



## 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*

### Commentary...

#### El Al Likelier to Resume Flights to Tehran than to Toronto

By Lawrence Solomon

El Al's last commercial flight from Tehran departed 47 years ago, on Feb. 10, 1979, as the Islamic Revolution engulfed Iran. Its last flights from democratic Toronto and Brussels left in October 2022—barely three and a half years ago. Yet in today's airline geopolitics, a resumption of direct Tel Aviv-Tehran service now looks more probable than El Al's return to either Toronto Pearson or Brussels Airport.

Consider the facts. In 2022, El Al suspended its long-running routes to Toronto, Brussels and Warsaw, citing post-COVID economics, pilot shortages and network optimization. Warsaw has since returned to the schedule. Brussels and Toronto have not.

Meanwhile, El Al has launched one of the most aggressive worldwide route-and-fleet expansions in its history, including a record 55 weekly flights to North America this summer—all to the United States, none to Canada. Arkia, Israel's second major carrier, has followed suit: regular Tel Aviv-New York service (now up to six times weekly), major capacity increases to Bangkok, Hanoi and Phuket, and explicit plans for further North American growth.

Conspicuously absent from every financial briefing, schedule update and press release: any mention of Canada. Not one flight.

Toronto's Jewish and Israeli-Canadian Diaspora community—the second-largest in North America after New York and the world's fourth largest—has noticed. A petition urging El Al to restore direct service has gathered thousands of signatures and impassioned pleas about family ties, business travel and cultural connections.

The airline's silence has been deafening. So has the contrast with Brussels, where El Al still sells tickets on codeshare partners, but refuses to operate its own aircraft and crews. This is the same Brussels Airport devastated by ISIS suicide bombings in March 2016 that killed 16 people in the departure hall and injured hundreds more, and where Belgium's national terrorism threat level remains stuck at 3 (“Serious”), meaning an attack is officially assessed as possible and likely. Belgium explicitly identifies Israeli interests as under particular risk.

El Al's official explanation for bypassing both cities remains “commercial.” But that doesn't entirely ring true. Both airports sit in jurisdictions where baggage handlers, ground crews and related unions have taken highly public, hostile positions toward Israel. In Brussels, unions representing ground-service workers openly called last summer for members to refuse to handle any flights to Tel Aviv “until the genocide in Gaza ends.”

In Toronto, the rhetoric is subtler but no less pointed: Unifor, which represents Greater Toronto Airports Authority employees and workers at certain ground-handling contractors at Pearson, has issued repeated statements endorsing an arms embargo on Israel and describing the Gaza campaign in language indistinguishable from strident pro-Palestine activism.

These are not fringe locals; they are the very unions whose members would load bags, fuel aircraft and service El Al planes on the ramp.

Adding to the chill is the broader political atmosphere: former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (on whose watch El Al departed) and his Liberal successor, Mark Carney, have both taken overtly hostile stances toward Israel, repeatedly condemning its military operations,

pushing for unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state and floating arms-embargo talk—signals that can only embolden union activists and human-rights complainants at the airport.

El Al's legendary security model—armed undercover marshals on every international flight, intensive pre-boarding interviews and behavioral profiling—has always been non-negotiable. Yet in Canada and Belgium, that model now collides with human-rights legislation, anti-discrimination codes and official anti-Islamophobia policies.

Canadian tribunals and European courts have already scrutinized airlines for perceived religious or ethnic profiling. El Al operated freely in Toronto for four decades; today, the legal and union environment makes the same intensive scrutiny of Muslim or Arab passengers far riskier. The airline may simply have concluded that the operational friction—potential complaints, work-to-rule slowdowns or worse—outweighs any revenue.

If regime change soon ends Iran's theocracy, the politics could reverse dramatically. A post-theocratic Iran would likely credit Israel and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (affectionately dubbed “Uncle Bibi” by many Iranians) for helping bring about its freedom. Warm relations that once existed under the shah, and which persist today, would resume, along with El Al flights.

