

Supporting Israel in war – and in peace

It's not accidental that the statements of Bezalel Smotrich, Itamar Ben-Gvir, and others in Benjamin Netanyahu's far right government who agree with them have become Exhibit A for the case now being made in the International Court of Justice that charges Israel's responses to Hamas's murderous October 7 attacks on Israelis constitute acts of "genocide."

In South Africa's otherwise dubious claim that Israeli military tactics against Hamas meet the high bar intentionally set by the relevant Convention for a finding of this singular, monstrous crime, the frequency of such reprehensible statements by Israeli leaders — in favor of "thinning" the number of Gazans, "flattening Gaza," creating a new "Nakba" (disaster) for Palestinians, and even potentially dropping an atomic bomb, already have been particularly damaging to Israel in the court of world public opinion, if not yet finally at The Hague tribunal.

Of course, Israel could readily and convincingly rebut such charges by a change in its actions on the ground in Gaza in the direction that President Biden has urged, especially regarding the delivery of aid. Two U.S. senators who sit on the Foreign Relations Committee recently visited Jordan, Egypt, and the Rafah crossing into Gaza, and reported the most disturbing situation regarding the aid. Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) remarked that he saw with own eyes the most basic items, like water filtration systems, collecting dust in a border warehouse after rejections by the Israeli screeners for no apparent reason. "And once a truck is rejected, the entire truck is rejected," he noted.

The senator also reported that all the responsible NGOs working to get the aid into Palestinian civilians' hands told him they've "never seen a worse process for assuring the safety" of the deliveries. He also referred to the high risk of outbreaks of cholera and other disease. Van Hollen says that based on what he saw, he believes that the roadblocks to the necessary aid are the result of political decisions by the Netanyahu coalition.

More than 100 days since the Hamas attack on Israel and the outbreak of the war, and with the possibility of mass starvation by Gazans close at hand, only between 100 and 150 aid trucks a day have been seen to make it into the enclave, compared to a normal 500 trucks before the war and the intense crisis. For the world's Jews, who have been on the forefront of humanitarian efforts during

battles against famine and disease during other world conflicts, lending any support to this type of obstruction by any government is well beyond a shanda.

After Hamas itself and its backers in Iran, the heaviest responsibility for the current war lies with Israel's two-decades-in-office prime minister, who admitted to members of his Likud Party in 2019 that the billions in money transfers from Qatar to Hamas he approved were "part of the strategy to divide the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank" and forestall the possibility of an international agreement that might lead to a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Unfortunately, Netanyahu hasn't given up on the ideas underlying this disastrously failed policy. On January 18, the prime minister flatly and publicly rejected Secretary of State Anthony Blinken's message on the urgent need for a strategy for the day after the fighting if Palestinian sovereignty would be a key part of the regional program for security of all states.

What are Netanyahu and the far right of his coalition that is exercising its power offering Israelis other than endless war accompanied by toxic fantasies? New settlements to defend and annexation of territory? The crazy delusion, openly advocated by some in the coalition, that Palestinians in Gaza, the majority of whom are now deprived of their homes by the bombing campaign, will somehow submit to mass expulsions?

There is nonetheless some good news. Saudi Arabian officials are saying that they are "absolutely" still interested in normalization with Israel, the Times of Israel reported. The context, of course, is the day-after perspective from the Israelis, which allows for a revitalized Palestinian Authority that grows to take responsibility for Gaza and obtains a pathway to statehood.

Yes, this will require some very new thinking within Israel and among us Jewish Americans who count ourselves as its supporters. Without any doubt, it will take a difficult slog to get past these dismal days to such a hopeful future. And with the distinct possibility of further escalations to the Israel-Hamas war, the time available to turn a corner is highly limited.

"Turn! Turn! Turn! ... There is a time for every purpose under Heaven," wrote folk singer Pete Seeger, taking his language from the book of Ecclesiastes. "A time of war," the song continued. And then, urgently, "A time for peace, I swear it's not too late."



Mark Lurinsky

Bibi's albatross

The recent news story on the exhumation of the graves in Gaza, purportedly to find hostage remains, gave me the chills. The macabre images of 16 torn up cemeteries — headstones smashed and graves left opened and disheveled — pounded my head as if someone had taken a hatchet and smashed me to smithereens. Why did I feel this way, when the visceral memories of Hamas's rape, murder, and mutilation of Israeli civilians in the October 7 massacre remain so fresh in my mind? Certainly I was short on sympathy, because just days before the graveyard story made headlines, Hamas released sadistic videos of the bodies of two male hostages purportedly killed in Israeli airstrikes over Gaza, without even confirming whether or not they had died.

