This Chanukah, there are many ways to support Israel and its people, but none is more transformative than a gift to Magen David Adom, Israel's emergency medical system.

Your gift to MDA isn’t just changing lives — it’s literally saving them — providing critical care and hospital transport for everyone from victims of heart attacks to casualties of rocket attacks.

Join the effort at afmda.org or call 866.632.2763.
Commentary's Candle

JOHN PODHORETZ

Great harm has been done to us. We have suffered great loss. And in our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment."

This was George W. Bush's call to America in the wake of September 11. Twenty years later, Joe Biden pulled American forces out of Afghanistan in a world-historical blunder that was the result of his desire to play the hero by ending that mission and that moment. Now we find ourselves two years later in a world on fire. Russia is trying to swallow Ukraine in a barbaric and unjust war Russia would never have begun if Biden had simply allowed Bush's mission to continue quietly. And then there's the Middle East.

In another effort to take that mission and that moment and stomp them to death, the Biden administration spent years trying to find some kind of accommodation with Iran—the partial result of which was Iran's triggering Hamas to fire the opening salvo on October 7 in a war of extermination against the Jews. That's the same war it's been promising since Iran's president said in 2006 that Israel would one day be "wiped out" and then six years later said Israel would soon be "eliminated."

The Jewish people now find ourselves in a position of literal existential peril for the second time in a century. Iran may not yet have a nuclear bomb, but it can in a matter of months if it chooses. And in unleashing Hamas as it did, Iran is telling the world the rhetoric it uses cannot and must not be divorced from the reality it wishes to remold and the world it wishes to re-create.

And the world seems all too nightmarishly ready for that re-creation.

The October 7 attacks not only ended with 5,000 mostly Jewish casualties, they began a worldwide assault on Jews. First the attacks began rhetorically, with marches and statements. Soon the anecdotes started piling up. Stars of David were painted on homes in Paris before a Jew was murdered on a Paris street. A student was arrested at Cornell for threatening to blow up the kosher dining hall. A kid in New Orleans was beaten with a megaphone one week before a man in Los Angeles was murdered in a megaphone beating. A Harvard kid was menaced and assaulted on the Harvard campus by a Harvard Law Review president. A synagogue president was murdered in Detroit, and the cops rushed to the microphones to say there was no evidence it was a hate crime—but have no suspect and no motive and had no reason to do what they did other than simply not wanting to think a Jewish woman of 40 was murdered simply because she was a Jew.

And who knows how many injuries will have been done to Jews between the time I finished writing this sentence on November 6 and the time you began reading it. Joe Biden rejected the mission and the moment. I will not.

What is happening here to the Jewish people is the mission of Commentary now and henceforth. This magazine is 75 years old. It was created to analyze, locate, and promote the purpose and meaning of American Jewry. Or maybe it came into being to build its strength and its longevity to be here and strong at this time so that we can do what must be done to serve the cause of the defense, the protection, the salvation, and the enduring strength of the Jewish people and our ancient, God-given homeland.

And our homeland here in America too. For if the disease of Jew-hatred that is spreading in our culture and our streets is allowed to become an epidemic, it will truly mean the end of the American experiment. Commentary will use argument, polemic, satire, invective, praise, wit, rage, and whatever else is at hand rhetorically to serve in the cause of saving America, saving Israel, and saving the West. Daily, we conclude our podcast with the phrase "Keep the candle burning." I have to be honest. I never quite understood what it meant. It just sounded good.

Now I know. I wish I didn't. But I do. We all do. They want to extinguish us. Our candle—the eternal light in every sacred Jewish space, the ner tamid—must burn.
## SPECIAL ISSUE: ENEMIES

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To the Editor:

JOHN PODHORETZ’S “2024: The Nightmare Ahead of Us” was an excellent, thoughtful discussion of our current political mess (October). The Democrats will probably dump the Biden-Harris ticket, but their problem is a lack of a credible replacement. So long as Democratic politicians are forced to take radical positions in favor of defunding the police, unlimited abortion access, DEI, transgender rights, climate change, and other progressive causes, they will remain unacceptable to middle-of-the-road Democrats and independents who care about crime, inflation, the cost of education, and other concerns of average Americans.

Terence Kelly
Richboro, Pennsylvania

To the Editor:

AS A CENTRIST independent, I value John Podhoretz's rare, reasoned, and rational viewpoint. I and many others I know are extremely concerned about how both Democrats and Republicans are going to react to the election results, and I'm glad Commentary is ringing the alarm bells.

Joseph Campanale
Las Vegas, Nevada

To the Editor:

JOHN PODHORETZ’S article on the coming presidential election was superb. But there's a need to address the matter from a broader perspective. Over the next two years, three massive storm fronts are going to collide: the constitutional crisis and civic unrest that will most surely follow from the election of either Donald Trump or Joe Biden, the fiscal cliff over which the U.S. is scheduled to drop at the end of 2025, and China's likely invasion/blockade of Taiwan. There is a lot of talk these days about an honest reckoning with the past; Americans are entitled to an honest reckoning with the future.

Daniel Gormley
Toronto, Canada

John Podhoretz writes:

I thank Terence Kelly, Joseph Campanale, and Daniel Gormley for their kindness and thoughtfulness. The trajectory of the race has only changed since the publication of my article to the extent that the potential worldwide crisis that erupted on October 7 will challenge both Donald Trump and Joe Biden to speak and act and conduct
A Karen Corrective

To the Editor:

WILFRED REILLY seems to have left some information out of his article “The Karens Were Innocent” (October). The omissions cast some doubt on his valid points.

For example, the author talks about First Nations mass-grave sites in Canada where no bodies were found. Yet he doesn’t mention the 20-plus sites where graves were found and the many more that are still under investigation. Leaving out this information makes it seem as if these genuine findings were a farce.

Similarly, Reilly mentions Nick Sandmann’s legal victory over the Washington Post without mentioning the lawsuits he lost against other media companies.

Moreover, discussions on “Central Park Karen” and “BBQ Becky” were not about, as Reilly says, who was right and who was wrong. They were about the escalation beyond a reasonable response. The sobbing, the shaking, the extreme fear, the accusations of being attacked when video shows that the accused were calm and never close to harming the women. The question is why these women were acting as though these black individuals tried to murder or attack them when the conflict was merely about park ordinances. “Central Park Karen” was indeed breaking the law. The
To the Editor:

MATTHEW Continetti makes solid points in “The Left of the Right” (October). But Continetti suffers from a failing similar to that of the most entrenched MAGA supporters. The Republican Party needs to include large numbers of people who disagree with one another.

Donald Trump is an albatross around the neck of the GOP and the conservative movement. But Republicans must make a place for all the people who Trump brought into the party if they are going to start winning national elections again. As always in American politics, the big tent wins.

Norm Frink
Portland, Oregon
To the Editor:

JOE BIDEN, as quoted by Tevi Troy, is right—the Democratic Party is no longer the party of “Scoop” Jackson ("Bibi’s Seven Presidents," October). The party contains a growing number of anti-Semites, and even some Jewish Democrats seem less likely than they once were to support Israel. This means that the Jewish state must figure out how to deal with a less approving Democratic Party.

What few Americans seem to understand is that Benjamin Netanyahu is a relative left-winger in his government. When he exits the stage, Washington may come to miss him. Israel is moving more and more to the right and becoming more religiously observant. American Jews who are neither conservative nor religious might find themselves estranged from Israel. Ultimately, Israel must decide what is in its best interests in spite of America’s wishes.

Rafi Marom
Haifa, Israel

Tevi Troy writes:

I THANK RAFI Marom for writing. He is of course correct that there is an ugly element of anti-Israel sentiment inside the Democratic Party, something that we have seen in some reactions to the Hamas pogrom of October 7. But polls also show that a majority of Americans of both parties side with Israel in its conflict with Hamas, which has the potential to reorient things in terms of partisan feelings toward Israel. As for Netanyahu, Marom is correct as well. The point of my article was that for all his flaws, Netanyahu has shown a willingness to study and figure out ways to either counter or work with American presidents. Whoever follows him will be someone new, and Democrats who have long worked for Netanyahu’s political demise—something I detail in my article—may indeed come to miss him.

Reconsidering Iraq

To the Editor:

IT SEEMS, as detailed in Abe Greenwald’s review of Melvyn P. Lefler’s Confronting Saddam Hussein, that the Iraq War was unavoidable and necessary, even though it ended so unfortunately (“A True History,” October). What was particularly unfortunate was that the U.S. did not have the will and staying power to turn the war around fully and implement needed improvements. This raises the essential question of whether the United States should continue to be engaged in world affairs as a benevolent superpower.

Arthur Yellin
Great Neck, New York

To the Editor:

IT IS WELL PAST time for an honest recounting of the Iraq War. I was an anti-Saddam leftist at the time it was being fought, and I wasn’t worried about the WMD allegations. I thought justifying the invasion on those grounds missed the more important truths about Saddam: He was, as Abe Greenwald’s review states, a monster. Getting rid of him was a good thing.

The postwar shambles were a disgrace in multiple ways. The invading forces didn’t secure Iraq’s munitions, didn’t provide for a quick recovery from the war’s damage, and botched operations in a number of ways.

Today, Iraq has something not entirely unlike representative government, even if the cost has been incredible. It’s worth supporting and preserving. Iraq is not a bystander in the contest between Saudi Arabia and Iran; it’s the very meat in the sandwich. Adroit diplomacy with real teeth is going to be needed. It’s not at all clear that the U.S. has the understanding or the moxie to see it through. And worse is likely to come.

Steve Evans
Westport, New Zealand

Commentary
ACCORDING TO a popular meme, “Queers for Palestine” is like “Chickens for KFC”: To sign on to that slogan, you’d have to be suicidal or an idiot. That, at any rate, seems to be the prevailing view in the circles I travel in when it comes to the transgender activists who support Hamas. The climate activists, the feminist extremists, Gays 4 Gaza, and sad-sack members of Jewish Voice for Peace—each of them strikes us as dupes of a regime that would happily jail, repress, or massacre them. Can they really be this self-defeating? Can they really be this gullible and dumb? Well, at the poker table of today’s leftism, if you don’t know who the fool is, more than likely, the fool is you.