Until the unions in Brussels and Toronto decide that servicing Israeli aircraft is no longer an ideological battlefield, and until El Al can be confident it would not be operating in hostile territory in Canada or Belgium, the world's most secure airline will continue to keep its 787s and 777s pointed elsewhere. And that includes Tehran if Israel succeeds in its stated desire to help Iranians in their quest to overthrow the current Iranian regime. (JNS May 20)

חג שמח ושבת שלום

#### The Iran War Exposed Europe's Strategic

##### Collapse

By Gabriel Rosenberg

For more than a century, the United States has served as the primary guarantor of European security. American power helped save Europe in two world wars, deter Soviet expansion during the Cold War, sustain NATO and lead the fight against jihadist terrorism after the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001.

Yet when Washington finally confronted the Iranian regime directly during “Operation Epic Fury,” much of Europe responded not with urgency or resolve but with hesitation, strategic paralysis and outright obstruction. Europe's response to the war exposed not only strategic weakness, but also a broader crisis of political will and moral clarity across much of the continent.

Some European leaders justified their refusal to support the operation by insisting that “this is not our war” or by criticizing Washington for not consulting them sufficiently beforehand. Yet after years of hesitation and obstruction over Iran, it's fair to ask why the United States would risk sharing sensitive operational details with allies unwilling to support the mission in the first place.

Europe's refusal was especially shortsighted because Iran does not threaten only America and Israel. In many respects, the Islamic Republic poses a more immediate threat to Europe than to the United States.

Iran's military collaboration with Russia directly threatens Europe through the war in Ukraine. Disruption of the Strait of Hormuz damages Europe far more than the United States. And Iran has orchestrated terrorist attacks against European targets and on European soil for decades.

Iranian-backed terrorists murdered 58 French paratroopers in the 1983 Beirut barracks bombing. Iranian proxies supplied the explosively formed penetrators that killed and maimed coalition

troops, including Europeans, during the Iraq War. Iranian operatives and proxies have been tied to assassination and terror plots across Europe for decades, from the murder of Kurdish dissidents in Berlin in 1992 to the 2018 plot to bomb a major Iranian opposition rally near Paris.

British intelligence officials have repeatedly warned about escalating Iranian activity inside the United Kingdom, including assassination and kidnapping plots targeting dissidents and Jewish communities.

And still, Europe spent decades pursuing accommodation over confrontation.

While Iran expanded its missile program, advanced toward nuclear-weapons capability, armed terrorist proxies across the region, and entrenched itself in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, many European governments continued to prioritize diplomacy while avoiding decisive action.

The decision by the European Union to designate the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization in February exposed Europe's chronic strategic delay. The IRGC did not suddenly become a terrorist entity in 2026. It had spent decades directing proxy warfare, terrorism, assassinations, and repression across the globe.

What changed was not the nature of the IRGC, but the political cost of ignoring reality after the Iranian regime massacred an estimated 30,000 protesters during its brutal crackdown.

Then came the real test.

When the United States requested support for operations connected to the Iran campaign, several European governments refused. France, Italy and Spain denied American access to airspace or military facilities needed for Iran-related operations.

Europe also failed to take meaningful military action of its own. Despite its dependence on Gulf energy and trade, Europe has yet to take serious steps to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. When a British military base in Cyprus came under attack, it took two weeks for the United Kingdom to deploy HMS Dragon, reportedly because critical dockworkers and support staff were barred from working past 5 p.m. The episode exposed a peacetime bureaucracy so rigid that a warship could not be readied for combat outside standard office hours.

Europe's paralysis is not only military. Despite Iran's brutal crackdown on protesters earlier this year and its confrontation with the West during "Operation Epic Fury," no European country has expelled Iranian ambassadors or meaningfully downgraded diplomatic relations with Tehran.

Ultimately, the war revealed a deeper crisis of strategic culture inside much of Europe: declining military readiness, political risk-aversion, and an inability to distinguish between avoiding conflict and preventing it.

A 2024 YouGov survey found that only a third of Brits under the age of 40 said they would fight for their country, even if it "was under imminent threat of invasion." Similar trends can be seen across much of Western Europe. Contrast that with Israel after the Hamas-led terrorist attacks in southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, when reservists flooded airports worldwide trying to return home for military service.

