimately had to be defeated militarily. The city of Mosul, with its 1.5 million inhabitants, was not liberated through negotiations – it took airstrikes and artillery, and Mosul's old town remains largely destroyed today. Very few people in Europe took to the streets back then to protest on behalf of the dead there, or the dead in Yemen.

Few other countries in the world must justify their very existence in the way that Israel does. Even in the face of absolute terror perpetrated by its enemies. During a press conference, a CNN presenter accused Israeli President Isaac Herzog of "collectively punishing" the Palestinians, while another journalist claimed that Israel is making the population accountable for the crimes of Hamas. Herzog replied angrily: "With all due respect, if you have a missile in your goddamn kitchen, and you want to shoot it at me, am I allowed to defend myself? That's the situation." There is something else that distinguishes this conflict.

People can flee from all the wars in the world. But that is not true of the Gaza Strip. There is nowhere for them to go.

Outside Gaza City

There's an uptick in the shelling. Captain Okashi says it's tank fire and anti-tank guided missiles. Along with heavy machine guns and artillery. Okashi is asked how he can fight and protect the humanitarian corridor at the same time. "Complicated," he replies. The buildings of Gaza City become visible. About 100 meters before reaching Salah al-Din

Road, the convoy comes to a stop on a rise. Down below, behind the mounds of earth pushed together by bulldozers, people emerge, real people, Palestinians. A soldier rams a metal sign into the mud, a marker for the photographers. The journalists aren't allowed to go beyond that point. Nor are they allowed to film to the side, where a Shin Bet checkpoint is located, the Israeli secret service.

Salah al-Din, the main arterial in Gaza, connects the border crossings from Israel to Egypt, and is one of the world's oldest roads, used as far back as in the times of the pharaohs.

"Carry On, Don't Push!"

Today, it is a hellish landscape of tangled rubble, with the road churned into mud by the tanks. Behind them, the multistory buildings have been bombed, with only skeletons remaining, the iron girders bent and huge concrete blocks broken out. A speed limit sign stands uselessly among the rubble. The announcement comes over the megaphone in Arabic. "Carry on, don't push! You, in the red T-shirt, to the side!"

Refugees are waiting down on the street. For the first time in six weeks, the people of Gaza are visible to Western journalists. There are a number of children among them, carrying small, pink backpacks, fathers carrying their sons. Women clutch handbags, men plastic bags. One man in a wheelchair is pushed laboriously across the rubble, a donkey standing behind him. Toddlers run around in the dust until their parents pick them up and take them in their arms. Gunfire can be heard in the distance, drones buzz overhead, a loud bang pierces the air every now and then. In the back, a man holds up a white flag. This corridor is open for a few hours a day.

"Can we talk to them?" an American journalist asks. Spielman glances down at the refugees from the rise and thinks for a moment before shaking his head. "Not now," he says.



Refugees in Gaza Strip
Foto: Ziv Koren / DER SPIEGEL

Looking for Hostages among the Refugees

The masses down below are silent. No one is screaming, no one is shouting. The people proceed slowly, their eyes fixed on the checkpoint. When the unit arrives, they look up at the soldiers in surprise, then away again. Refugees from Gaza will later report that they are afraid of being shot if they don't follow the rules, if they bend down or don't hold up their passports.

There are no cars to take them, fuel is too scarce. The people flee along the 45-kilometer road on foot, some by donkey. They report that there are burned-out cars along the road, in addition to corpses and fighting. The road has turned into hell. Up in the mud, Major Schraga has his rifle pointed toward the corridor. He says he sometimes thinks about the children down below. Above all, though, he says he's proud that the Israelis are securing an exit route for the refugees. He looks around and says: "I know it looks like there has been a lot of fighting here. And there has. But the responsibility lies with Hamas." Sometimes, an announcement in Hebrew is made: "If you can understand this, show yourself. You will be safe. Nobody will harm you." The announcements are born out of the hope that some of the hostages might be mixed in among the refugees. Thus far, though, says Schraga, they haven't found any.

Each of the soldiers has a different story to tell. Assaf says that he has four children and isn't seeking revenge. But because he wants peace, he must wage war. Okashi says that the Israeli military is only doing what is necessary. Referring to the refugees, the military photographer says: "The entire world is against us."