Consider Black Lives Matter Chicago, which announced its support for Hamas in the days after the massacre with a gleeful post on X (né Twitter), featuring a Palestinian flag and a silhouette of a paraglider, presumably on his way to rape women and butcher children, as Palestinian paragliders had just done. “I stand with Palestine,” the poster read. Does BLM, an organization whose aim is to “bring justice, healing and freedom to Black people across the globe,” not know how Ethiopian Jews would be treated if they dared visit Gaza?

Similarly, an associate professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, called Israel a “white supremacist Zionist project.” Anyone who has ever visited Israel knows this to be absurd on its face. The 100,000-plus Ethiopian Jews are far from “white,” and a majority of Israel’s population—the Mizrahim, or Easterners, who have been living in and around the Middle East since antiquity—could not be and should not be considered any “whiter” than their Palestinian neighbors.

The foolishness extends beyond race. Climate activists like Greta Thunberg took to Twitter to pledge support for Gaza in the days after the massacre—almost as if they didn’t know that the unprovoked war launched by Hamas on October 7 and the thousands of rockets fired from Gaza into Israel will result in both increased carbon emissions and devastation to the local environment.

Meanwhile, gender-studies departments in the United States have sought to “amplify” the call from Palestinian feminists “to join the struggle for Palestinian liberation.” So, in a struggle between an Islamist police state—quite literally, a patriarchy—whose terrorists were encouraged to rape Israeli women on October 7 and a society where women enjoy full rights and serve in the military, Western academic feminists choose the former. And at Columbia University, the queer nonbinary women student group, LionLez, held
a movie night: “It’s FREE PALESTINE over here. Zionists aren’t invited.”

Why are the BLM supporters, climate extremists, academic feminists, and trans activists so quick to side with Hamas? Why are those who champion women’s reproductive rights so quick to align themselves with a Hamas-controlled Gaza where women lack the right to drive, let alone get an abortion? Why would they rally to a society where men are encouraged to hit the stray uppity wife? For that matter, why would so many LGBTQ+ groups side against a society that hosts some of the largest Pride festivals worldwide so that they can throw in with another that puts homosexuals to death?

Conservative thinkers James Lindsay and Christopher Rufo have painstakingly traced the Marxist roots of all of these groups, showing that they all branch from the same rotten revolutionary trunk. These groups aim to overthrow the West, and so they support one another. Nests of critical theory fill their interchangeably empty heads.

But I want to suggest a motivation less highbrow and more straightforward. They are all fed by the same polluted water source: hatred, envy, and resentment.

What leads them to show up at the pro-Hamas rallies in remarkable numbers is not ideological commitment. Sure, some may want Marxist revolution, if they even understand what that is. But whatever beliefs they may hold about gender, race, or climate quickly unravel under the clumsy weight of the obvious contradiction of supporting a regime so hostile to these causes.

Which means they are no more motivated by ideology, in other words, than Adolf Hitler was when he allied himself with Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Arab mufti of Jerusalem, or the Japanese—another race allegedly inferior to whites in his despicable hierarchy—and made war upon the white French and British. Hitler believed Nazi racial theory, of course. But sometimes hatred simply burns brighter and hotter than all other ideological commitments combined.

So don’t bother informing Gays 4 Gaza that same-sex attraction is proscribed by criminal law in Gaza, backed by a penalty of 10 years’ imprisonment, in that very territory they’re so wild about. No need to educate them about the finding by Pew Research that the Palestinian population’s opposition to homosexuality is among the highest in the world; that in 2016, Hamas responded to a senior commander’s homosexual activity with a firing squad; or that gay adoption and gay marriage are strictly forbidden in Palestinian territories.

They already know—and they really, truly don’t care.

You could plead with Greta Thunberg and her dead-eyed friends that Israel leads the world in desalination efforts and technology. You could suggest to any of the climate activists marching for Hamas that if they cared about conservation, they might want to side with the state leading the world in renewable-energy technologies. You could remind them that Israel turned over ecologically advanced greenhouses to Gaza worth $14 million as part of the 2005 disengagement—only to see those greenhouses promptly destroyed by the Gazans. If these activists can’t be moved to care for the women who were raped, the babies and elderly butchered, then perhaps Israel’s remarkable efforts to produce electricity from the ocean and seawalls ought to earn it a shout-out from the climate-change warriors? Nah.

They aren’t stupid, and they aren’t suicidal. Here’s what they are.

They are LGBTQ+ activists who aren’t primarily motivated by gay rights. They are climate radicals who aren’t principally motivated by concern about the climate. And if there were ever a BLM member sincerely concerned about racial justice, no doubt he has long since left the organization behind. Its remaining rank-and-file are no more committed to their putative causes than Hamas is to improving the

**A person carries a ‘Queers for Free Palestine’ sign at the 29th Annual New York City Dyke March on June 26, 2021 in New York City.**

**Commentary**
lives of ordinary Palestinians.

The postmodern left celebrated Lia Thomas, the mediocre male athlete who swapped genders his senior year in college and won NCAA female swimmer of the year, not because it wants to improve the lives of gay and transgender Americans. Had that been the goal, the left would have accepted a fair and sustainable solution, such as an open category for all gender identities alongside a female-only team, and safe transgender changing rooms.

No, they want to take over women's teams and women's restrooms, for the same reason a vandal loves a clean white wall. They enjoy making women afraid. They enjoy deleting girls' names from the record books. They thrill at seeing average Americans squirm.

When a DEI staffer named Nahliah Webber informs parents and children, “There is a killer cop sitting in every school where white children learn,” that isn't a statement of values. You don’t glue yourself to the Mona Lisa, as eco-warriors have done, or vandalize the Wellington Arch in central London because you love the earth that much. You do it because you despise the civilization that cradles such treasures, because your desire to inflict pain on those you resent deeply overshadows any aim you may espouse on behalf of Mother Earth.

Same with the tearing down of a poster with an image of a child held in captivity, then laughing at a woman who tries to stop you, crying out for mercy. In videos, those who vandalize the posters rarely even react. Their indifference is chilling. At Boston University, confronted by a man holding a camera phone who tells her she should be ashamed of herself for taking down the posters and aligning with movement that spreads anti-Semitism, a woman named Anna Epstein stares him coolly in the face. “Dude, you literally know I’m Jewish,” she says.

The great 20th-century economic journalist Henry Hazlitt once noted that Marxism itself ultimately reduces to highly concentrated envy: “The whole gospel of Karl Marx can be summed up in a single sentence: Hate the man who is better off than you are.” Universities may add intellectual arabesque to the expression of this hate. But in the end, when these groups bang their bongo drums, their chants reduce to a single creed: Hate those who have something you don’t.

That is what unites this motley crew of mutually exclusive values. When they cry for genocide of the Jews across America’s campuses—“Intifada Revolution,” or “Glory to Our Martyrs,” as one George Washington University student group did—they simply want to inflict fear and instill chaos in a peaceable civilization they despise.

They are not the dupes of a hideous regime in opposition to their values—racial justice, reproductive rights, women’s liberation, climate awareness. We are the dupes for believing they sincerely held those values in the first place. 

Don’t bother informing Gays 4 Gaza that same-sex attraction is proscribed by criminal law in Gaza, backed by a penalty of 10 years’ imprisonment, in that very territory they’re so wild about. No need to educate them about the finding by Pew Research that the Palestinian population’s opposition to homosexuality is among the highest in the world. They already know—and they really, truly don’t care.
IN THE EARLY-MORNING hours of October 7, Shin Bet, the IDF’s security service, began detecting hints of activity across the border with Gaza. According to a report in Haaretz, it was nothing concrete, just “an accumulation of signs or fragments of information [that] aroused certain concern.” Telephone conferences were held, possible scenarios discussed. It was just an exercise, some argued; others suspected an isolated abduction attempt. Officers alerted IDF Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi, as well as Shin Bet director Ronen Bar. Shin Bet dispatched a small squad to hunt for any possible abduction incursion, but that was it. No general alert was issued. They would wait until morning for more information.

I am not an expert in Israeli military affairs. But I have spent years studying man-made disasters—and almost every case I’ve examined includes a scenario like the one above. People working in a hazardous environment notice small signs of trouble, pass those warnings along to their superiors, and then...nothing. The Titanic, for example, received multiple telegrams about icebergs in its path. In 2010, the crew of the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig performed a test that suggested high-pressure methane might surge up the drill string—but after a second test produced a less worrisome result, managers decided work should proceed as normal. And, in an eerie parallel with October 7, the night before the 1986 launch of the space shuttle Challenger, anxious engineers requested a telephone conference with NASA brass. The rubber joints on the Shuttle's booster rockets had had a history of leaking small jets of flame. The engineers worried that the very cold weather that night might make those rubber seals inflexible and thereby allow bigger, more dangerous leaks. After a long discussion, managers decided the launch should proceed because there weren’t enough data to justify scrapping the mission.

Humanity has always faced disasters. Some, like hurricanes, earthquakes, or tsunamis, are unpredictable caprices of nature. Others, especially since the Industrial Revolution, result from breakdowns in technological systems, mistakes on the part of humans operating those systems, or, most often, some devilish combination of the two. These include train wrecks, industrial accidents, plane crashes, and the like. The epic catastrophes of the 1970s and ‘80s—Three Mile Island, Challenger, Chernobyl, Exxon Valdez—helped launch a new field of inquiry dedicated to understanding these types of “socio-technical” failures. The field was pioneered not by engineers, but by sociologists and psychologists, experts in how humans behave in organized groups. This relatively new science of disaster reveals that major accidents are rarely the result of a single mechanical breakdown or isolated human error. Instead, organizations gradually “drift into failure,” in the words of disaster theorist Sidney Dekker. During long, accident-free periods, businesses and other institutions tend to reduce manpower and trim safety margins, all in the name of efficiency and focusing on their “core mission.”

James B. Meigs is a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, a co-host of the How Do We Fix It podcast, and the former editor of Popular Mechanics.

