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ISRAEL NEWS

A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation

A nation that lives in a constant state of persecution has forgotten what it means to demand peace and quiet. As the saying goes: You can take Jews out of exile, but you can't take the exile out of the Jews.

Commentary...

The Time has Come: Us or Them? By Odelia Kedmi

As the State of Israel stands on the brink of a fateful decision with historic geopolitical implications, some might argue that it's a decision as significant as the 1947 U.N. Partition Plan.

For the first time since the Simchat Torah massacre on Oct. 7, 2023, a bold idea has been put forth that offers a real, feasible and long-term solution to the chronic problem known as Gaza.

U.S. President Donald Trump announced an emigration or "relocation" plan earlier this month for Palestinian residents in the Gaza Strip. He argued that war-torn Gaza is essentially a massive construction site and that its nearly 2 million residents should be housed in another country, at least during the reconstruction. Moreover, many Gazans have expressed interest in emigration even before the war began (though Hamas systematically works to prevent it). On the surface, no step seems simpler or more logical for the benefit of Gaza's population.

Given that Hamas is unlikely to agree to disarm in the second phase of the current deal and considering the military achievements Israel has already secured (many of which could be lost as a result), the only logical conclusion is that only a massive ground operation—a thorough clearing of both the surface and underground—will allow Israel to achieve its declared war objectives in Gaza of eliminating Hamas's military infrastructure; removing Hamas from power in the Gaza Strip; and returning all of the hostages.

Any rational observer understands that resuming combat now while Gazans flood into northern Gaza following the withdrawal by the Israel Defense Forces from Netzarim Corridor—as food and construction materials, likely including tactical equipment hidden in trucks, flow back in and as the Rafah border crossing reopens—would be a deadly trap for Israeli forces. Such action would do nothing to advance Israel's war objectives and would instead deepen the quagmire. So why do it? More suicidal raids in Jabalia? More static positions with IDF soldiers sitting like ducks in a shooting gallery? At this stage, even the most aggressive and determined military action will not achieve Israel's goals.

The continued display of strength by Hamas, including armed fighters and vehicles parading during the "ceremony" of the hostages' return, makes it clear that Hamas is still standing, growing stronger daily and recruiting new fighters at a faster rate than they are being eliminated.

Since Hamas was never a conventional army, "eliminating its infrastructure" does not mean targeting tanks and planes, but rather personnel and finances. These are its core assets, and it is clear that we have not yet destroyed them.

The truth is, in some ways, that Israel has been stuck since the day of the massacre. The contradiction inherent in eradicating Hamas and retrieving the hostages is Israel's Achilles' heel—and Hamas's ultimate insurance policy. The only scenario in which the terrorist organization would agree to release all of the hostages is if it achieves its war objective: Israel ceasing to exist.

More than 16 months since the deadliest massacre in Israel's history, it is back at square one, but not Oct. 7. Rather, back to May 15, 1948. For 76 years, Israel has been engaged in a struggle for survival with its Arab neighbors and their proxies inside Israel. For 76 years, Israel has lived in a state of perpetual emergency, surviving against all odds every single day. Why do we accept this reality?

It is time to state the obvious: The State of Israel is a legitimate entity, established by law, and there is no reason for the Jewish people to apologize for its existence. This is the only state of the Jewish people, and its purpose is to provide them with a safe home. Any consideration beyond that, especially prioritizing the well-being of foreign states or entities, amounts to a crime against the Jewish people.

Show me another country in the world that has normalized running to bomb shelters within 15 seconds—for 20 years straight.

Show me another country that employs people sworn from birth to murder its citizens.

Show me another country that provides electricity, water and financial support to an enemy that pays salaries to baby killers.

The State of Israel is a miraculous phenomenon—so much so that we refuse to believe that things could be better, should be better, and that we have the right to demand better.

For years, we have been told that we are stuck together in the "Israeli-Arab (Palestinian) conflict." But history has proven that at every critical juncture, the Arabs refused to make peace. As Israeli statesman Abba Eban famously put it: "The Arabs never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity."