Her name is Eden, she says, like paradise. She says she had never before been to Gaza, and her parents never visited either. There is a "Little Gaza" in Israel, a place where they have built a model on a military base to practice house-to-house fighting. But aside from that and the television images, most soldiers know nothing about the place. For them, Gaza is a place where you die and where you kill, nothing more. A threat, a complicated place for which there is no solution.

"How Bad Is Bad?"

Most of the people in the refugee corridor have never been to Israel either. They don't know any Israelis, and they're afraid. Two sides stand facing each other, unable to understand one another.

"How bad is bad?" Spielman asks.

Up on the rise, a soldier from a different unit comes over, Ariel, who says that he once lived in

Gaza, in 1998, in a kibbutz south of here. Back then, U.S. President Bill Clinton opened the international airport in Gaza. The soldier says they used to grow tomatoes with help from the Arabs. Just before the soldiers jump back onto the convoy, he says: "We will live here again." There are parties for soldiers in Israel, with some walking around in a T-shirt that reads: "Beer in Gaza next year." Ariel says that property prices will be high in five years. After all, he notes, Gaza has a good beach.



Refugees hold up their identity documents
Foto: Ziv Koren / DER SPIEGEL

In the Kfar Asa Kibbutz

One of the body collectors says he remembers a house where they found a birthday cake on the table. He says he looked around and saw photos hanging on the fridge: the children, the adults. They were all dead.

"There are cribs, they had everything," says Shalicar's assistant. "Do you want to keep going?" he asks, "Or are you tired?" A few Israelis offer Uwe Becker sweets. No thanks, says Becker. The German broadcaster RTL calls and says they are standing in front of the other kibbutz where another massacre took place. There were so many massacres that people sometimes get confused. "Call the office," says Shalicar. Becker has to return to Germany soon to read to a kindergarten in North Hesse and to visit a gymnastics association. But he's still here. Among the burned-out buildings, Becker talks about the videos from the security cameras. Canadian journalists who have seen the footage say that two small boys can be seen fleeing with their father from the living room into the bunker in the courtyard of their home. A terrorist throws a grenade in after them, and the father's body topples out lifelessly. His body protected the children. A gunman takes the boys back into the house, goes to the fridge, offers the children water and then grabs a Coke. The older brother examines the younger one, who says the grenade has blinded him in one eye.



*Uwe Becker in Kfar Asa
Foto: Privat*

Beheaded with a Hoe

Becker proceeds, holding his selfie-stick in his hand like a weapon, as if using it to defend himself from the horrors here. At times, he goes into the destroyed buildings, climbing over the rubble. In the end, he films a black wall and says: "That's the truth." Behind him, Shalicar is on the phone with another broadcaster. "There's a bit of shelling here right now," he says.

When Becker later hands in the vest, the Armenian ambassador takes him aside and shows him the folder with the terrible pictures, as he describes them. Women who have been raped, he says, burned and decapitated babies. "Sandwich?" Shalicar asks. Later in the car, he says Baerbock didn't see the whole video, but that she did watch the one in which a man is beheaded with a garden hoe. The man struck many times, says Shalicar. "Because the hoe was dull," says Becker. Shalicar says Baerbock was nice. But some also show emotions, says his assistant.

Sometimes, Shalicar says, he asks students in Germany what they imagine when they hear the word "Jew." Four out of five answers have to do with dead Jews, he says, the fifth is about Israel, the wicked Jews.

He says he then asks if anyone knows a Jew personally and that the answer usually given by pupils is "no."

DER SPIEGEL 24.11.2023

*Inside story Analyst: 'He
mismanaged relations with most
Arab countries'*

PA's Abbas a 'liability' in planning for post-war Gaza, Arab officials say

*PA president can't be relied on to
take over after Hamas, Arab
diplomats tell ToI, highlighting
Ramallah's ineffective governance as
a factor in its current weakened state*



By Jacob Magid



*Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas
meets with Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez
and Belgium's Prime Minister Alexander De
Croo in the West Bank city Ramallah, on
Thursday, Nov. 23, 2023.
Alaa Badarneh/Pool via AP*

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has become a "liability," contributing to reluctance from Arab leaders to fully cooperate with the Biden administration's strategy for a

post-war Gaza, two Arab diplomats told The Times of Israel this week.