Commentary

James B. Meigs
“Drifting into failure is a slow, incremental process,” Dekker writes. “An organization, using all its resources in pursuit of its mandate (providing safe air-travel, delivering electricity reliably, taking care of your savings), gradually borrows more and more from the margins that once buffered it from the assumed boundaries of failure.”

Organizational culture also plays a role. Especially in hazardous fields, workers and managers grow accustomed to certain risks and increasingly confident in their ability to manage them. Situations that might appear scary to outsiders feel routine to them. NASA convinced itself that small leaks from shuttle booster rockets were a predictable annoyance, not a looming crisis. The crew members of the Deepwater Horizon were so accustomed to pushing the boundaries of undersea drilling that, in the words of one accident post-mortem, “they forgot to be afraid.”

University of Michigan sociologist Karl Weick has extensively studied the famous Mann Gulch disaster, a 1949 forest fire that claimed the lives of 13 smoke jumpers. He concludes that those men died due to a failure of what he calls “sense-making.” Having fought many similar fires, the crew shared a deep assumption that this one would behave like those they’d extinguished before. As a result, the crew missed subtle clues that their mental model was flawed. When the fire suddenly turned on them, they had no escape route. Weick argues that successful organizations need to be wary of too much optimism. True safety requires cultivating a bit of paranoia: being alert for the “weak signals” that might signal future trouble. “Positive illusions can kill people,” he warns.

Military history is full of disasters, of course. And the lessons of military history dovetail with the findings of disaster science. But wartime catastrophes contain yet another variable: an enemy eager to exploit any hint of complacency or distraction on the part of its adversary. Looking at October 7 through the lens of disaster science reveals how Israel’s military and political leadership developed an overly optimistic mental model of the threats that surrounded them. They forgot to be afraid. Worse, Hamas’s attack planners deeply understood Israel’s weak points and blind spots.

Israel’s drift into failure began long before October 7. Prime Minister Netanyahu and military leaders believed the threat from Hamas was mostly contained. With the Iron Dome missile-defense system in place, they came to see occasional rocket barrages from Gaza much the way NASA viewed booster leaks: as a manageable problem rather than an existential threat. A high-tech fence and automated listening posts had mostly eliminated incursions across the border. With Hamas seemingly quiescent, the IDF was able to reassign most troops from the Gaza frontier to other missions.

Amos Harel, a defense reporter for Haaretz, visited the border region six weeks before the attack. The IDF’s Coordination and Liaison Office at Erez “looked quite drowsy,” Harel later recalled. He saw “high fences, outposts, observation means, plenty of technological systems—but not many forces on the ground … the level of preparedness and vigilance also didn’t appear to be high.” On a visit to a base on Israel’s northern frontier, “I was taken aback by the amount of garbage in the corridors,” Harel wrote. Trash on a military base is like rust on a ship or burned-out light bulbs at a nuclear plant—the kind of weak signal that suggests slack discipline. If soldiers aren’t noticing litter underfoot, what else are they overlooking?

After the attack, stories trickled out that some observers had noticed worrisome activities in Gaza. An unnamed Egyptian intelligence official told the Associated Press that we have warned them an explosion of the situation is coming.” Hamas was planning “something big.” (Netanyahu called the claim “fake news.”) U.S. intelligence services also circulated reports indicating a rising threat of rocket attacks and other “unusual activity by Hamas,” according to CNN. But U.S. officials had seen such reports before, one source told the network: “I think what happened is everyone saw these reports and were like, ‘Yeah of course. But we know what this will look like.’” It is unclear whether the U.S. passed any warnings back to Israel. But apparently, U.S. experts were equally confident they could predict Hamas’s future tactics based on its past behavior.

Maya Desiatnik, an observation officer at the Nahal Oz outpost near the Gaza border, told Israeli public radio that she and other observers informed IDF superiors about multiple instances of suspicious activity. They saw people consulting maps along the fence line, heavy equipment, and groups of armed men engaged in what appeared to be training exercises. “It was clear that something would happen,” she said. Apparently, those warnings failed to dent the IDF’s
mental models about what risks might emanate from Gaza. If they had, perhaps military leaders would have been more alarmed by those reports that had filtered up to various headquarters in the hours before the attack. Instead, as Haaretz writes, “at the Shin Bet, the signs were deemed ‘weak signals’ from which it wasn’t possible to derive sufficient insight on activity in the near future.”

The Hamas leaders who planned the invasion—along with their likely Iranian advisers—knew exactly what they were doing. The attack began with a massive rocket barrage. The Iron Dome began launching its interceptor missiles while IDF forces stayed safely in their bunkers, monitoring the frontier remotely on video screens. The cacophony overhead masked the sound of gunfire and bulldozers breaking down fences. Snipers took aim at the cameras overlooking the border, while remotely operated drones dropped small bombs on automated watchtowers and cellular transponders. The timing was so precise that “all our screens turned off in almost the exact same second,” one soldier in a command center told investigators. Within minutes, the most powerful military in the Middle East was blind.

Israel had invested heavily in its high-tech border defenses, which included remote-controlled machine guns in addition to surveillance capabilities. In theory, the system should have kept the border region safe. But, as disaster researchers have documented, safety technology can be a two-edged sword. A new gadget can make an existing system safer, but it might also open the door to less frequent, yet more severe accidents. For example, the Deepwater Horizon platform relied on an elaborate seafloor rig known as a blowout preventer as a last resort to keep oil and gas from erupting out of the bore hole. These devices have prevented many accidents, but they also allow oil companies to drill deeper and take more risks. When the Deepwater Horizon preventer failed, it enabled the largest accidental oil spill in history.

With its high-tech barrier in place, the IDF became comfortable leaving only token forces along much of the border. Many of the troops who remained were concentrated in a single base. And instead of patrolling the border on foot, they watched it mostly via video links. In other words, Israel’s border defense evolved over time from a loosely connected string of observation posts to a single, well-integrated network. Disaster researchers would call this a “tightly coupled system.” The modern world is full of such interconnected systems. As a rule, these make our communications, commerce, infrastructure, and so on more efficient and convenient. But they have the potential to turn small, isolated problems into sprawling disasters.

Our power grid, for example, connects utilities across multiple states, allowing them to shuttle power to where it is needed, helping to prevent local brownouts and blackouts. But by linking local grids together, it exposes each of them to the threat of a grand, cascading failure. In 2003, a minor short circuit on an Ohio transmission line propagated across the grid until much of the Northeast and parts of Canada were plunged into a blackout. Almost 100 people died. Israel’s border-defense system was similarly vulnerable. Once terrorists knocked out the cameras and communications nodes, the whole system went dark. But even before communications fully collapsed, the information pouring in was too chaotic for IDF soldiers and officers to process. One new recruit told a military website, “We started receiving messages that there was a raid on every reporting line,” she said. “There were swarms of terrorists, something psychotic.” Higher up the chain of command, IDF officers were preoccupied with the rocket attack. At the main military headquarters in Tel Aviv, panicked reports from the front were met with “a lot of question marks,” one former military adviser told the Washington Post. No one grasped the massive scale of the attack; the very idea was outside anyone’s mental model. Faced with its worst crisis since the Yom Kippur War, Israel’s military suffered a complete collapse of sensemaking. An hour and a half passed before the IDF reported a “combined attack.” It took hours more to call in air support, even though the closest bases were only minutes away.

Such failure to grasp the scope of an unfolding catastrophe is surprisingly common. In fact, it is the norm. “Failure is not as much the accident,” Sidney Dekker once wrote, “but failure to identify the accident early in its birth.” In 2012, after the cruise ship Concordia struck a rock and began to sink off the Italian coast, befuddled crew members told passengers, “We have solved the problem and invite everyone to return to their cabins.” It is easy, in retrospect, to condemn such obtuseness, but this “positive optimistic bias” is deeply ingrained in our nature. What the human mind can’t comprehend, it seeks to minimize.

Civilians near the Gaza border were equally overwhelmed. Attackers arrived at the small Kissufim kibbutz just after 6:30 A.M. Shai Asher, a member of the kibbutz security team, got a WhatsApp message: “This is a real action, real action, a real situation,” he recalled to the Washington Post. He asked his colleagues whether anyone knew how to contact the IDF. But efforts to communicate were in vain. The attackers had detailed information about where to find—and soon disable—the village’s communications equip-
ment. Asher described the moment he realized the kibbutzniks were on their own: “The phone network doesn’t work, WhatsApp doesn’t work, everything is broken down,” he said. Similar scenarios played out all along the border.

The IDF would have been little help in any event. In many cases, military outposts and kibbutzim alike were just hundreds of meters from the border fence. Everyone was living under an imaginary umbrella of security. And the military had abandoned the long-standing concept of “defense in depth.” Hamas terrorists overran the thinly staffed bases before many soldiers even realized they were under attack. Some were shot in their beds. At the Nahal Oz post, Maya Desiatnik—the officer who reported suspicious activity—was one of only two soldiers who weren’t killed or abducted. “That’s what happens when you suffer a catastrophic systemic failure,” a former Israeli intelligence officer told the Post. “That’s what happens when you forget that all defense lines can eventually be breached and have been historically. That’s what happens when you underestimate your enemy.”

In a 2017 paper for the Brookings Institution, former CIA analyst Bruce Riedel wrote that Israel’s lack of preparedness for the 1973 Yom Kippur War was “a classic example of how intelligence fails when the policy and intelligence communities build a feedback loop that reinforces their prejudices and blinds them to changes in the threat environment.” Riedel’s paper is just one of hundreds of analyses and investigations that try to make sense of that war’s initial, nearly fatal, missteps. The tragedy of October 7 will no doubt prompt similar inquiries.

“Rituals of risk and error are the aftermath of every disaster,” writes Diane Vaughan, a Columbia University sociologist who wrote the definitive analysis of the Challenger disaster. Committees are convened, hearings held, fingers pointed. Invariably the investigations focus on exposing the culprits responsible for the lapses that few saw in advance, but that seem so glaringly obvious in retrospect. As Dekker puts it, disaster inquiries always seek to identify “bad people, bad decisions, broken parts.” After a tragedy it is natural to want someone to blame. And Israel’s current political and military leadership certainly offers plenty of candidates. But singling out negligent or even corrupt leaders isn’t enough to prevent catastrophes from recurring.