It seems that Trump and his advisers understand that Israel has endured a Sept. 11-scale massacre that has brought it to a point of no return. Given this reality—and it must be the reference point—when all past attempts have failed colossally, time and again, for 76 years, it is legitimate to discuss groundbreaking ideas, even if they are not politically correct. Yes, even transfer.

The U.S. administration can call this plan whatever it wants—even Exodus 2.0 would work. But I will call it the "Avida Bachar plan," named after a survivor of the Kibbutz Be'eri massacre who witnessed the murder of wife and son, and has called for the complete wipeout of Gaza. I argue with all my strength that there is no simpler or more correct solution. Because in the end, we have learned the hard way: It's either us or them.

Now is the time to act. Without hesitation. Without fear.

Only true security within defensible borders will bring Israel the peace it has long deserved. It is in our hands. (JNS Feb 18)

Netanyahu's Tightrope, Trump's Net By Ruthie Blum

The Israeli opposition and so-called "international community" have spent most of the past 16 months lobbying two key demands—or accusations—at Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin ("Bibi") Netanyahu. One is that he must introduce a clear plan for the "day after" Hamas. The other is that he "bring home all the hostages now."

Busy fighting an existential defensive war against the terrorists who gleefully perpetrated the massacre of 1,200 people on Oct. 7, 2023, he has been unable to give a definitive answer. He did assert, however, that the Palestinian Authority could not assume any role in Gaza. "I will not allow us to replace Hamastan with Fatahstan," he told the now-former administration in Washington.

The second rebuke was akin to alleging that Bibi was holding the hostages in his basement. Never mind that he was deploying the might of the Israel Defense Forces to search for them while battling the barbarians responsible for their plight—those continuing to commit the worst atrocities against Jews since the Holocaust.

Last week, U.S. President Donald Trump answered both. First, he announced that the United States would take control of Gaza. Then—after witnessing the condition of the three men emerging last Saturday from captivity looking as though they'd been liberated from Auschwitz, and hearing Hamas say that it wouldn't free the next three the following week—he delivered an ultimatum.

"If all of the hostages aren't returned by Saturday, [Feb. 15] at 12 o'clock ... I would say, cancel [the ceasefire deal] and all bets are off and let hell break out," he declared to reporters at the White House. "And if they're not returned—all of them, not in drips and drabs, not two and one and three and four and two—by Saturday at 12 o'clock ... all hell is going to break out."

Ironically, the very people who claimed to want immediate solutions to the dire situation are up in arms over the plans that Trump presented. For one thing, they have a hypocritical aversion to population "transfer" when it applies to Palestinians. For another,

they—like all Israelis—fear the potentially deadly consequences for the hostages of painting Hamas into a corner.

As a result, rather than feeling relief at the prospect of a crack in the enemy's armor, the protest movement raised its voice even higher, pushing for the implementation of phase two of the ceasefire deal. You know, the part that requires a full IDF withdrawal from Gaza.

That this is Hamas's precondition for demilitarization of the enclave and a third phase for the return of the rest of the hostages makes a mockery of the whole enterprise. Anyone paying attention must realize that Hamas won't lay down its weapons. Nor will it relinquish every last captive—unless, of course, the hundreds of terrorists released from Israeli prisons kidnap a fresh batch of innocent Israelis.

The above opportunities that Trump has opened up are being obfuscated by the anti-Netanyahu crowd. Members of that camp haven't ceased asserting that the longest-serving prime minister in Israel's history cares solely about prolonging the war, regardless of the fate of the hostages. In their distorted version of events, Bibi's priority is maintaining his coalition to preserve his power.

That his behavior indicates the opposite is irrelevant to those whose main objective is toppling the government he heads. Oh, and to see the bogus trial to which he has been subjected for the past several years bear fruit, despite the disintegration of the prosecution's cases.

Even the unfriendly Biden administration has repeatedly acknowledged that Netanyahu never torpedoed a proposed ceasefire-hostage-release agreement during negotiations with Egyptian and Qatari mediators. However, this hasn't persuaded the "anybody but Bibi" choirmasters to change their tune. On the contrary.