The US envisions the PA eventually returning to govern the coastal enclave currently ruled by Hamas, but the Arab diplomats expressed skepticism that the 87-year-old president plagued by longstanding corruption allegations is capable of reuniting the West Bank with Gaza under the PA.

Accordingly, Arab allies have been hesitant to embrace US proposals to contribute to an international force that would help manage Gaza's security for an interim period until the PA can take over, the diplomats said.

"There is not a lot of hope that this day could ever come under Abu Mazen," the first Arab diplomat said, referring to Abbas.

Certainly, the diplomats asserted that much of Abbas's weakness was the doing of Israel, pointing to longstanding policies in the West Bank implemented by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's successive governments they said systematically weakened the PA over the past 15 years.

And the second diplomat noted that Netanyahu's continued "rejectionist" approach regarding post-war Gaza planning is further contributing to the chilly Arab response to the US proposals.



Landscapers work beneath a billboard depicting Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas wearing a Hamas headband, in Tel Aviv, Israel, Thursday, Nov. 23, 2023. AP/Oded Balilty

However, both Arab diplomats said the onus will be on Abbas to prove that he is serious and capable of reuniting Gaza and the West Bank, before their governments agree to help pave the way for the PA's return to the Strip.

The pair of diplomats, representing separate countries, spoke to The Times of Israel on condition of anonymity, but willingness to voice such criticism at all is exceedingly rare, particularly in the midst of a war when Arab governments are working to highlight their solidarity with the Palestinian cause.

Neither diplomat is from Jordan, where Abbas is viewed more favorably, but both diplomats insisted that their reservations regarding the PA president are shared by other US allies in the region and have been for some time.

For his part, Abbas has told the US that the PA will not return to Gaza "on an Israeli tank," and is only prepared to govern the Strip if it's in the context of a broader diplomatic initiative that leads to a two-state solution.



Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, right, meets with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken at his office in the West Bank city of Ramallah, Thursday, Nov. 30, 2023.

AP Photo/Nasser Nasser, Pool

US President Joe Biden has said he envisions the PA being "revitalized" before its responsibilities are extended to Gaza. He has not elaborated on what this means, but a former US official familiar with the matter told The Times of Israel this week that Washington seeks new faces at the top of the leadership in addition to "significant governance reforms."

Both of these aims were welcomed by the two Arab diplomats. Neither went as far as to call for Abbas's ouster, but the first diplomat agreed with the second's characterization of the PA president as a "liability."

Abbas hasn't held a presidential election since 2005 and a recent poll found that roughly 85 percent of Palestinians want him to resign.

The diplomats argued that more than anything, what keeps their capitals at arm's length from the Biden administration's post-war planning is an overwhelming feeling that it is somewhat futile as long as the fighting continues, given that there isn't a consensus in the Arab world that Israel will be able to remove Hamas entirely from the equation.

"What happens next? How can we even entertain what will happen next?" Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said earlier this month.



*Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, right, greets Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, center, and King Abdullah II of Jordan, during a conference at the Arab League headquarters in Cairo, Egypt, Sunday, Feb. 12, 2023.
AP Photo/Amr Nabil*

Burned bridges

Explaining the position voiced by the two diplomats, former PA official and Abbas adviser Ghaith al-Omari pointed to the way his old boss “mismanaged relations with most Arab countries.”

Al-Omari said Abbas had “refused to engage positively” with several Egyptian initiatives aimed at reconciling the PA president’s Fatah movement with Hamas in recent years, greatly angering Cairo and President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi in particular.

Abbas’s poor ties with some of the Gulf countries, namely the UAE, are more well known, with the PA leader resenting Abu Dhabi’s hosting of his exiled PA rival Mahmoud Dahlan in addition to the Emirati decision to normalize ties with Israel in 2020.

“The weakened state of the PA that we see today happened completely under Abu Mazen’s watch, and he is seen as a leader who is ineffective and [one who expects] that others will do the job for him,” said al-Omari, who is currently a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.



UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, center, with Palestinian Authority leader

Mahmoud Abbas, left, and Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh after the opening session of the Arab Summit in Riyadh, March 28, 2007.
(AP Photo/Awad Awad, Pool)

“Many of those Arab leaders are very aware of the Israeli policies that weaken the PA, but they also believe that there’s much that the PA could have done internally in terms of governance and in terms of advancing the Palestinian interests in a more proactive manner,” he continued.