The Challenger disaster led to the famous Rogers Commission, an inquiry committee stuffed with notables including Neil Armstrong, Richard Feynman, Sally Ride, and Chuck Yeager. It produced a scorching report, which focused on leadership lapses. NASA initiated serious reforms. Nonetheless, 17 years after the Challenger was lost, the shuttle Columbia disintegrated on reentry. It turned out, NASA had made the same mistakes all over again: It had decided to tolerate seemingly small risks (in this case, chunks of detached insulating foam striking the orbiter’s delicate wings during takeoff) and to tune out weak signals. Vaughan concludes that NASA’s problems ran deeper than a few bad managers at the top. “Mistake, mishap, and disaster are socially organized and systematically produced by social structures,” she writes.

Inquiries into the Yom Kippur War failures led to major changes in Israel’s military structure and political leadership—including the end of Prime Minister Golda Meir’s storied career. And yet here we are, 50 years later, grappling with another catastrophic failure of sensemaking on the part of Israel’s political, intelligence, and military elites. And this could be the hardest lesson of the post–October 7 reckoning: Identifying and even punishing these failed leaders might be necessary, and indeed, cathartic. But it won’t be sufficient. The problems lie deeper than any group of individuals. “Locating blame in individuals perpetuates the problem,” Vaughan writes. The people thought to be at fault can be fired or even jailed, “but unless the organizational causes of the problems are fixed, the next person to occupy the same position will experience the same pressures and the harmful outcomes will repeat.”

It’s natural to be outraged at the leaders who failed to anticipate this horrific assault. But, unlike in a disaster, we should reserve our deepest anger for the people who ordered and carried out this exercise in primitive barbarity. Emily Harding, an analyst with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, writes that intelligence collapses like 9/11 and October 7 “are often failures of imagination.” They occur when leaders and analysts “neglect to think as big and as ruthlessly as their enemy.” Maybe we shouldn’t be shocked that Israel’s military and intelligence leaders failed to imagine the depths of Hamas’s depravity. Perhaps—and I know this is asking a lot—we should try to summon a bit of empathy for officials whose notions of military threats didn’t include mass rape and babies in ovens.

No doubt all these questions will be hashed out in the coming years of inquiry and attempts at reform. But that will have to wait. As Israeli forces were still engaging the last Hamas terrorists, a reporter asked IDF military spokesman, Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari, about the status of the investigation into military and intelligence failures. His response: “First, we fight, then we investigate.”

December 2023
ON MAY 8, 1997, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia delivered what may have been the most important speech of his life. Strikingly, the address had nothing to do with jurisprudence; it made no mention of the Constitution or of the originalism that had marked his career. Delivered in the Capitol Rotunda, the justice’s remarks focused on the horrors of history, yet Scalia looked to not only the past but also the future. His words, not printed in the vital volume *Scalia Speaks*, have proved terrifyingly prescient.

The occasion of the address was a ceremony marking Holocaust Memorial Day. The justice reflected that, as honored as he was to participate, he found the invitation difficult to undertake as a non-Jew: “I am an outsider speaking to an ancient people about a tragedy of unimaginable proportions that is intensely personal to them.” Scalia further reflected, “I am not only not a Jew, I am a Christian,” and said he believed that the anti-Semitism in Christendom had “helped set the stage for the mad tragedy that the National Socialists produced.” He stressed, however, that for him, the ceremony of the day was personal: “When I was a young man in college, spending my junior year abroad, I saw Dachau. Later, in the year after I graduated from law school, I saw Auschwitz. I will of course never forget the impression they made upon me.”

These remarks were interesting enough, but the most important part of the speech was yet to come. Scalia stressed that it was not enough to remember the Holocaust. Rather, he said, one must mark the sort of society in which it occurred: “The one message I want to convey today is that you will have missed the most frightening aspect of it all, if you do not appreciate that it happened in one of the most educated, most progressive, most cultured countries in the world.” The Germany of the early-20th century, he noted, “was a world leader in most fields of art, science, and intellect.” Its universities were some of the most celebrated on earth. Yet this did not prevent Nazism from suffusing society; in fact, German education and Nazism went hand in hand.

Then, suddenly, Scalia switched from past to present and focused on his own family: “This aspect of the matter is perhaps so prominent in my mind because I am undergoing, currently, the task of selecting a college for the youngest of my children—or perhaps more accurately, trying to help her select it.” American parents, Scalia reflected, place so much value today on what is taught in academic institutions, yet the opportunities afforded there, he argued, are “of only secondary importance—to our children, and to the so-

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Commentary

Scalia’s Prophecy

MEIR Y. SOLOVEICHIK

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ciety that their generation will create.” The Holocaust, Scalia argued, is a reminder of the importance of imparting moral wisdom above all else, and it is this, he was implicitly saying, that parents must bear in mind as they ponder the intellectual future of their progeny.

I thought of Scalia’s speech as I watched the videos of student rallies in prominent American universities celebrating the atrocities wrought by Hamas, rejoicing in the murder of Jews. It is not too much to say that these assemblies have summoned the specter of Nuremberg and are made all the worse by the fact that the language employed by the students—such as defending infanticide as “decolonization”—reflects the very curriculum they have been taught. In a striking interview on MSNBC, Rabbi Ari Berman, the president of Yeshiva University (where I am privileged to teach), called on “all university presidents to issue with moral clarity for their entire university” the message that the perpetrators of these evils must be fought, and that “what happened should never happen again.” Since Rabbi Berman’s clarion call, some universities have joined a statement organized by Yeshiva, which forthrightly states: “We Stand United with Israel Opposing Hamas.” In stark contrast, many of those leading some of the most celebrated academic institutions in America released, in the days and weeks following October 7, letters rife with the moral relativism that has festered within the academy for some time.

When those statements were issued, I read them with horror, but not with surprise. And then, suddenly, one online video caught my eye. The setting of the clip was anything but academic; it was taken from the broadcast of a football game featuring the Kansas City Chiefs. A moment of silence was held to mark the memory of those murdered in Israel. Then, from the crowd, rose one sports fan’s plaintive cry, an unsophisticated but defiant denunciation of terror: “F— Hamas.” It struck me that this one anonymous attendee at a game hundreds of miles away from any Ivy League institution had somehow summoned more moral clarity than most university presidents in America, and that if the West was to be saved, it would be through the ability to call evil by its name. Or, as Scalia reflected:

It is the purpose of these annual Holocaust remembrances—as it is the purpose of the nearby Holocaust museum—not only to honor the memory of the six million Jews and three or four million other poor souls caught up in this 20th-century terror, but also, by keeping the memory of their tragedy painfully alive, to prevent its happening again. The latter can be achieved only by acknowledging, and passing on to our children, the existence of absolute, uncompromisable standards of human conduct. Mankind has traditionally derived such standards from religion; and the West has derived them from and through the Jews.

The past horrible month has been clarifying in many ways, including the way in which the rot in much of the academy has been exposed. Parents across this country will be forced to ask themselves what is truly the essence of education, and where their children will be taught the moral wisdom that matters most. As their considerations commence, they would do well to read the words of one Harvard-educated lawyer who, 25 years ago, understood the answer to these questions and warned of what was yet to come—and what is now upon us.
Politics in the Biden era has a weird, split-screen aspect. Poll after poll comes out, showing that the president is unpopular, that Americans are unhappy with the economy and the southern border and the state of the world, and that the GOP has a national advantage. And then, in election after election, Republicans lose.

They don’t lose every race. In 2021, Republicans took the Virginia governor’s mansion, and they claimed the U.S. House of Representatives the following year. The GOP still holds most governors’ mansions and state legislatures. So far in 2023 they have picked up the Louisiana governor’s mansion; held on to power in Mississippi; and made further inroads on Long Island, New York. Republicans can see a faint silver lining—if they squint hard enough.

Still, since Joe Biden took office, the GOP’s overall record has been disappointing. It’s a story of frustrated ambition, cognitive dissonance, and general incompetence. Biden is the most vulnerable presidential incumbent since 1980, yet he and his party remain competitive. They can point to electoral success. The Republicans, by contrast, have not converted widespread dissatisfaction into sizeable and durable majorities.

This year’s elections in Ohio, Kentucky, and Virginia tell us why. All three contests touched on abortion rights in the aftermath of last year’s landmark Dobbs decision that overturned Roe v. Wade. In Ohio, voters approved a ballot initiative to establish a right to abortion in the state constitution. In Kentucky, voters reelected pro-choice Democratic governor Andy Beshear. In Virginia, voters rebuked pro-life GOP governor Glenn Youngkin by handing control of the state legislature to Democrats.

Now it is true that off-year elections do not predict presidential outcomes. It is true that, if viewed in isolation, each of these results can be downplayed or otherwise explained away. After all, the Ohio measure was vaguely worded. Beshear is a popular moderate, and state-level Democrats have done well in Kentucky. And a Democratic gerrymander hobbled Youngkin’s chances.

Such excuses are true enough. But they are hardly reassuring. The fact is that these elections can’t be viewed in isolation. They hang together. They fit a pattern. They are the latest entries in a litany of loss. And the catalogue has a theme: For more than a year now, if the issue is abortion, the Democrats win.

The Court issued the Dobbs ruling in June 2022. That August, Democrats won special elections in New York and Alaska. And pro-choice activists defeated a measure that would have allowed the Kansas legislature to restrict or ban abortion.

In November 2022, election analysts, including me, expected a red wave to wipe out the Democratic majorities in the House and Senate. Judging by Biden’s unpopularity and historical precedent, we said that the 2022 result would look like GOP landslides in 1994, 2010, and 2014. We were wrong.
The red wave petered out. There were mini waves in Florida and in New York, to be sure, but nothing spread across the country. Republicans did carry the House of Representatives, but by a disappointing margin. And Republicans lost a Senate seat, dropping to a 49-to-51 minority.