When Netanyahu decided on Saturday not to take advantage of Trump's threat that all hostages be released "or else," opting instead to accept the three hostages whom Hamas ultimately consented to free, the rallying cry against him from the usual suspects continued unabated. But had he taken Trump's lead, they would have shouted just as loudly.

Meanwhile, many on the right—and among some of the hostage families whose relatives are not slated to return in the current phase—were disappointed that Netanyahu didn't promptly adopt Trump's "no more nice guy" approach, especially as it coincided with the delivery of crucial arms that had been withheld by Team Biden.

Still, these people blame Hamas, not Bibi, for the crisis. They constitute the majority of the public that is praying that he and Trump have been discussing the best way to proceed with the greatest number of live hostages rescued in as short a time as possible.

So far, there's cause for optimism on this score, as U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio made plain after meeting with Netanyahu in Jerusalem on Sunday. For his part, Netanyahu said to Rubio: "Contrary to what is being reported, President Trump and I are working in full cooperation and coordination. We have a shared strategy, which cannot always be detailed to the public—including when the gates of hell will open. And they will open if all our hostages are not returned, every last one of them." (JNS Feb 17)

Foreign Funding of Judicial-Reform Protests Spurs Knesset Legislation By David Isaac

As billionaire Elon Musk and his youthful team of tech wizards tear through America's administrative state, exposing waste and misuse of funds, reports emerged that the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) funded judicial-reform protests in Israel.

While this would constitute a blatant case of U.S. interference in Israel's internal affairs, the way in which funds bounce from one group to another before reaching their final target makes it difficult to produce hard evidence.

However, reports of heavy foreign funding of key groups opposed to the Israeli government's plan to reform the judiciary led Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu himself to weigh in last week in a Knesset speech, blasting what he called the "almost inconceivable" amounts of foreign money that drove the protest movement.

Israel's Ministerial Committee for Legislation approved a bill on Sunday to impose an 80% tax on donations from foreign entities to Israeli non-profits. Currently, those donations are tax-free.

The heart of the current debate is Blue and White Future, an Israeli NGO that funded and ran the headquarters for the coalition of groups

opposing judicial reform. A significant percentage of its funding came from foreign sources.

The HQ's website lists some half-dozen protest groups supported by Blue and White Future, including Achim L'Neshek ("Brothers in Arms"), which called for reservists to refuse service, and Bonot Alternativa ("Women Building an Alternative"), which introduced Handmaid's Tale costumes to the protests.

The key figures in Blue and White Future are Orni Petruschka, a high-tech entrepreneur; Ami Ayalon, a former head of the Internal Security Service (Shin Bet); and Gilead Sher, an attorney who served as chief of staff and policy coordinator to former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, one of the most vociferous of Netanyahu's opponents.

Blue and White Future was founded in 2009 as Blue and White Peace. Its initial purpose was to "enhance and highlight" public support for the two-state solution.

It changed its name by the end of that year to Blue and White Future and then its *raison d'être* in January 2023 (when Justice Minister Yariv Levin announced the government's judicial-reform plan), saying its new goal was "to preserve the democratic character of the State of Israel."

In September 2023, it hired Washington-based PR firm Trident DMG, for a three-month contract of \$75,000 for "strategic communications services" to boost its cause in the United States.

It would have found a ready ear in the then-Biden administration, which made no secret of its opposition to the judicial-reform plan. U.S. President Joe Biden himself spoke out against it several times in 2023.

Blue and White Future's financials, filed with Israel's Registrar of Associations, show that the NGO received a major shot of money in 2023, with donations jumping to 134 million shekels (~\$38 million) from 824,730 shekels (\$232,000) in 2022. Its budget in previous years hovered in that lower range.

In 2023, it spent most of its budget, or \$31 million, on opposition to judicial reform.

Approximately 54%, or 83 million shekels (~\$23 million), of the donations came from foreign sources and 71 million shekels (~\$20 million) from within Israel.