Al-Omari agreed that there were other steps short of Abbas’s removal that could be taken to regain Arab leaders’ trust in the PA.

One could be the appointment of an empowered prime minister to run the PA’s day-to-day operations and “set the diplomatic tone for the Palestinians,” al-Omari said, adding that another approach would be to revamp the Fatah party — currently dominated by Abbas loyalists — in a manner that allows new leaders to emerge.

Advertisement

The former Abbas aide said that Arab states likely took note of a meeting last week in Doha between Dahlan’s deputy Samir Masharawi and another Abbas rival Nasser al-Qidwa with Hamas leaders Ismail Haniyeh and Kahled Mashaal.

The sit-down came as Dahlan has increased his media presence since the war, leading to speculation that he is interested in returning to Palestinian politics after over a decade in exile.

Al-Omari clarified that Israel’s regional neighbors aren’t necessarily looking to throw their support behind Dahlan or any specific individual but “are watching closely to see which Palestinian leader asserts himself.”

The Times of Israel, 30 November 2023



Palestinians deserve a state despite Hamas, not because of it

By Harry William Baumgarten



Palestinians deserve a state despite Hamas, not because of it © Provided by The Hill

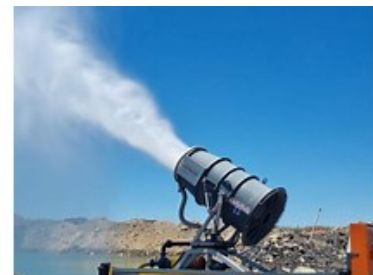
Following Hamas's horrific terrorist attack against border communities in Israel on Oct. 7, some people on the far left have sought to politicize this tragedy by arguing that the cold-blooded murder of more than 1,000 Israelis justifies recognition of a Palestinian state. This argument, best articulated by Daoud Kuttab in the Washington Post, posits that Israel's structural violence in the form of settlements and defensive measures warrant a violent backlash, apparently without any limit, that is better addressed with recognition rather than punishment. Kuttab is not the only one making this backwards argument. Rather, it manifests itself in one form or another in list serves, social media posts and rallies around the world. This pro-Hamas argument is both dangerous and complete hogwash. Palestinians deserve a state despite Hamas's war crimes, not because of them. Predicating recognition on terrorism, rather than state-building does nothing to advance the situation of Palestinians or Israelis. Instead, it sidelines diplomats, peace activists and moderates across the region who have eschewed violence in favor of the far braver tasks of state building and diplomacy, which are the only ways to bring about a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The argument that Hamas's terrorist attack justifies recognition of a Palestinian state also turns a blind eye toward Hamas's charter, history and immoral values. Hamas was founded in the late 1980s as an offshoot of the Muslim

Brotherhood. The preamble to its charter states that "Israel will be established and will stay established until Islam nullifies it as it nullified what was before it."

Such wording leaves no room for interpretation, nor does it solely fault Israel's post-1967 territorial expansion. Hamas has acted on its charter, killing thousands of innocent civilians over the course of decades. Some of its victims have been rival Fatah members, whom Hamas killed to consolidate power following its only election more than 15 years ago.

This pro-Hamas argument further ignores decades of peace negotiations, jumping to the conclusion that violence is the only solution. Yet, Israel and the Palestinian Authority have made numerous attempts to resolve the conflict. At times, these involved sizeable offers of land for peace. To be sure, more could have been desired at times, but such is how negotiations often operate. This is very different from a reality in which no credible offer was ever on the table.

Another fatal flaw among those who seek to justify Hamas's terrorism is that they deny Israel's right to exist. Israel is the successor state to an ancient kingdom that was driven away by force. It has been recognized by the international community and fits all the criteria for a modern nation state. Without mutual recognition, there can be no peace.



Fog Cannon Water Evaporation

Finally, the pro-Hamas far left provides no prospective agenda, other than justifying brutal violence against civilians. It offers no vision for the future nor a viable path toward achieving better lives. The conflict will not resolve itself overnight. However, pretending that targeted violence against civilians is the answer relegates those who have viable non-violent solutions to the margins and makes prospects for peace all the more distant.