Yes, pro-life Republican governors such as Ron DeSantis, Kim Reynolds, Brian Kemp, and Mike DeWine won reelection by stunning margins. They were experienced incumbents in red states who also offered voters popular economic, social, and education policies. Novice challengers drawn to Trump’s MAGA worldview were nowhere as effective. According to the Fox News voter analysis, Democrats trounced Republicans among the supermajority of voters who said that the Supreme Court’s reversal of Roe v. Wade was an important factor in their vote.

The evidence piled up. This past April, liberal candidate Janet Protasiewicz defeated conservative Daniel Kelly for a Wisconsin supreme court seat. Protasiewicz won 56 percent to 45 percent in a race fought over the future of abortion law in the Badger State.

Nor was it only Republicans who suffered losses because of the (often false) impression that they supported abortion bans. Around the same time as the Wisconsin judicial election, far-left progressive Brandon Johnson defeated moderate Paul Vallas in the Chicago mayoral Democratic primary. Johnson ran a campaign devoted to calling Vallas a crypto-Republican who would restrict abortion.

In a September 2023 memo, the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee, which handles state legislative races, announced that Democratic candidates had been over-performing in special state legislative elections by 7 points. “Voters are rejecting Republican extremism and it’s up to us to take advantage of our momentum to shift the balance of state power in 2024,” the memo read.

Governor Youngkin’s proposed 15-week limit on abortion—well in the mainstream of public opinion—was meant to prevent Democrats from defining Virginia Republicans as extreme. It did not work. At the least, it did not work nearly well enough.

Indeed, it is hard to know how Republicans can ditch the baggage they are carrying. Republican victories in 2010, 2014, and 2016 were thanks to independent voters. But independents have swung to the Democrats since 2018 and, apart from Youngkin’s race in 2021, have not looked back. Even if Republicans could figure out how to talk about abortion, they would have to deal with the underlying source of discontent: Donald Trump.

Ironically, Trump understands that abortion presents a political dilemma for Republicans. He has picked several high-profile fights with pro-life leaders to distance himself from the cause. He is triangulating between the right-to-life movement and a public wary of limits on abortion, at no cost to his standing in the Republican presidential primary, or in head-to-head matchups against President Biden.

Yet Trump can’t triangulate from himself. Say he convinces voters that he won’t ban abortion in a second term. He will have to deal with persistently high negative ratings. He will have to deal with suburban independents tired of the chaos and craziness associated with MAGA.

In recent polls that show him ahead of Biden, Trump has benefited from a surge in support from non-college-educated minority voters. Yet, because of how those voters are distributed across the country, Trump’s gains do not necessarily translate into swing-state victories.

Furthermore, my colleague Philip Wallach found that in competitive House races in 2022, Trump-endorsed candidates underperformed baseline expectations by 5 points. What reason is there to believe the same effect won’t apply in 2024?

The polls are clear that Joe Biden has lost supporters since the last presidential election. What’s fuzzy is Trump’s ability to regain followers who abandoned him after 2016. “This will be a very close general election,” wrote Biden campaign manager Julie Rodriguez in a November 2 memo. “With a year until November 5, 2024, the fundamentals of this race show our campaign is in a strong position to win.”

To say that Biden’s position is “strong” is going way too far. The public doesn’t trust him, doesn’t like the job he’s doing, and thinks he’s too old and too infirm to serve another term. Yet the public has been thinking about Biden along these lines since the summer of 2021. And Republicans have little but a narrow and fractious House majority to show for it.

A successful opposition would do all it could to fix two glaring weaknesses: its vulnerability to the charge that it will ban abortion, and its deeply flawed presidential front-runner. That is not what’s happening. The off-year elections were a wake-up call. The GOP is sleeping through it.
How Do You Solve a Problem Like Attiah?

CHRISTINE ROSEN

For someone with the title of “Global Opinions Editor” at a major newspaper, Karen Attiah of the Washington Post holds many opinions that ought to stupefy serious opinion leaders across the globe, if they were to bother wasting their time reading her. For my sins, I have and did, and now I will tell you about them, so you will be prepared if you ever see her byline. Her column appears regularly in the Washington Post, one of the many reasons it has ceased being a great newspaper and has now become at best a mediocre bird-cage liner.

A week after the Hamas slaughter and wounding of thousands of Israelis, President Biden announced the United States’ strong support for Israel and its right to defend itself. Attiah’s response on X? “I will never forgive Biden for this.” When she was criticized on social media for her cavalier attitude about the atrocities committed by Hamas, she responded with snark: “twenty years from now ‘Mom, dad…what did y’all do in 2023 when Palestinians were being ethnically cleansed? ’Well honey, we served the cause of justice…we volunteered to scold angry ethnic minorities for criticizing Biden.”

No one who has followed Attiah’s career is surprised by any of this. She is, after all, the editor who, in 2018, published an opinion piece by the leader of the terrorist Houthi militia, and justified doing so by claiming that all sides in Middle East debates needed to be heard. The Houthi motto is certainly straightforward about what it wants the world to hear: “Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse the Jews, Victory to Islam.”

Her tough-mindedness extends only so far, however. A few years later, Attiah, like many of her ilk in elite mainstream-media institutions, was so threatened by Senator Tom Cotton’s suggestion in the New York Times that cities should consider calling in the National Guard to quell riots in the wake of the killing of George Floyd, she actually demanded that the Times issue a retraction.

Death to Jews? No problem. Ending riots in America’s cities? That’s a bridge too far for Attiah.

Attiah also defended Marc Lamont Hill, who lost his job as a CNN contributor after he used the Israel-eliminationist phrase “from the river to the sea” in a pro-Palestinian speech. Hill also frequently offers his support for Palestinian terrorist Ali Jiddah and on his Facebook page posts anti-Semitic statements about “Satanic Jews” by Louis Farrakhan. And yet Attiah chose him as her prime example of how “Black people can be discredited as antisemitic and punished simply for advocating justice for Palestinians.”

She also frequently defends anti-Semitic members of the so-called Squad in Congress—Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ayanna Pressley, and Cori Bush—claiming they are being attacked only because they are women of color. For someone who is frequently fêted with awards for her journalism, Attiah is astonishingly ignorant in the face of clear facts: that people who frequently make anti-Semitic remarks are anti-Semites.

But seeing what’s right in front of her is not Attiah’s strong suit. Before she was an enthusiast of terrorists and
anti-Semites, Attiah was known for being the Washington Post's point person for Jamal Khashoggi, a foreign national who laundered talking points for the government of Qatar in columns that Attiah published without disclosing the foreign influence behind them. Khashoggi was murdered at the behest of the Saudi Arabian government in 2018. A book that Attiah was writing about Khashoggi for Harper Collins was recently pulled by the publisher with little explanation.

Attiah's simplistic approach to complicated global issues—viewing every conflict through the radicalized undergraduate lens of oppressor and oppressed, colonizer and colonized—extends to domestic matters as well. She gained visibility during the summer of 2020 by presenting herself as a voice for the Black Lives Matter–inspired racial reckoning the country was supposed to undergo in the wake of the killing of George Floyd. Attiah embraced the issue of race with the same ideologically blinkered zeal that has long marked her writing on foreign affairs.

A typical 2021 column claimed, "If America were another country, we would be talking about how post-Civil War America is still in desperate need of a U.N.-sponsored Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program for white supremacists and segregations."

The previous year, she appeared on writer Ian Bremmer's show to proclaim, "Anti-blackness in this country is pervasive. It's like oxygen. It's in the air. You don't even notice it but we're all breathing it" and called the U.S. a "developing country" regarding race.

It's thus no surprise that Attiah's views on foreign terrorism are clearly aligned with those of Black Lives Matter supporters here at home. In the immediate aftermath of the October 7 attack by Hamas, BLM chapters in the U.S. posted praiseworthy memes hailing the terrorists, including reproducing the image of paragliders who invaded Israel to rape and slaughter women and children. As now-discredited BLM co-founder Patrisse Cullors once said, "Palestine is our generation's South Africa, and if we don't step up boldly and courageously to end the imperialist project that's called Israel, we're doomed."

Attiah also seems eager to serve up morally equivocating statements in the service of ending the "imperialist project" of Israel. Consider this recent gem: "Many of us were horrified at the initial attack and hostage-taking by Hamas," she wrote, "while also feeling as though we were horrified at the initial attack and hostage-taking by Hamas; as the Jewish community worldwide reeled from an unprecedented spike in often-violent anti-Semitic attacks, Attiah thought the world's focus should instead be solely on the Palestinians: "As Israelis and Jewish people express their terror, shock and grief, Palestinians are (rightfully) pointing out that their own pain and deaths under the actions of the Israeli state have been ignored for years," she wrote.

After the IDF took out a Hamas command center that had been placed deliberately among civilian populations, a practice the organization has long engaged in, Attiah took to social media to express her disapproval: "Absolutely NOTHING justifies this reckless slaughter," she posted on X. "This is beyond, beyond atrocious," another post said, calling for an immediate cease-fire. She accused Israeli officials of having "genocidal intent" toward residents of Gaza, even as the Israeli army was making every effort to warn civilians of impending attacks. She has written nothing about the fact that Hamas regularly uses its own people as human shields and steals international aid to fuel its war machine while its people starve. Instead, she put the phrase that correctly describes the state of Israel—the only democracy in the Middle East—in scare quotes.

Attiah's colleagues don't have this problem. Post columnist Charles Lane, for example, actually viewed the footage provided to journalists of the atrocities committed by Hamas in Israel. In a recent, harrowing column describing what he saw, Lane wrote, "What was revelatory—what you really do have to see and hear to believe—is the attitude of the terrorists. They are having the time of their lives. Some whoop with delight over dead civilians lying on a highway... a terrorist calling home to tell his parents that he is in Israel and killing Jews—10, he boasts, including a woman whose phone he is using. 'Their blood is on my hands,' he cries, joyously. 'Your son's a hero...'."

These are the people Attiah would have readers sympathize with because of their supposedly oppressed status.