This is not simply a military difference. It is a civilizational one.

Europe today often struggles to defend the very values and security order that American power continues to guarantee. The continent faces rising antisemitism, growing internal polarization and mounting threats not only from Russia and Iran, but also from Islamist movements operating both outside and within Europe itself. Yet too many leaders remain constrained by short-term political calculations and the illusion that hard power can indefinitely be avoided.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio recently asked a fundamental question: Should the world accept a regime attempting to dominate one of the most important waterways on earth?

So far, much of Europe has failed to answer that question with clarity. And unless it rediscovers the will to defend its interests and values, its strategic decline will only accelerate. (JNS May 14)

## **Leiter's Blunt Accuracy May be Undiplomatic, but his Criticism is Valid**

Jerusalem Post Editorial

Sharply criticizing J Street and implying that US Senator Bernie Sanders should not be called a Jew may not have been Israeli Ambassador Yechiel Leiter's most diplomatic moment. But it was perhaps his most candid – articulating what many Israelis and their supporters quietly believe.

"How can you be pro-Israel and advocate for an arms embargo on a state that's fighting a seven-front war against Iranian proxies?" Leiter asked of J Street, which bills itself as pro-Israel, pro-peace, and pro-democracy.

His comments in Washington referred to the lobbying organization's call to end military aid to Israel, including support for weapons systems such as Iron Dome.

"If they said that they were pro-Palestinian, I wouldn't have a problem meeting with them," he said. "I meet with pro-Palestinian groups. But when you come and say in such a two-faced manner, 'We're pro-Israel, we're pro-democracy,' there's a democratically elected government in Israel. You don't like [Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu, make aliyah, vote in the next election, and express yourself. Don't say you're 'pro-democracy' and decry and defy the position of the democratic government of Israel."

Even as we reject Leiter's reference to J Street as a "cancer" – believing it is possible to disagree without resorting to toxic rhetoric – we agree with the thrust of his criticism.

Israel is now in the 956th day of a war forced upon it on October 7. The very least it could expect from an organization calling itself pro-Israel is not to lobby against the sale of arms needed to defend itself or accuse it of genocide. That's a low bar, and one that J Street failed to clear.

Since its 2008 founding, just before Barack Obama's presidency, J Street has served as a convenient vehicle through which Democratic administrations could pressure Israel while touting Jewish political backing.

Its head, Jeremy Ben-Ami, gave voice to this role in a 2009 interview, using an American football metaphor and saying that the organization's "number one agenda item is to do whatever we can in Congress to act as the president's blocking back."

In other words, J Street would lobby Congress on behalf of Obama's Middle East policies – policies that tilted overwhelmingly toward the Palestinians – counter opposition from AIPAC, and give Democratic lawmakers political cover to side with the administration against Netanyahu.

Along the way, J Street adopted a far-Left position on Israeli politics even as the Israeli public repeatedly rejected that approach at the ballot box. Yet, the organization continued to portray itself as the arbiter of what was best for the Jewish state, arrogantly signaling that it knows the country's interests better than Israel's elected government.

In August, Ben-Ami said he could no longer defend Israel against accusations of genocide. Pro-Israel indeed.

Ben-Ami's reaction to Leiter's criticism was predictable.

"Instead of disparaging friends of Israel who disagree with its government and calling us names, Israel's ambassador to the United States should be engaging seriously with us."

Really?

Ben-Ami is complaining that his organization is being disparaged, even as he and J Street have spent years disparaging the very state Leiter represents.

Speaking about legislation J Street supported in April to block the sale of bulldozers and 1,000-pound bombs to Israel, Leiter said one US senator reminded him that the sponsor of that legislation was Jewish.

"The sponsor is not a Jew," Leiter said of Sanders, though not mentioning him by name. "The sponsor is a Communist, who may have Jewish pedigree. That doesn't make him a Jew."

Harsh words, certainly. But the criticism is not unwarranted.