Harry William Baumgarten previously served as legislative director and counsel to members of Congress, where he advised on foreign policy. The views expressed here are his own and do not necessarily represent those of any other party.

The Hill Opinion Contributor

As Israel fights Hamas, activists on the right are calling to rebuild settlements in Gaza

By Eliyahu Freedman



A view of the synagogue in Nitzan B, a Gaza border community established to house Israeli settlers evacuated from Gaza in 2005. (Eliyahu Freedman)

Benjamin Netanyahu has largely avoided face-to-face meetings with ordinary Israeli citizens. One exception occurred in mid-November, when the Israeli prime minister met with a group of Israelis evacuated from the Gaza border, including former Gaza Strip settlers who presented him with a request: to return to their uprooted homes once Israel's war with Hamas was over.

"The Gaza Strip won't let us rest, the land of Israel won't let us rest until the people of Israel return to settle it, and only then will it flourish" one of the participants, Zehorit Cohen, told Netanyahu in a video clip that has since circulated online. Cohen is a former resident of the Gaza bloc of settlements, known as Gush Katif.

"It has nothing to do with strategy or security or economics or anything," she said. "We need to go back there because it's the land of Israel, and the land of Israel calls to us."

Israel evacuated 8,000 settlers and all of its troops from Gaza in 2005, a withdrawal that split Israeli society and that, for the uprooted settlers, still festers as an open wound. Now, as the Israeli military reconquers broad swaths of the coastal territory in its campaign to destroy Hamas, former Gush Katif residents and other settler leaders are standing at the vanguard of mounting calls to rebuild the evacuated settlements.

"Today, after this thing, everyone understands that settlements equal security, and where there aren't settlements, there's terror, massacre and Holocaust," Yossi Dagan, the head of the Samaria Regional Council of settlements in the northern West Bank, said in a recent interview on Israeli Channel 14, a right-wing station.

Jewish resettlement inside Gaza has no international support and is understood by even some right-wing lawmakers to be inadvisable. But Dagan, along with settler activist Daniella Weiss, is leading a coalition of right-wing groups using the current war as a springboard to intensify a push for a return to Gush Katif.

Their coalition recently held a conference that drew some 200 people and at least one lawmaker, according to Haaretz. The group has already drawn up a list of families who have committed to relocating to a future resettlement project in Gaza.

"The true victory over Hamas will be to take territory back and establish settlements," Dagan said.

Politicians on the far right have long called for reestablishing Gush Katif, including an Israeli government minister who did so earlier this year. Now, the war has brought those demands squarely into the mainstream.

A mid-November poll of Israel's Channel 12 News found that 44% of Israelis are in favor of resettling Gush Katif, with 39% opposed and 17% "unsure." A Hebrew University poll in December found that enthusiasm had declined, with 33% in favor of settlement in Gaza while 55% are opposed.

In the international arena, however, and even among Israel's right-wing leadership, the idea appears to be a non-starter. Netanyahu has denounced the 2005 withdrawal from Gaza, called the disengagement, but he voted for it as a member of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's government at the time. While he has said Israeli troops will remain in Gaza for the foreseeable future, he called the resettlement of Gush Katif "not a realistic objective" of the war against Hamas.

And President Joe Biden called a potential reoccupation of Gaza a "big mistake" in an October "60 Minutes" interview. In March, his administration rebuked Netanyahu's government for repealing a portion of the 2005 disengagement law.

Former Israeli right-wing officials have also criticized the movement to return to Gush Katif. Yonatan Bashi, who was one of the leading officials overseeing the implementation of the 2005 Gaza withdrawal, said trying to settle several thousand Israelis in a territory inhabited by millions of Palestinians would be an error. "From the beginning, the idea that we went to live in the Gaza Strip was a big mistake, not

because of ideology but because there were 1.6 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip versus 7,000 or 8,000 Jews,” Bashi told Israel National News last month, estimating 2005 population figures. “Whoever thought our problem with the strip was geographical was wrong then and is wrong now.”

Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who took a lead role in advocating for the disengagement plan and later became an outspoken advocate of territorial withdrawal, said the idea that settlements in Gaza provide security is “utter nonsense.”