Of the foreign funds, 78 million shekels came from two American nonprofits: the Middle East Peace Dialogue Network (MEDPN)—14 million shekels (~\$4 million) and PEF Israel Endowment Funds—64 million shekels (~\$18 million).

The MEDPN receives funds from NGOs that were given U.S. government funds. But it's impossible to trace the origin of the money, as it's already too far removed from the source.

For instance, USAID gives to Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, Inc., which donates to the Jewish Communal Fund, which in turn donates to MEDPN, according to DataRepublican, a website that tracks taxpayer funds.

PEF Israel's receipt of U.S. taxpayer funds is negligible. It received \$149,000 in indirect government monies, or 0.5% of its total contributions of \$281 million in 2023, DataRepublican reported.

The torrent of U.S. taxpayer money streaming out of U.S. government coffers and adding to America's \$2 trillion deficit is what the Trump administration wants to bring under control.

In a Feb. 11 press conference, Elon Musk, who heads the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), joined President Donald Trump at the Oval Office to discuss his efforts. He noted that many payments his team found didn't have a categorization code or description of what the payments were for, meaning there was no way to track them. There is a "massive number" of such checks "flying out of the building," Musk said.

With such few basic controls, it seems unlikely that Musk's team will uncover a smoking gun pointing to USAID grants going to Israeli NGOs.

However, Knesset Member Yitzhak Kroizer of the Otzma Yehudit Party, who wrote to Musk on Feb. 16 requesting a meeting to discuss the misuse of U.S. taxpayer funds in Israel, expressed cautious optimism that much could be uncovered.

"It will be very difficult to track all the money," Kroizer told JNS. "But we will be able to identify fund transfers from certain entities, parties and nonprofits and how it flows from the United States to groups in Israel."

Kroizer is interested in exposing the mechanism by which the funds are piped in, not specific dollar amounts, noting that the names of the associations change but the methods remain the same.

"They find the same ways each time to transfer the funds," he said.

The U.S. has a history of interfering in Israeli politics, along with certain European countries, he added. "It's the same countries all the time."

In May 2023, a bill that would have significantly limited the amount that Israeli NGOs could receive from foreign governments was dropped after harsh criticism from the United States, Germany and France. By protesting the bill, those countries were "probably" pointing a guilty finger at themselves, Kroizer said.

In his letter to Musk, he noted, "It is well known in both Israel and the United States that past administrations have used American funds to exert improper influence in Israeli affairs. The 2015 incident involving OneVoice and V15—organizations that received funding from the Obama administration while working to oppose the Netanyahu government—left a lasting negative impression."

Kroizer was referring to the scandal in which a U.S. Senate subcommittee found that the Obama administration's State Department had donated about \$350,000 to a group trying to defeat Netanyahu in the 2015 Israeli elections.

The Knesset passed a law the following year requiring nonprofits that receive more than half their funding from abroad to disclose it each year to the NGO Registrar at the Justice Ministry.

The United States expressed its concern with that law, too, with the Obama administration's Ambassador to Israel Dan Shapiro meeting with the law's sponsor, then-Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked.

A U.S. embassy statement released after the meeting put in diplomatic language American displeasure, saying Shapiro "reiterated" the United States' view that "a free and functioning civil society is an essential element of a healthy democracy, and that governments must protect free expression and peaceful dissent and create an atmosphere where all voices can be heard."

It remains to be seen whether the current proposed Knesset bill, whose stated purpose is "to reduce the indirect influence of foreign government and political entities on the State of Israel"—if it becomes law—will have better luck than previous efforts to sharply cut outside activity in shaping Israeli politics. (JNS Feb 18)

Apply 'Trump Spirit' to the Situation in Gaza By Ronen Itsik

Everything that has been happening since U.S. President Donald Trump's entrance into the White House in the context of the future of the Gaza Strip and the Israeli hostages has been widely discussed in Israel, in Arab countries and around the world. Yet it seems that the understanding of what I call the "Trump spirit" has not yet penetrated sufficiently into the discourse, and, perhaps, the only one who does understand it is King Abdullah II of Jordan.