Democracy might die in darkness, as the Washington Post's self-aggrandizing motto proclaims, but journalism suffers when despicable apologists for terrorism like Karen Attiah are given powerful platforms to spread propaganda and rationalize hate. Birds themselves might shy away in disgust from using the pages with her work on them to relieve themselves.
It’s Not the ‘Occupation,’ Stupid

It’s a century of Palestinian Jew-hatred

BY SOL STERN

ON THE MORNING of October 7, waves of Hamas death squads entered Israel for the sole purpose of murdering defenseless Jews. The leaders of the Islamist terrorist movement were so confident they were on the right side of history that they boasted about their atrocities, released graphic videos of butchered Jewish mothers and babies, and then promised to do it again. Unfortunately, they weren’t entirely wrong in their assessment of the likely world reaction. At an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council two weeks after the massacre, Secretary General Antonio Guterres opined that the “attacks by Hamas did not happen in a vacuum. The Palestinian people have been subjected to 56 years of suffocating occupation.” Guterres also repeated the 56-year-old UN mantra that “the only realistic foundation for a true peace and stability [is] a two-state solution.” Too bad the secretary general didn’t identify the party to the conflict that is doctrinally opposed (through its founding charter) to any statehood at all for the Jewish people.

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Commentary
It means little that Guterres later tried to walk his comments back somewhat. The widely circulated statement by the head of the world body represented a previously unimaginable propaganda victory for Hamas and the other Palestinian terror groups. And since the “occupation” is not likely to end soon, it surely encourages more Nazi-style death squads.

Credit for Hamas’s achievement belongs as well to the international, pro-Palestinian united front that includes five members of the U.S. House of Representatives known as “the squad.” For the past several decades, this well-organized advocacy network has been arduously promoting the lie that Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, plus the absence of a “two-state solution,” leaves the Palestinians with no recourse other than continued armed resistance, including the killing of innocent civilians. That twin falsehood, now endorsed by the UN chief, was repeated over and over again at the massive pro-Hamas demonstrations in the Western democracies. It is also echoed in parts of the mainstream media.

What’s most astonishing (and depressing) about the durability of this particular libel is not merely that there are mountains of historical evidence debunking it, but that Palestinian leaders themselves have repeatedly acknowledged there is no connection at all between Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and the war they have chosen to wage against the Jewish state. Palestinian terrorists were sent to slaughter Jews during the years when there was an occupation, and they murdered innocent Jews when there was no occupation at all.

In the century since the British army liberated the Palestinian people from four centuries of brutal Ottoman occupation, they have had three preeminent political leaders: Haj Amin al-Husseini, Yasser Arafat, and Mahmoud Abbas. At several points during their varied careers, each had to make a fateful choice for their people between two separate historical paths. The first path would have led to an end of foreign occupation (either British or Israeli) and the creation of an independent Palestinian state. But it would also have required the Palestinians to end their war against the Jews and give up the dream of exclusive sovereignty throughout the land. The second path was to persist in trying to eradicate Zionism or (later) the Jewish state, but at the price of continued occupation. On four separate occasions—in 1937, 1947, 2000, and 2008—those leaders chose the second path, meaning more killing of Jews and more occupation, and more misery for their own people.

A FORETASTE OF THE RUIN to come occurred in Jerusalem on April 4, 1920, during the traditional Muslim procession known as Nebi Musa. As a result of the British military victory in the recent Great War, Palestinian Arabs enjoyed significant political rights for the first time in their history. At that moment there was no Zionist occupation anywhere in the land. Nevertheless, Palestinian leaders were not inclined to use politics and public diplomacy to press for their goal of ending Jewish immigration. At the procession, Muslim notables harangued Arab mobs to storm into the Jewish Quarter in an orgy of killings, looting, and rape. The victims were mostly pious Jews who had lived in the Holy City for generations and cared not at all about political Zionism. Because the Palestinian Arabs didn’t yet have guns or bombs, the casualty figures were low by contemporary standards: Only six Jews were murdered, 200 injured, and two Jewish women raped.

One of the ring leaders of the Nebi Musa riots was Haj Amin al-Husseini, the younger brother of the mayor of Jerusalem. Another was Aref al-Aref, the 27-year-old editor of the Palestinian Arab journal Southern Syria. The politically active journalist rode through the gathering crowd on horseback, chanting, “Palestine is our land and the Jews are our dogs.”

It took the British authorities several days to restore order. Haj Amin al-Husseini and Aref al-Aref were tried and sentenced to 10 years in prison by a British military court, but they escaped the city. After this first of many Palestinian pogroms, the British government appointed Herbert Samuel, a British Jew with alleged Zionist sympathies, as high commissioner of the mandate’s civil administration.

One of Samuel’s first official acts was to pardon al-Husseini and appoint the 26-year-old Islamist agitator as the grand mufti of Jerusalem, charged with overseeing the city’s Muslim holy places. Samuel also rubber-stamped al-Husseini’s election as president of the Supreme Muslim Council. With those titles, the former Nebi Musa rioter became the most powerful political and religious leader among the Palestinian Arabs.

Commissioner Samuel’s strategy, taken from the British imperial playbook, was to contain anti-colonial resistance by doling out political patronage to rebellious leaders of the native population. In the case of the Palestinian Arabs, the approach was doomed to failure. Palestinian Jew-hatred was already deeply entrenched and infused with Islamist religious doctrines. It could not be contained by political concessions then, or for the next hundred years.
In 1929, al-Husseini used his seat of power to instigate new atrocities against the Jews—the Palestinian version of Kristallnacht. There was still no “Zionist occupation” of Arab land, but the mufti spread the rumor that the Jews were plotting to take over the Haram al-Sharif (the Dome of the Rock) above the Western Wall. His followers responded by again attacking the defenseless Jewish Quarter, this time killing more than 130 innocents. A few days later, an Arab mob turned the Orthodox Jewish community in Hebron into a killing field. Sixty-seven Jews were murdered, women were raped, and several men were castrated.

Yet again, the British authorities sought to constrain the violence by offering political gifts to the perpetrators. A white paper issued by the British government declared that Jewish immigration would be limited, based on the country’s “economic absorptive capacity.” The Palestinians and their maximum leader, al-Husseini, were not pacified.

Al-Husseini was soon elected chairman of the eight-member Arab Higher Committee (AHC), which became the ruling political body for the Palestinian Arabs for the next 15 years. The AHC then initiated a full-scale rebellion against the British occupation. This time, the Palestinians had enough guns and bombs to launch hit-and-run guerrilla attacks against the overstretched British military forces. The declared aim of the revolt was the ouster of the mandatory regime and the elimination of the Yishuv, the name given to the organized Zionist community in Palestine.

In the middle of the revolt, the British government offered the Palestinians the biggest political prize yet. A royal commission of inquiry chaired by Lord William Peel investigated the causes of the unrest and, in 1937, recommended the first-ever “two-state solution”—the partition of Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state. The Arabs would receive 90 percent of the territory for their state with the Jews allocated a tiny strip along the Mediterranean coast. The AHC, with chairman al-Husseini weighing in from exile in Lebanon, immediately rejected the offer and demanded Arab rule over the entire land of Palestine. David Ben-Gurion, the leader of the Yishuv, provisionally accepted the plan.

The debate over the Peel Commission’s recommendations became moot when the AHC resumed the military revolt. British forces didn’t fully succeed in crushing the uprising until the eve of World War II in Europe. In the meantime, al-Husseini had moved on to Iraq, where he participated in the abortive pro-Nazi revolt against the country’s British-backed government. Al-Husseini then fled to Germany, where he was welcomed by the Führer and hailed as a partner in the struggle against world Jewry.

The mufti never felt so appreciated as he did during his years in Berlin. He was provided with a large house and staff and invited to meetings with Heinrich Himmler to discuss the war against the Jews. He had the honor of reviewing troops of the Wehrmacht and directly helped the German war machine by recruiting

**The grand mufti of Jerusalem fled to Germany, where he was welcomed by the Führer and hailed as a partner in the struggle against world Jewry. Beginning in the mid-1930s, he came under the influence of Nazi racial doctrines and created a Palestinian organization modeled after the Hitler youth.**

Bosnian Muslims for the Waffen SS.

As an experienced propagandist, the mufti was put to work overseeing Arabic-language broadcasts promoting the affinities between Nazi ideology and Islamic Jew-hatred. At a private meeting in November 1941, Hitler informed al-Husseini about the coming extermination of the European Jews. In the German archives there is a summary memo of that fateful meeting in which the Führer also tells the mufti that his next objective would be “the destruction of the Jewish element residing in the Arab sphere under the protection of British power.”

The reason that the mufti allied himself with Germany was not that Germany was the enemy of his enemy, i.e., the British occupiers. Beginning in the mid-1930s, he came under the influence of Nazi racial doctrines and created a Palestinian organization modeled after the Hitler youth. He also sent Palestinian delegations to the Nazi Nuremberg rallies. According to the widely respected German historians Klaus Michael Mallmann and Martin Cluppies, if Rommel’s Afrikacorps had won the battle at El Alamein and then conquered Palestine, the Mufti would have gone along to supervise another Final Solution for the Jews of Palestine.

After the German surrender, the mufti was
captured by French military forces and placed under “house arrest” in a villa outside Paris. The Yugoslav government requested his extradition to face trial for the war crimes he had committed in the Balkans. But al-Husseini was shielded from prosecution by high-level government officials in the U.S. and France determined to protect Western influence in the Arab world.

In June 1946, French security forces guarding the house where al-Husseini was detained conveniently left the door open and he “escaped” to Egypt. The mufti was granted asylum and received a rapturous reception. In Cairo, he was greeted as a conquering hero by the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna. The mufti, al-Banna declared, “challenged an empire and fought Zionism with the help of Hitler and Germany. Germany and Hitler are gone, but Amin al-Husseini will continue the struggle.”

During the period of Jordanian and Egyptian occupation, there were few opportunities for Palestinians to fight the war against the Jews directly. Instead, the legend of the Nakba was used to depict the creation of the Jewish state as a ‘catastrophe’ for the land’s native people.