The cemetery story, however, which pointed to the damage to gravesites since the start of Israel's counteroffensive following the Hamas rampage in southern Israel, gave me pause to think. I was concerned that since disinterment is a war crime, these actions would add fodder to the International Court of Justice's inquest into Israel's alleged genocidal war conduct, launched earlier this month at the



Amy Neustein, Ph.D.

Letters

No place for blasphemy

During this extremely difficult period since October 7th, the Jewish nation has been united in prayer, charity and good deeds.

Which is why when one of our own, a "rabbi" / public figure, attempts to weaken our unity by maliciously defaming a group of us with inaccurate information, and encouraging us away from God in a distorted and very public way, I see it as antisemitic and blasphemous ("Where was God on October 7?" January 12). I feel that his opinions and beliefs have no place in a Jewish newspaper, especially in times like these.

Marci Spiro
Teaneck

Call it by name — antisemitism

Let's skip the charade and the construction of facades to hide the antisemitism that pervades much of the fabric nationally within the U.S. and globally. To honestly entitle a "Systemic Racism," within the U.S., one must use the term, "Anti-Semitism." It is present in media portrayals of Jews and Israel, within the world of academia from pre-K to post graduate studies, and politically from school board meetings to the halls of Congress and all areas between.

"NEVER AGAIN" has become an almost meaningless half phrase. It has become, more succinctly, "NEVER AGAIN UNTIL THE NEXT TIME." Hate crimes against Jews and their supporters have become accepted as part of our "freedoms." The accusations of genocide, indiscriminate murders, and war crimes are printed, claimed, and accepted as truths.

The "Pro-Palestinian Rallies" are not pro-Palestinian, they are Pro-Hamas, a return to the 1930s rallies in support of Hitler and his policies. We have the repeated whitewashing of the term, "From the river to the sea," denying that it is the call for the eradication of the State of Israel and those infidels living within it, unless they accept living as Dhimmis. Who is organizing and financing these rallies/riots? Why do our law enforcement agencies allow them to take place, when they break the law?

We have anti-Semitism alive and well within the halls of

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request of South Africa as the petitioning party. Sadly, my foreboding centered on something much deeper than the tactical aspects of war and Israel's ability to defend itself before the world court. This is because the desecration of cemeteries, paradoxically, adumbrates messianic visions among the far right. In fact, Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir, both far-right ideologues in Netanyahu's cabinet, have never tried to hide their wish to exile the Palestinians from Gaza. In their thinking, such an expulsion of the Palestinian population would allow Israel to return to its biblical borders. Then they would rebuild Gaza solely with Jewish inhabitants.

Herein lies the danger.

It is impossible to carry out a messianic game plan without a strict adherence to the doctrine of "by any means necessary."

Let us review the events in the past months. The massive displacement of the Gazans, many of whom had to uproot themselves multiple times in the course of just weeks, naturally causes geographic disorientation for the displaced resident. However, the destruction of habitats, schools, and hospitals, along with the disruption in the supply of electricity, water, food, fuel, and internet and phone access, quickly plunges a population into desolation and despair. In such a state, wherein basic sustenance is scarce, many will cling to

spiritual imagery and symbols. Cemeteries serve that purpose, for they provide psychological relief when physical relief is not forthcoming. In providing a place to inter the dead, graveyards symbolize the last vestige of human connection to survivors' loved ones. When cemeteries are destroyed, there is nothing to keep people on their land, for their departed loved ones can no longer be found around the corner, down the block, or reasonably close to home. This makes the so-called voluntary resettlement of that population both feasible and expedient. Certainly, it would be a victory for the far-right members of Bibi's cabinet.

Ben-Gvir and Smotrich have placed Israel in an untenable predicament. These literalists have influenced the prosecution of a war that arguably has abandoned Israeli hostages in favor of placing the Palestinian population on the fast track to expulsion. Most Israelis and Diaspora Jews find this appalling – and if they don't, the world will. And the world certainly will broadcast its displeasure on the streets, on the university campuses, and in everyday life.

Indeed, Jewish history has documented the suffering of Jews whose fate was as bad as, and sometimes worse than, the Gazans. The Jews were targets of Hitler's planned extermination campaign. They were targets of the Spanish Inquisition. They were targets of pogroms in Eastern Europe. And most recently, they were targets

of the Hamas massacre. My fear, however, is that messianic thinking, particularly among victims of atrocities, may prompt the destructive psychological reaction of identifying with the aggressor.

This is so because in their zeal to save their people, messianic leaders will do so at any cost – even if it entails expulsion of an entire population. In truth, messianism, borne in the throes of calamity, often is entwined with a need to turn the tables on victimhood, to oppress others to feel empowered once again. This defense mechanism has practical value, as it allows victims to stop blaming themselves for having succumbed to the aggressor. Nevertheless, this dangerous cycle, where the victim becomes the aggressor, must be broken. If it is not, I fear for those who become aggressors, for they will be judged so harshly and unsparingly that they will find themselves victims yet once again.