Even before Trump began his second go-round as president, he declared that the Israeli hostages must be immediately released from Gaza and promised hell if they were not. But public pressure in Israel, along with fear for the hostages, did not allow for a fundamental change in the basic conditions that were set—namely, a "trickle" of hostages in exchange for Israeli concessions that offset a significant part of the combat achievements of the Israel Defense Forces.

The opportunity to leverage the "Trump spirit" has grown in recent days, and it seems that Israel is still in awe of the enormous credit it has received from the new/old American president. With the extensive backing of the United States and the changed situation in the Mideast—the weakening of the Shi'ite axis of evil and the IDF's achievements in various arenas—Israel can now change the rules of the game.

It is Hamas's declaration in recent days about alleged Israeli violations, which they believed would lead to the "explosion" of the deal, that has solidified the opportunity for dramatic change. Hamas knows there has been a change in the U.S. position; as such, it is trying to hold onto its precarious situation to preserve the survival of its rule in the Gaza Strip.

But Israel's opportunity in the face of the Trump spirit is much stronger. It can propose a new and different outline that minimizes the strategic damage to the hostage agreement—first, by demanding the return of all hostages immediately and then by exerting maximum pressure on Gaza. This would include a dramatic reduction in

humanitarian aid, the re-evacuation of areas in Gaza, a rapid takeover of the Netzarim Corridor and the dismemberment of the Strip. This leverage must be substantial and real vis-à-vis Hamas. Rather than going on to the second stage of the stuttering deal that was formulated in May 2024, it's time for Israel to say, "We turned to a different deal," based on 2025 conditions.

It is important to realize, especially in light of the "festival" that Hamas is creating around the release of each tiny group of hostages, that Hamas wants to present itself as the ruler of Gaza. This is their supreme interest, and Israel must pluck these strings with an uncompromising ultimatum to release the hostages immediately. The expiration date for this ultimatum should allow for the replacement of the IDF's chief of staff—Maj. Gen. (res.) Eyal Zamir, who is expected to be sworn into this role on March 5—and the entry of new officials in preparation for a renewed military operation, if required.

If Hamas does not respond, the flexibility of Israel's action in a military context will be completely different than it has been so far. This would include full American backing, assistance in defensive efforts—with an emphasis on offensive efforts against distant circles—and a complete military victory, not only against Hamas's military wing but also against its civilian governmental body.

I have used the term "Trump spirit" several times, and not by chance. The idea is not to take deterministic declarations and break them down into an orderly plan. Rather, it is to take Trump's ideals, which is "you have full backing, go on your way, I am with you," and translate them into an updated Israeli strategy based on the extraordinary military achievements that Israel has achieved in the region over the past year. (JNS Feb 18)

The Hamas Baby Killers and a Broken Global Moral Compass

By Jonathan S. Tobin

As much as anything else, two little red-haired boys and their mother symbolized the barbaric cruelty of the Hamas assault on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. The video of a terrified Shiri Bibas, 32, clutching and comforting her two children—Ariel, 4, and Kfir, just 9 months old at the time—as they were being pushed away by Hamas terrorists into captivity in Gaza should haunt the conscience of humanity in much the same way as some of the most iconic images of the Holocaust.

But it did not. Or at least, it didn't do so sufficiently to prevent a sizable portion of the international community from thinking of their captors as the good guys in the war that the Palestinians started on Oct. 7. Now, 500 days after that infamous and tragic date, as their fate has been revealed, we are also being forced to come to terms with the extent of the moral failure of the world to respond appropriately to this brazen act of genocidal terrorism.

To much of the world, the Bibas children were just Zionist propaganda, not human beings who were brutalized for the crime of being Jewish. Their likenesses were not to be tolerated—let alone viewed with sympathy. Posters of them and others kidnapped by Hamas were put up around the world only to be torn down by brazen antisemites.

Yet now that Hamas has announced that the bodies of Shiri, Ariel and Kfir are to be handed over to Israel this week as part of the first phase of ceasefire/hostage deal that has, at least for the moment, halted the fighting, attitudes toward the fate of the Bibas family has become an unavoidable test of our common humanity.