Sanders is the prototype of the anti-Israel activists who leverage their Jewishness to lend legitimacy to their attacks. Sanders and others like him have done enormous damage to Israel's standing by employing some of the harshest rhetoric against the country while benefiting from the credibility their Jewish identity gives them as critics.

Seven of the 10 Jews in the Senate, all Democrats, voted with Sanders in a failed attempt to block the arms sales to Israel. They surely understood the signal they were sending: if Sanders sponsors the resolution, and senators such as Adam Schiff and Jon Ossoff vote for it, then it must be kosher.

But it is not. And those advancing that type of agenda – J Street and Sanders – deserve to be called out, even if doing so is undiplomatic. (Jerusalem Post May 20)

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## **The Four Reasons Why We Can't Move on from a Blood Libel**

By Jonathan S. Tobin

On May 11, The New York Times published Nicholas Kristof's astonishing compendium of charges that the State of Israel is deliberately raping Palestinian Arab prisoners not just by the usual means of such crimes but by training dogs to sexually assault them. In the week since then the question hanging over both the newspaper and its critics is what, if any, consequences would there be for publishing a 21st-century blood libel.

As far as the Times is concerned, the answer is none. And given the applause this piece of journalistic malpractice generated from its core readership, the unlikelihood of a threatened libel suit being successful, coupled with the dismal turnout for a demonstration outside of its offices in Midtown Manhattan, they have some reasons to believe that they are right.

The article sparked outrage from those who pointed out the lack of credible evidence to back up this astonishing charge, which the newspaper, as well as its liberal and leftist readers, largely ignored. It also prompted cheers from Israel-bashers and antisemites everywhere, who view it as something they could place alongside the false accusations about the Jewish state committing "genocide" and creating mass starvation in the Gaza Strip, as well as practicing "apartheid" at home.

During the days that followed the article's publication, hopes that the paper's management would issue some sort of clarification or correction about it proved vain as they stood by Kristof, without giving any more reasons for readers to trust them than he did. So, as far as the nation's largest newspaper is concerned, those who are angry about its shoddy reporting and normalization of classic tropes of antisemitism should just move on.

And with the publication of all of three letters-to-the-editor on May 18—none of which even mentioned the dogs, which was the most shocking and offensive element—senior Times management is trying to tell us that the matter is closed.

Are they right?

Those in charge at the Times likely assume that journalism is now a business where stories rarely last more than a single news cycle. They also know that readers—even many in their audience, who are largely made up of credentialed elites steeped in leftist doctrines—have become so immersed in nonstop social-media feeds that their attention spans are short.

Under the circumstances, they have likely come to the conclusion that even if they are aware of how wrong their actions have been, they won't have to answer for Kristof.

While those responsible for one of the worst moments in the Times' long reportorial history may think that is so, that won't happen. And it won't happen for four reasons.

The first is that Israel's government is likely to follow up on its threat to sue the newspaper, even if most legal experts think that such

an effort would be a waste of time. There is a genuine danger of embarrassing and damaging revelations for the newspaper in any legal proceeding, regardless of whether it would be successful.

On the face of it, the chances of Israel being able to sue and win a libel lawsuit are slim to none. Under the "actual malice" standard that governs U.S. law that stems from *The New York Times v. Sullivan* Supreme Court legal precedent, it is very difficult to win such cases. The three-part test that any public figure suing for libel must satisfy is to prove knowledge of falsity, reckless disregard for the truth and an intent to cause harm. That has proved nearly impossible to satisfy in most cases. And it's unlikely that a foreign leader like Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu or an individual country could even get a U.S. court to consider such a lawsuit.

Nevertheless, some legal experts have pointed to reasons why the Times may still be in trouble.

George Washington University Law School Professor and Fox News legal analyst Jonathan Turley points out that while the Jewish state is unlikely to be able to sue the Times and Kristof for libel, soldiers who were implicated in the story may be able to do so.

Mark Goldfeder, CEO of the National Jewish Advocacy Center and a law professor at Touro Law School, writing in *National Review*, agrees. But he thinks Israelis need not sue in American courts. He believes that they can sue the Times in an Israeli court, though not for libel.