Within months, al-Husseini was reinstated as chairman of the Arab Higher Committee, now officially recognized in international forums as representing the Palestinian Arabs. With Great Britain winding down the Palestine mandate, the AHC vehemently opposed any discussion of partition, and al-Husseini’s armed gangs threatened and intimidated Palestinians who thought otherwise. After the passage of the UN partition resolution in November 1947, al-Banna and al-Husseini combined forces and sent thousands of fighters into Palestine to begin the first full-scale war against the Yishuv with the intent of aborting the Jewish state. It was the second time during the mufti’s tenure that he chose to continue the war against the Jews rather than accept a plan that would free his people from foreign occupation and allow them to establish an independent state in most of the homeland.

During that period, the American left understood that the emerging Jewish state was threatened by enemies steeped in Nazi doctrines of eliminationist anti-Semitism. Before the UN General Assembly voted on the partition resolution, the Nation magazine submitted a lengthy report to all the member states titled “The Arab Higher Committee: Its Origins, Personnel, and Purposes.” Supervised by longtime Nation editor Freda Kirchwey, the report urged a vote for partition and declared that the AHC was “an almost exact equivalent, in Middle Eastern terms, of the cabal that ruled Hitler’s Germany.”

The theme that the Palestinians were led by Nazi collaborators was also stressed in the dispatches written by the legendary leftist reporter I.F. Stone. In This Is Israel, Stone’s book about the 1948 War of Independence, he refers to the Jewish state as a “tiny bridgehead” of 650,000 surrounded by 30 million Arabs. He quotes the head of the Arab League, Abdul Rahman Azzam, declaring, “This war will be a war of extermination and a momentous massacre which will be spoken of like the Mongol massacres and the Crusades.”

Stone blamed al-Husseini and the Arab Higher Committee for creating the Palestinian refugee crisis. The Palestinian leaders reminded him of the fascists he had fought with his pen since the Spanish Civil War, and he ticked off the names of Nazi veterans leading Palestinian military units attacking Jewish settlements. “German Nazis, Polish reactionaries, Yugoslav Chetniks, and Bosnian Moslems flocked [into Palestine] for the war against the Jews,” Stone reported.

The Jewish state won its war of independence, but 90 percent of the Palestinian people came under foreign occupation. The Kingdom of Jordan annexed the West Bank, Egypt took control of Gaza, yet there were no anti-occupation protests by the local population. The new arrangement was particularly rewarding for Aref al-Aref, veteran of the 1920 Nebi Musa riots. He became mayor of Arab Jerusalem and loyally served the kingdom of Jordan for the duration. He also had time to write a history of the Palestinian struggle, titled The Nakba of Jerusalem and the Lost Paradise.

During the period of Jordanian and Egyptian occupation, there were few opportunities for Palestinians to fight the war against the Jews directly. Instead, the legend of the Nakba was used to depict the creation of the Jewish state as a “catastrophe” for the land’s native people. So much so that Israel had to be erased by any means necessary. During this brief interregnum, the Nakba myth allowed the Palestinians to continue the struggle through historical narrative.
It is true that after winning the 1967 war, Israel took over the West Bank and the occupation continued for the next 56 years. (The occupation of Gaza was ended unilaterally by Israel 18 years ago.) It is equally true that Israeli governments of both the left and right worked assiduously to end the occupation and allow the Palestinians to create their own independent state. Israel’s left-wing Labor government initiated the Oslo process in early 1993. By September of that year, it culminated with the famous handshake on the White House lawn between Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

At the time, Arafat was stranded in Tunis in a very precarious position. His PLO cadres were expelled from Jordan in 1970, thrown out of Beirut by Israel’s army in 1982, and then again kicked out of Tripoli, Lebanon, by the Syrians. Arafat’s reputation was in tatters among the Arab governments because of his impetuous decision to support Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait. Yet the Rabin government was so determined to end the occupation and achieve a two-state solution that it threw Yasser Arafat a lifeline and made him a serious negotiating partner. According to their signed agreement, Arafat would be brought back to the West Bank to preside over a fledgling Palestinian government. After a five-year interim period, the parties would negotiate a final-status arrangement that contemplated an independent Palestinian state living in peace with Israel.

In the spring of 1998, Arafat and his top lieutenants in the Palestinian Authority (PA) began confering about the final-status negotiations due to begin shortly. It was at this point that Arafat announced the first commemoration of Nakba Day. To avoid delivering on the promises he had made five years earlier, Arafat chose to weaponize the Palestinian Nakba narrative into a declaration of permanent war against the Jewish state. The key element of his May 15 Nakba Day speech was the claim of 5 million Palestinian refugees who had a sacred “right of return” to their homes in Jaffa, Haifa, and dozens of formerly Arab towns and villages in Israel. From his Ramallah headquarters, the PA president read out the marching orders for the day’s violent demonstrations over Palestinian radio stations and public loudspeakers:

The Nakba has thrown us out of our homes and dispersed us around the globe. Historians may search, but they will not find any nation subjugated to as much torture as ours. We are not asking for a lot. We are not asking for the moon.

We are asking to close the chapter of Nakba once and for all, for the refugees to return and to build an independent Palestinian state on our land, our land, our land, just like other peoples.

By “our land” Arafat included Israel, thus unilaterally ending the Oslo process.

At the time, only one exceptional Palestinian leader knew exactly what Arafat intended and was willing to say so. It was Sari Nusseibeh, the PA’s representative in Jerusalem. In his memoir, Once Upon a Country, Nusseibeh describes a meeting with Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas on the issue of the refugees’ right of return. He recounts the following exchange with Abbas:

Nusseibeh: You have to level with us. What is it you want, a state or the right of return?
Abbas: Why do you say that? What do you mean by either/or?
Nusseibeh: That’s what it boils down to. Either you want an independent state or a policy aimed at returning all the refugees to Israel.
You can’t have it both ways.

The “right of return” for 5 million (now 7 million) alleged refugees was a deal-breaker not only for Israel, but also for the Clinton administration that brokered the Oslo Accords. Nevertheless, Arafat was dragooned by President Clinton to go to Camp David in 2000 for the final-status negotiations. The outcome was a foregone conclusion. The PA president stormed out of the meeting after turning down a generous offer for an independent state. Mark the year 2000, then, as the third occasion that a Palestinian leader chose to continue the war against the Jews, even if that also meant continuation of the occupation.

Yet another round of negotiations that might have ended the occupation took place eight years later, this time directly between Israel’s Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and PA President Mahmoud Abbas. The two leaders held 35 one-on-one meetings in Jerusalem over a span of seven months. At the last session, on September 16, 2008, Olmert offered Abbas an independent Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem. He shared with Abbas a proposed map of the borders of the two states that, through territorial swaps, would give the Palestinians almost 100 percent of the territory of the West Bank and Gaza that the Arabs had held before the 1967 war.

Abbas took the map. He said he would consider the offer and return in a few days with his answer. But...
he never came back, and the negotiations abruptly ended. It was the fourth time in 70 years that the recognized political leader of the Palestinians made the choice to continue the war against the Jews, which also meant extending the Israeli occupation.

In a scoop, the liberal Israeli newspaper Haaretz published the map that Olmert gave to Abbas. The PA president should have been embarrassed by the map's release, since it made clear that he had missed the best chance in 56 years to end the Israeli occupation. Instead, Abbas claimed his hands were tied over the refugee issue because the Palestinian masses would settle for nothing less than the right of return.

The Olmert map remains an indispensable historical document, the most graphic proof yet that the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is not about the occupation. It should be displayed on posters and banners and waved in front of all UN officials and pro-Palestinian demonstrators who continue to claim, against all the evidence, that Hamas and its allied Islamic terrorist networks are merely resisting oppression.

LIKE OTHER DAYS of infamy and horror, including December 7, 1941 and 9/11, October 7 should be remembered as a moment of illumination and clarity. Eighteen years after Israel unilaterally evacuated the Gaza Strip, Hamas sent its killing squads across the border to fight what the group believes is an “occupation.” For Hamas, though, the goal is to end the 75-year-old Zionist occupation of Tel Aviv and every other city and settlement in Israel today. Or, to put it more directly, the Jewish state is still fighting its war of independence.

Even the allegedly more moderate Palestinian Authority declares that the 1948 war is still ongoing every Nakba Day when it sends tens of thousands of violent demonstrators to the streets, chanting, “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.” The very same slogan is now also routinely chanted at college campuses and public squares all over the United States.

The mass-murder events of October 7 have understandably evoked memories of the Holocaust. In a phone call with President Biden, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Hamas committed acts “as in Babyn Yar where Jews where machine-gunned in killing pits.” Although morally correct, the comparison is not quite precise enough. Babyn Yar occurred a thousand miles away from the Middle East; Haj Amin al-Hussein and Hassan al-Banna worked for a Final Solution for the Jews of Palestine.

It’s more appropriate now for Israelis to focus on the strictly local political and religious antecedents of the October 7 massacres. The Hamas sha’ahids of today are the spiritual children of al-Husseini and al-Banna, and of the alliance between Islamic Jew-hatred and Nazi eliminationist anti-Semitism.

Hamas was created in 1987 as the Palestinian branch of the Egyptian Brotherhood. Its founding charter speaks of a sharia state similar to the Caliphate. Its religious slogan is “Islam is the solution.” But it is the legacy of al-Husseini and his embrace of Nazi Jew-hatred that drives Hamas’s political and military policies.

How dispiriting it is, then, to recall the many occasions over the past hundred years on which otherwise well-meaning British and Israeli officials fell into the trap of believing that this Islamist/Nazi ideological movement could be bribed into relative normalcy with political gifts and accommodations. Even the allegedly hardline Netanyahu governments of the past 15 years willfully ignored the lessons of history and complacently believed that Hamas had been deterred by bundles of cash.