That is a test that much of the international community is failing miserably. And it's important for the rest of us, even as we mourn for the Bibas family, to take note of this and ask why it should be so.

It's not just that Hamas wants to destroy Israel and commit genocide against its population. The terror group that, contrary to the claims of former President Joe Biden, has the backing of most Palestinian Arabs, planned and executed a massacre in which more than 1,200 people of all ages and places in society were murdered. It did so not only by shooting missiles or sending suicide bombers into crowded buses, cafes and dance clubs. Its "fighters" and the Palestinian civilians who followed in their wake when Israeli communities were attacked on Oct. 7, engaged in an orgy of murder, torture, rape and kidnapping in a way that made it clear that they had shed any vestige of humanity or decency.

More than that, it boasted proudly of these bestial crimes by posting photos and videos of their actions on social media to make it

clear that their attack was a trailer for what they aim to do to the rest of Israel—or at least it did so before their foreign supporters perversely began to deny any of it actually happened.

When stated that way, the atrocities of Oct. 7 are, as awful as they were, still something of an abstraction. But when you look at the images of Shiri, Ariel and Kfir as they cowered in the face of their kidnappers after their home in Kibbutz Nir Oz was attacked, we see it in a different light. They are not just statistics. They are human beings with whom anyone can identify.

That's why so many decent people came to care so much about them.

We knew that Yarden Bibas—Shiri's husband and the children's father—had left their house's safe room in a futile attempt to save his family, and had also been kidnapped. We prayed that they would all be reunited and brought home. But when Yarden was among the few Israelis released under the current ceasefire deal, and his wife and children were not, it quickly became obvious that they had died in captivity.

That should force even those most inclined to rationalize Palestinian actions to conclude that the so-called "resistance" against Israel that Hamas and its allies aren't just garden variety terrorists; they are baby killers.

Regardless of the details of the crime that we don't yet know, the unavoidable truth is that a toddler, an infant and their mother were all murdered by their Palestinian captors.

Once we arrive at that sad conclusion, it is incumbent to ponder how it is that even after learning about this so many people, including a large number of those who consider themselves humanitarians and opposed to barbarism, still support Hamas and oppose Israel.

How is that possible? The answer isn't complicated.

An increasingly significant proportion of international opinion, as well as of Americans, has turned on Israel since Oct. 7. While, as always is the case with polls, it depends on how you pose the question, a number of surveys show a decline in backing for Israel, and its right to defend itself and the war against Hamas it has been fighting for the last 16 months. Though most Americans still back Israel, this shift to support the war on the Jewish state is especially apparent when it comes to young people.

Muslim and Arab sympathy for the Palestinians, coupled with a long tradition of Jew-hatred so prevalent in the Islamic world, is part of the reason. But throughout the West, this development is the result of the spread of toxic leftist ideologies like critical race theory, intersectionality and the woke catechism of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) that pointedly excludes Jews from its alleged crusade for better treatment of minorities.

Like other neo-Marxist theories, those indoctrinated in such beliefs—a demographic that includes most of those who have gone through the mainstream American education system in recent years—encourage the dehumanization of those who hold the wrong identity and/or the wrong views about the world, according to fashionable leftist doctrine. And that is what has fueled the post-Oct. 7 surge in Jew-hatred worldwide.

It is also why so many college and university students, especially those attending elite schools, have come to believe that the Bibas family simply doesn't fall into the category of people who deserve the empathy of fellow human beings. As was the case for European fascist and Nazi ideologues a century ago, left-wing intellectuals and those who have fallen under their influence believe that Israelis and Jews are undeserving of compassion.

To those who buy into the anti-Zionist mindset, by living in Israel—even within the 1967 borders and in communities where support for peace with the Palestinian Arabs was prevalent—Jewish residents and often pacifists in places like Kfir Oz had it coming on Oct. 7. It didn't matter to them that Gaza wasn't "occupied" on Oct. 7. The fact that every Israeli soldier, settler and settlement had been withdrawn from the Strip in 2005 and that since 2007, it had been an independent Palestinian state run by Islamist terrorists was irrelevant.