By holding them accountable under a civil-law charge of "injurious falsehood" and "negligent publication," they can create a viable case. Doing so will mean an opening that will allow Israelis to go to the federal district court in New York City, and then "compel evidence production from a U.S. entity for use in foreign litigation." As he notes, "A properly framed application does not ask the court to adjudicate the case; it simply asks the court to order the Times to produce the factual basis for one published allegation." It stands a chance of forcing compliance.

In either instance, the result would mean that the Times and Kristof would have to produce the evidence it claims to hold, how it obtained that evidence, and other information and communications that might undermine its credibility. Even if that doesn't lead to a win in court, the resulting revelations will likely be extremely damaging for the news outlet and possibly be of greater importance to its reputation than the ludicrous accusation of dog rape would be to Israel.

The second reason why this isn't going away has to do with questions being raised by journalists about what happened at the Times.

What we're learning is that some liberal journalists who share the negative view of Israel, demonstrated by Kristof and the editors who enabled him, are asking questions about how this story was produced. To put it mildly, the way the paper handled it was fishy. Doubts about their decisions are being voiced not only by conservative critics but also reportedly by members of the paper's notoriously woke news staff.

As veteran media reporter Dylan Byers writes in *Puck*, some Times reporters don't understand why a charge of such magnitude and dubious provenance was only published in the paper's opinion section and not on the news pages.

Many readers of the Times have pointed out with justice that there is no longer any real difference between opinion and news there, let alone the church-state divide that once existed between the two prior to the publication taking a hard-left turn in the last generation. Many who work at the newspaper think that there should be such a division, at least in principle. And if there is, the failure of management to allow its news staff to do their own investigation into Kristof's tall tales of dog rape makes the whole thing even more suspicious.

Regardless of what you think of Israel—and few at the Times aren't hostile to it—the failure of the paper to either break the claims

as news or to advance the story with further reporting that doesn't fall under the label of opinion calls into question its credibility. And that's something, as Byers reports, that has not gone unnoticed in its offices on 42nd Street.

Even if lawsuits don't create discovery that unravels the allegations, the ferment within the media organization could bode ill for the editor who must be deemed primarily responsible for this atrocity.

Kathleen Kingsbury became editor of the Times' opinion section in 2020 in the wake of its scandalous retraction of an op-ed by Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.). That retraction was forced by a newsroom mob that revolted against the publication of a view they didn't favor. The result was the firing of veteran editor James Bennet for allowing a conservative opinion on its pages. He was replaced by Kingsbury, a woke writer who clearly sees no distinction between journalism and leftist activism.

By exposing the newspaper to the sort of unflattering scrutiny brought on by Kristof's smears, Kingsbury may wind up paying the price for the paper's dropping of traditional journalistic ethics and commonly accepted rules about publishing far-fetched claims. Times publisher A.G. Sulzberger—a member of the fifth generation of his family to serve in that capacity and two generations removed from anyone in it who was nominally Jewish—may believe that appealing to the hard left is good business. But once readers start learning more about how Kristof's claims were published, Sulzberger might start looking for a scapegoat for this mess. And Kingsbury is first in line to walk the plank.

There is a third reason why this controversy is far from dead. Despite the ineffectual nature of the public protests, the blood libel finally disillusioned many of those in the Jewish community who were still ready to continue to view the Times as "the paper of record," despite its troubling record of bias against Jews and Israel.

The newspaper crossed a line with its absurd story about dogs being trained to rape human beings. That cannot be ignored or undone, and going forward will color the debate not only about this newspaper's credibility but that of the mainstream liberal media that it exemplifies.

Until now, liberals who had not gone completely over into the anti-Zionism and open antisemitism that has become normalized by the Times could try to claim that its coverage was still fair, despite abundant evidence to the contrary.

But the dog-rape charge is so ridiculous and utterly without substantiation—animal trainer after animal trainer have attested to the improbability and impossibility of it happening—that only someone already drenched in both Jew-hatred and woke ideas about journalists not having to prove their allegations could believe it.