Would it not be wise to denude the Israeli messianic cabinet members of their power, so that their actions do not dig a cavern for Israel, and for the diaspora Jews around the world, that is so deep from which they may never climb out?

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academia. Colleges and universities get the most attention, but they are not unique. How much of the millions of dollars of foreign money pouring into their coffers is coloring their policies. I shouldn't state the names of those countries because that would call down the accusation of "Islamophobia" on my head. Has one noticed that after anti-Semitic acts are called to be denounced, anti-Islamic condemnations are demanded to be added on to the statements?

If it wasn't so tragic, the congressional hearing where the presidents of three major universities denied that the anti-Semitic actions on their campuses violated their Codes of Conduct would be a cruel joke. The calls for genocide were not violations, because genocide did not actually occur.

A good part of my condemnation of the lack of aggressive fighting against anti-Semitism and the anti-Semites falls almost universally on the major "Jewish" organizations who go through the motions of condemnations. They request that the leaders of academia take actions to protect those suffering from anti-Semitism. What do they get in return? Letters stating that these accusations will be looked into and actions taken. Meaningless words and denials that anti-Semitism even took place. Jews were told to hide their "Jewishness," don't wear a kippah, or have any Jewish symbols showing, don't speak Hebrew, watch what you are saying in class. All of these requests are anti-Semitic actions. Those institutes of higher education taking these actions or not taking any actions, should be sued and taken to court. Federal violations should be filed by those organizations whose charters and bylaws state that they are organized to protect and fight for the Jewish people. Why hasn't this taken place?

It's long overdue to stop being passive and begging

others to protect us. The world has shown that when it comes to protecting ourselves, it is largely, "We Alone." If we don't protect ourselves, why should others?

Howard J. Cohn
New Milford

Chabad's infinite kindness

Concerning Shammai Englemayer's column denigrating the Chabad movement, I, having been raised Reform (and now Conservative), and experiencing Chabad's infinite kindness and outreach around the world along with hundreds of thousands of other Jews, wanted to respond.

There are so many mitzvahs Chabad does for Jews around the world, from secular to Orthodox, from non-observant to strictly so, that I hardly know where to begin. Having a presence in 100 countries and with over 5,000 full-time emissary families, you are welcomed as a member of the Jewish family at any and all Chabad homes – whether you are a practicing Jew or not. Whether it's putting on tefillin, sharing a meal, having a place to spend the night, or just stopping by to kibitz and relax, there's almost always a Chabad emissary in that area waiting to warmly welcome you.

Mr. Englemayer ignores the unfathomable good Chabad has done and continues to actively do, from arranging 100 flights to transport thousands of kids and provide treatment from the radiation-infested Chernobyl blast (see "Chabad's Children of Chernobyl") and the heartwarming stories of their transport and treatment as told by the people themselves), to arranging a Passover seder in Nepal for 1500 hikers. What other Jewish, let alone any other organization, can claim such a record? The cost of attending a Chabad service anywhere in the world? Not one penny. And should you arrive early, even on the High Holy Days, you're

welcome to sit in the front row or anywhere else you please – even if it's your first time and haven't donated. It's about mitzvahs, not money. Chabad does receive plenty of generous donations, to be sure, much of them from non-Orthodox Jews who've found a vibrant home there. As anyone who has attended a service can attest, you're immediately greeted warmly, and if it's your first time, usually offered an Aliyah. For some it's the first time they've had one in years.

I've witnessed firsthand how our local Chabad provided a minyan in the middle of the summer when our local Reform shul was short several people for a minyan in order for a local resident to recite kaddish. I've watched the thousands of folks on a Sunday waiting to receive a dollar from the Rebbe (my wife and I were a part of it as we received his wedding blessing, me in English and my wife in French among the seven or so languages the Rebbe spoke), as he stood for multiple hours every Sunday – even in his later years. Giving the dollars creates the spark of Tzedakah, with folks usually keeping the Rebbe's dollar and giving another to charity in its place. He answered every one of the thousands of letters written to him from all corners of the world, and regularly received world leaders who sought his counsel. The stories written about encounters with him would seem fantasy if they weren't true. To quote Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (OBM): "Just as Hitler sought out every Jew in hate with the intent to eradicate Judaism, the Rebbe sought them out in love with the goal to bring them closer to Judaism."

A peek at the Rebbe's Wikipedia page reveals that his work has been recognized by every U.S. president from Richard Nixon to Joe Biden, and in 1978 the Rebbe became the first rabbi to have a U.S. national day proclaimed in his honor. In 1982, Ronald Reagan proclaimed the Rebbe's birthday as a "National Day

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