Since Oct. 7, they have spewed forth a series of often-contradictory arguments and narratives justifying Palestinian conduct. They falsely claimed that Gaza was an "open-air prison" whose inhabitants had a right to "resist" Israeli oppression. They further argued that even though Hamas had initiated this round of fighting with unspeakable atrocities, it was Israel's efforts to defend itself

against this Palestinian terrorism that was the real crime.

They cite the suffering of Gazans during the subsequent war as a reason not to care about the Bibas family. While that suffering is real, they refuse to accept that the people who started the war are the ones who are responsible for the horror inflicted on both sides of that conflict.

No doubt we will hear in the coming days that it wasn't Hamas that killed the Bibas boys and their mother—that it was the Israelis who did it in the course of their war on the terrorists. We don't know if this is true. Even if they were killed by Israeli fire on terrorist enclaves and fortresses that were deliberately constructed to increase civilian casualties, the idea that Hamas is innocent of their deaths is risible. They were in Gaza and exposed to danger not because the Israeli government was heartless or complicit in their murders but because they were dragged there by terrorists that ruled the Strip.

Despite the dogmatic justification of their crimes by Israel's enemies, which is morally equivalent to Holocaust denial, other mothers and children, as well as fathers and sons, were murdered on Oct. 7, with many slaughtered by horrific methods that are hard to think about.

Yet once you've been convinced that Jews have no rights, those crimes become just details to be dropped down an Orwellian memory hole. Those who have romanticized "resistance" to Israel—like best-selling author Ta-Nehisi Coates, who has spoken of his wish to have taken part in Oct. 7—the murder of one mother and her children is an act that is justified by Jews simply living in the one Jewish state on the planet.

In this way, Palestinian Arabs who deliberately set out to kill Jewish babies can be depicted as heroes and the Israelis who seek to avoid civilian casualties while trying to defeat the Oct. 7 criminals are the bad guys. Those with an unbroken moral compass recognize the difference between the baby killers and people trying to stop them.

That's why we shouldn't expect the news that Shiri, Ariel and Kfir died at the hands of their captors or their funerals to shift public opinion about Israel or the war on the part of those who have been taught that Israel has no right to exist.

For generations, decent people have wondered how it was that the citizens of what was arguably the most civilized and scientifically advanced society in Europe—Germany—behaved as they did during the Holocaust.

The answer was that they didn't believe in the humanity of the Jews. Ordinary Germans looked the other way as their Jewish neighbors were taken away and sent to their deaths. The best and brightest of their young men fought to preserve the Nazi regime and/or took part in the slaughter of 6 million Jews, including 1.5 million children, and millions of other victims.

The point being is that if you cheer for or justify these Hamas baby killers, it isn't just that you're mistaken about the origins and causes of the post-Oct. 7 war or have been misled by the misinformation about it spread by the Palestinians. It means you are no different from those ordinary Germans who stood by with indifference or actually facilitated the Holocaust.

During World War II, the people of the Allied nations instinctively understood that there was no moral equivalence between those murdered by the German Nazis and their collaborators and civilians killed as a result of military actions that led to the liberation of Europe. But that wise understanding of the nature of war is not shared by much of liberal and leftist elite public opinion today. Instead, they have accepted the big lies about Israel committing "genocide" and Hamas terrorism being justified "resistance."

This sort of broken moral compass is to be found among so many of those who consider themselves good people and can be discerned in many ways. It's evident among those who think that democracy can only be preserved by trashing its basic values through censorship of dissent against leftist orthodoxies. It's also present among those who have come to reject the canon of Western civilization because it doesn't conform to divisive woke ideas about race.

But at the core of the argument are those who take the side of the Hamas baby killers and spread hatred for a moral and democratic Israel, as well as for the Jewish people. Not for the first time in world history, antisemitism has provided a justification for the murderers of Jewish children. (JNS Feb 19)