The fact that the only two mild criticisms of its story to be published as letters failed to mention the rape canard makes it obvious that any vestigial belief in minimal standards there is gone. Many on the left may cling to the Times, since it validates all of their pre-existing prejudices and opinions. That every news story reads more like opinion than what would have been considered news at the newspaper a generation ago may also appeal to them. But what Kristof and his editors have done is make it harder than ever to maintain the fiction that the Times is anything but a left-wing rag and undeserving of the respect it once earned.

As much, if not more than its sins of the past—like Walter Duranty's 1932 Pulitzer Prize-winning denials of Joseph Stalin's terror famine in Ukraine—Kristof's rapist dogs will be thrown in the faces of its employees long after the columnist is forgotten.

The fourth reason why the discussion of this particular story won't go away is that it has exposed a critical failing within the Jewish community about the way it responds to attacks.

The instinctual identification by many Jews with those locked in conflict against the State of Israel is nothing new. Yet some are still willing to think that the proper response to a dog-rape libel is to

assume that where there's smoke, there's fire. All that does is help those who seek Israel's destruction and Jewish genocide. Anger about this will at least (or at least, ought to) fuel a discussion that ought to change the way we discuss the information war against the Jews.

The newspaper was counting on not just cheers from those who are ready to believe any lie about Israel, no matter how despicable. They were also relying on responses from those labeling themselves as "liberal Zionists," as well as other Jews whose ties to Israel are far more tenuous, who speak up to shift the attention from the paper's misconduct or Palestinian crimes to investigations of the Israeli prison system. And that's exactly what some writers at left-wing publications, like *The Forward*, *JTA* and *Haaretz*, essentially did.

By accepting the story as credible enough to justify treating its charges as plausible, such people are practicing what the Canadian psychologist Gad Saad calls "suicidal empathy."

In this manner, they help to flip the script from the documented outrages committed by Palestinian Arabs, including the widespread and horrific acts of sexual violence and murderous brutality that happened on Oct. 7, 2023, to one about dubious allegations. And in so doing, they validate a false narrative about moral equivalence between the two sides.

Though some may be well-meaning, those who prioritize sympathy for the side that started the current war (and all those that preceded it between Jews and Arabs) and lost it—bringing great suffering to their people—aren't so much being fair-minded or kind. Rather, they bolster terrorists and undermine efforts to defeat them and to defend Israelis, all while virtue-signaling their self-righteousness.

Some are also using the Times story as a cudgel with which to beat Netanyahu and Israeli Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir, whom they oppose for other reasons, for their alleged indifference to prison abuses on their watch.

It's true that Israeli military prisons may be no better than those in other countries. Maybe they're worse. But also understand that the large number of Palestinian prisoners who were captured post-Oct. 7 after committing unspeakable atrocities, in addition to other terrorists caught in Gaza, are not only deserving of contempt from civilized persons. Their propensity for violence has made these facilities unsafe for themselves and those Israeli reservists who have been given the unpleasant job of guarding them. They are equally a great danger to each other, which is one more aspect of his story, among others, that Kristof chose to ignore in a quest to point a finger and demonize Israelis.

As for Ben-Gvir, he is popular on the far right and despised by centrists and the left. But he appealed to a far larger group than only his voters when he vowed that the Oct. 7 criminals weren't going to be given privileges or anything more than the bare minimum required by law. To scapegoat him or treat his attempts to keep this problem under control as a reason to diminish outrage about Kristof's lies is wrong. Nor should it divert any attention from his libelous charges or the documented use of rape by Palestinian Arabs, as the Times clearly intended.

By crossing over from debatable accusations to blood libels, Kristof has similarly exposed both the futility and the intellectual bankruptcy of those Jews who have internalized so much of the post-Oct. 7 surge in antisemitism around the globe. But they also expose themselves as failing to realize the implications of their foolish stands. Instead of validating these positions, the fallout from Kristof's writing will further discredit them.

For all these reasons—and even if the Times never owns up to the betrayal of its obligation to report the truth—the controversy and the debate about Kristof and his mythical rapist dogs will linger in the public imagination in ways the writer never intended for many years to come. (JNS May 19)