“Had we remained in Gush Katif, we would have been in the kishkes of Gaza, and everything would have happened years ago,” he said, using the Yiddish word for guts. Instead, he blames the Oct. 7 attacks on reports that the army diverted troops from the Gaza border to the West Bank leading up to the attack.

“If our soldiers had stayed next to the border and were not ... protecting the settlers so they can attack Palestinians in the West Bank and destroy their olive groves, what happened would not have occurred,” said Olmert.

While Netanyahu threw cold water on resettling Gaza, some politicians in his government support the idea. Amichai Chikli, the Diaspora affairs minister, said resettlement shouldn’t be “ruled out.” And Gideon Saar, a Netanyahu rival who also opposes Palestinian statehood, wrote in a recent op-ed, “We need to strengthen Jewish settlement across the Land of Israel, especially on battle lines. We need to return to the classic Zionist approach of spreading out our population instead of shrinking.”

Far-right Heritage Minister Amichai Eliyahu recently told Israel’s public broadcaster, “I want to return and establish settlements in the strip, but I’m not sure now is the time to do it.”

Many former Gush Katif residents and their ideological supporters feel themselves pulled back toward Gaza by trauma from a home that was lost — one that is connected to a historical right-wing Zionist mandate to control the entire land of Israel. For years after the disengagement, many of the evacuated settlers lived in temporary housing. Some communities have reconstituted themselves elsewhere. The former Gush Katif settlers generally refer to the withdrawal as an “expulsion.”

At the Gush Katif Heritage Center in Nitzan B, a southern Israeli town established to house evacuated settlers, there is a constant mourning over what was lost and an unfading desire for a return to Gush Katif.

“Here is a memorial — not a museum for something that was and is finished, but a memorial for what continues to live in our hearts” said Shimon Samson, a 71-year old guide at the center who lived in the small Gush Katif

settlement of Gadid beginning in 1980, a decade after the Gaza settlements were founded. Samson pointed to a historical Jewish presence in the ancient city of Gaza that dates back centuries, as exemplified by a replica mosaic of King David, on display by the center’s entrance, based on an original discovered in a fifth-century Gazan synagogue in 1965, shortly before Gaza was conquered by Israel from Egypt in the 1967 Six Day War.

According to Samson, approximately 40 of the Israelis killed in the Oct. 7 attack were family members of the first generation of Gush Katif settlers, who left their farms in the Gaza border region to receive government-sponsored land inside Gaza.

“At first there were no problems,” recalled Samson nostalgically of the initial period of Israeli settlement in Gaza. He recalled local rabbis permitting eating fresh fish on the beachfront in Gaza City and even dining at a halal falafel stand.

The situation deteriorated with the advent of the first intifada in 1987. As part of the 1993 Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, the Palestinian Authority was given control over much of Gaza including the cities and refugee camps now seeing fierce battles. Violence escalated again during the second intifada two decades ago. All told, the memorial center lists 42 civilians — not including soldiers — who were killed in terror attacks across Gush Katif’s history. Samson said another 40 community members died prematurely after the “expulsion” in 2005 from “depression, heart attack and other ailments caused by losing millions of dollars and their homes,” including two suicides. Israeli researchers found that former Gush Katif residents were at an increased risk of diabetes and hypertension.

A Haaretz report from 2005 found that 85 members of Israel’s security forces were killed in Gaza since the start of the second intifada in 2000, while 2,600 Palestinians were killed in total in the territory between 1967 and 2005. Many more Palestinians have been killed in the repeated rounds of fighting between Israel and Hamas, which took control of Gaza in 2007 after a brief civil war with a rival Palestinian faction.

Nadin Cohen, a 70-year old immigrant from France who was evacuated from Gush Katif, now has a home in Nitzan B lined with photos of seaside vistas from her old home. Samson and Cohen both say they are too old to consider uprooting themselves again, but they both consider their grandchildren among the “many youths who are interested in settling Gush Katif once again,” Cohen said.

While such a return may seem unrealistic, evacuated settlers still have faith that it can

happen. Limor Son Har-Melech, a far-right lawmaker who was evacuated from a northern West Bank settlement as part of the 2005 withdrawal, quoted the Bible while expressing her belief that the residents of Gush Katif will yet return.

"We are a nation of God. This is the land that the creator of the world gave us," she said in a video she posted to social media last week. "We just need to believe in this. If we just believe in this, God willing, we will win."

Nitzan B, Israel (JTA) — Since Oct. 7, December 18, 2023

Israel's most-wanted man



*Yahya Sinwar has reportedly demanded that senior Hamas figures are among those to be freed in any future deal - Alamy©
Provided by The Telegraph*

By Nataliya Vasilyeva

Hamas's de-facto leader has said he will only agree to a new truce if it guarantees the release of all Palestinian prisoners being held in Israeli jails, according to reports.

Al Arabi Al Jadidi, a Qatari newspaper, on Thursday quoted an unnamed Egyptian official saying the "leadership of Hamas" had rejected Israel's offer of a temporary truce in exchange for the release of several dozen Israeli hostages.

Yahya Sinwar, Hamas's leader in Gaza, insisted on a lasting ceasefire and all Palestinian prisoners being released, including several high-profile figures, the newspaper reported.

Sinwar also reportedly demanded that Israel halt its combat operations in Gaza before the deal goes into effect.

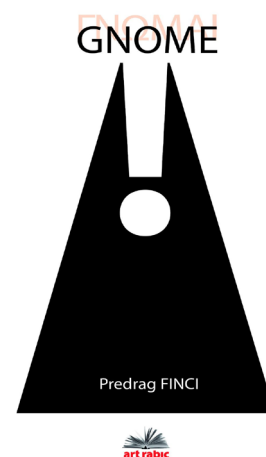
Hamas later on Thursday said it would reject any deals to free more hostages until Israel stops bombing Gaza.

"If Israel wants its prisoners alive, then it has no other options but to stop the aggression and the war," said Abu Obeida, a spokesman for Hamas's military wing. (*Passage*)

Predrag Finci's poem "A View Through the Window"

By Jasna Samic

Predrag Finci's poem "A View Through the Window", (from the recently published book "Gnomes", Art Rabic, Sarajevo, 2023), which, in my opinion, could be titled simply "A House", or even "A Solitary House", tells a long, unfinished story to each of us, to every stranger, past or present one, former or future exiled one. It brilliantly describes an entire city, a foreign city, but also the experience of living abroad, describing with apparently economical words the life of London's peripheries. Only a stranger, with his sharpened eye, can see what the poet notices through that solitary house, looking through the darkness, into its twilight and its brief awakening. There is a visible alienation. Profound loneliness emanates from it, and thus, from the entire quarter or a suburb of London. The House sings about its solitude, about the loneliness of the one who contemplates it, and about the silence that seems to sing, almost ringing from the House.



The silence echoes in us as we watch it together with its author. In the poem, not only the entire life of the inhabitants of a London's peripheries is expressed but also that of every suburb in major cities around the world. The impression does not come from the fact that its author has been living for a long time in exile but because he does not observe this house only with the eyes of an ordinary neighbor, but with that of a different neighbor, who will always see more than what can be seen by a local neighbor, what the local resident of the neighborhood will never register. The house is an ode to foreignness and

melancholy. The House cornerwise from Predrag irresistibly revokes melancholic paintings by Edward Hopper, who was well known for drawing loneliness, the desolation of the environment, as well as the desert inside a man. And who could say that deep sorrow does not emanate equally from the House and the poet?

Predrag Finci, View through the window

Diagonally, seen from my place, resides a house

Quiet, dignified,
Large, beautiful, classy,

Close, slightly repugnant
The silence bursts forth from it.

Once, a child's cry emerged,
once, *Aida* briefly resonated,
then immediately fell silent.

In the evening, its windows brighten,
before falling asleep, behind the curtains, rooms
discreetly appear,
then everything darkens, sinks into the night.

In the morning, cars discreetly depart,
disappear at the top of the street,
Then, no one!

Only at noon the mailman
places letters in front of the door,
rings the bell, then leaves without a signature.

As daylight wanes, the lights come on,
Only then, a barely visible hand,
picks up the letters which awaited in it.



Jasna Šamić



Predrag Finci

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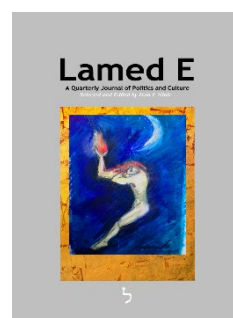
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