The slogan “never again” has historically referred to the catastrophe in Europe where defenseless Jews were led to the slaughter. It must now take on a second meaning in the Jewish homeland. Self-defense is not the issue there. The people, the ordinary citizens of Israel, have shown over and over again that they can come together as one, rise to the occasion and defend their communities. It is rather that Israel’s governments and politicians must now pledge, “Never again.” Meaning, never again will we be lulled into complacency or forget the brutal lesson of the past 100 years. When avowed enemies steeped in Nazi and Islamic Jew-hatred announce they want to kill us, we should take them seriously and prepare to kill them first. Finally, never again will we believe that such enemies can be bribed into decent human behavior. 🔥
The University Horrors: Chapter and Verse

Here’s what happened. Everywhere.

BY KC JOHNSON

On October 26, the Biden administration expressed horror about the “extremely disturbing pattern of anti-Semitic messages being conveyed on college campuses.” According to a White House spokesperson, “delegitimizing the State of Israel while praising the Hamas terrorist murderers who burned innocent people alive, or targeting Jewish students, is the definition of unacceptable—and the definition of anti-Semitism.”

The October 7 Hamas massacre of more than 1,400 in Israel horrified most of the country and the democratic world. But the administration’s critique offered a glimpse at a far different reaction at colleges and universities—especially at elite institutions, increasingly dominated by an enforced orthodoxy in key corners of campus life; and at blue-state public universities, which draw from more left-of-center student populations who in recent years have grown sharply critical of Israel.

At these schools, the mass murder and kidnap-

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ping of Israeli civilians aroused great passion—but not for the victims. The passion came, instead, from critics of Israeli policies toward the Palestinians and in many cases of Israel's existence itself. Large student protests indifferent (at most) to the Hamas massacre have accompanied statements from faculty, particularly in the humanities and related fields, excusing, whitewashing, or even celebrating Hamas's actions. And university leaders, so accustomed to addressing political crises with ideologically charged statements reflecting the majority viewpoints on campus, often retreated to nebulous remarks or simply remained silent.

Harvard set the tone. Almost immediately after the Hamas attacks, a coalition of 34 student groups issued a joint statement holding “the Israeli regime entirely responsible” for “all the unfolding violence.” Formulated as the IDF desperately sought to save Israeli civilians within Israeli territory, the statement didn't condemn Hamas's targeting of civilians. It didn’t mention the mass slaughter of many college-age Israelis at a rave. It didn't call for the release of hostages. It did demand “a firm stand against colonial retaliation.”

Earlier in the decade, senior Harvard officials had forcefully condemned the killing of George Floyd and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Two days after the Hamas massacre, by contrast, Harvard president Claudine Gay joined 17 other senior administrators who said they were “heartbroken” about “the death and destruction unleashed” by Hamas and “the war in Israel and Gaza now under way.” This failure to distinguish between the morality of Hamas murdering civilians and the casualties of the war Hamas incepted did generate some dissent from prominent faculty members and partly inspired a faculty letter criticizing the administration’s “false equivalency between attacks on noncombatants and self-defense against those atrocities.” The next day, Gay (this time alone) issued a second statement “on the war in the Middle East,” leaving “no doubt” that she condemned Hamas's terrorism and distancing her administration from the student groups' missive.

By this point, even some of the student groups had changed their minds. The first public recission came from the Undergraduate Nepali Student Association, which acknowledged that Hamas had murdered 10 Nepali students along with Israelis. The group wrote, “We are deeply saddened by this news and mourn the lives that we have lost in the Nepali community”; but it did not comment specifically on the Israeli deaths. Off-campus websites identified the names of the student signatories among the 34 student groups that drafted the original letter, and a mobile billboard showed their names and faces in Harvard Square.

These developments prompted Gay to offer her third, and most passionate, statement—not about the mass murder, but rather in defense of the student groups’ ability to articulate their position. Harvard, she remarked, “rejects the harassment or intimidation of individuals based on their beliefs” and “embraces a commitment to free expression.” This sentiment might have seemed more credible if—just one month earlier—Harvard had not been ranked as the worst university in the country for free speech (with a score of zero on a 100-point scale) by the nonpartisan Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression.

Gay's updated remarks did not suffice for three government professors who were worried not about the kidnapped children in Gaza but rather about those who had signed the letter whitewashing the kidnapping. Those professors penned a Harvard Crimson op-ed demanding that Harvard “protect” the student groups, because “powerful individuals” had harshly criticized them merely for seeking to stimulate “a deeper discussion of the roots of Israeli-Palestinian violence.” Thirty full-time (mostly humanities) professors likewise complained that Harvard had refused “to actively protect the free speech of Palestinian, Arab, Black, and Muslim students,” while accusing Gay of ignoring “systemic Israeli state violence.”

Anti-Israel student speech did not seem particularly chilled. Weeks later, Harvard students marched through campus buildings disrupting classes with chants of “let Gaza live” and held a “die-in” criticizing the nonexistent Israeli missile strike on a Gaza hospital. A group of protesters claiming to be “safety marshals” (including a Harvard Law Review editor) surrounded an Israeli student attempting to record the “die-in” event, obstructing his path and bumping him as they shouted “Shame! Shame!” into his face.

N 1967, THE UNIVERSITY of Chicago's Kalven Report embraced institutional neutrality, since “the university is the home and sponsor of critics; it is not itself the critic.” Some institutions, such as Stanford and Williams College, revived this tradition in response to these events—a welcome development, although it's hard to miss how the sudden rediscovery of neutrality’s virtues came as the alternative to expressing sympathy for Israelis. (The president of Williams, for example, wrote a lengthy statement last year against the Supreme Court decision on abortion.) Other universities, such as Princeton and the University of
Florida, issued statements unequivocally condemning Hamas’s intentional targeting of civilians. It was nonetheless striking to see how many elite institutions—Penn, Cornell, NYU Law School, Columbia Law School, the University of Virginia—joined Harvard in releasing follow-up statements only after a backlash from alumni, donors, and politicians to their initial remarks. It was almost as if, in the intersectional university, academic leaders could not process a situation in which the victims were perceived (however inaccurately) as powerful and white, or in which anti-Semitism didn’t come from the far right.

The contrast with the Russian invasion of Ukraine was bracing. In March 2022, University of Virginia President Jim Ryan affirmed support for “members of our community who are affected by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine,” having “watched these difficult events with concern for the people of Ukraine and admiration for their resolve.” He expressed no concern with the loss of Russian lives, nor did any subsequent UVA statement do so. Regarding the October 7 massacre, on the other hand, the university initially indicated that “UVA is focused on the crisis in Israel and Gaza,” after noting, “The Palestinian militant group, Hamas, had attacked Israel from the Gaza Strip by air, land and sea.… More than 1,000 have been killed on both sides.” Only in its follow-up statement did the university, in Ryan’s name, condemn Hamas terrorism.

The visuals also dramatically differed. The Ukraine post included a photo of a large wall on campus that was painted in the Ukrainian flag’s blue and yellow; the Russian flag did not appear. The Israel post featured both the Israeli and Palestinian flags, in equal size.

In defense of their missteps, perhaps university leaders could not have predicted that the mass murder of Israeli civilians by the Palestinian regime in Gaza would quickly generate pro-Palestinian protests and campus commentary. Five days after the massacre, Students for Justice in Palestine called for resistance rallies at universities around the country. The organization’s messaging toolkit stressed that “settlers are not ‘civilians’ in the sense of international law, because they are military assets used to ensure continued control over stolen Palestinian land.” One of the two suggested promotional posters included a Hamas-like paraglider, which at least one chapter, at Long Beach State, used.

Apart from the odd timing—bodies of the murder victims were still being discovered—the resulting protests were notable for their silence on the events of five days before. While many rallies disclaimed support for Hamas, the vision of a “free Palestine” never included freedom for Gazan citizens from the Hamas dictatorship. The non-criticism of Hamas even extended to the terrorists’ attacks on Israeli Arabs who risked or gave their lives to save their Jewish fellow citizens. (This omission was especially curious, as highlighting the heroism of Israeli Arabs in the face of Hamas murderers was an obvious tactic to challenge Islamophobia, a key theme of the rallies.) The SJP events mostly played out as if the events of October 7 hadn’t occurred, except perhaps as a pretext for Israel to attack Palestinians. Columbia and George Mason rallies championed a Palestine “from the river to the sea.” At UCLA, protesters envisioned a renewed intifada.

A second round of organized student protests, on October 25, theoretically had a more discernible justification: opposing ongoing Israeli military strikes on Gaza. But the rallies’ focus ranged far beyond that issue. It “appalled” Emory President Gregory Fenves to see that “anti-Semitic phrases and slogans were repeatedly used by speakers and chanted by the crowd” during the event on his campus. Cooper Union protesters chanting “Free Palestine” banged on locked library doors and a transparent library window behind which some Jewish students sheltered. (Police led the students safely out of the library; an NYPD spokesperson denied any “direct threats” occurred or that the students were in danger.) More than 100 Brown students toured the campus advocating not an end to the occupation or a cessation of bombing, but Israel’s replacement by a Palestine “from the river to the sea”; Northwestern protesters made the same call.

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Commentary
Yale students maintained that Palestinian “resistance is justified,” while Cal-Berkeley and NYU protesters demanded “all of” the pre-state mandate for an independent Palestine; the NYU protest featured two students with signs reading “Keep the world clean,” alongside a drawing of a Star of David in a trash can. More than 100 University of North Carolina students demanded the university boycott all Israeli companies, as well as “companies that have showed support for Israel.” A speaker at the University of Washington proclaimed, “We don’t want Israel to exist. We don’t want these Zionist counter protesters to exist.”

These rallies, like their predecessors, featured few if any calls for the release of hostages and no discernible criticisms of Hamas, including for having murdered Israeli Arabs. Though the protests all involved protected speech, however unsettling the message, at least three campuses have seen arrests. At Cornell, a mentally imbalanced student was charged with threatening to kill Jewish students in the Kosher dining hall; at Columbia, an Israeli student allegedly was assaulted while putting up posters of his kidnapped fellow citizens; and at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, 57 students illegally occupied a campus building to express their disgust with Israel.

Other individual episodes likely violated campus disciplinary codes. Students at George Washington University projected messages of “Glory To Our Martyrs” and “Free Palestine From The River To The Sea” onto the walls of the university library. (The university’s initial statement acknowledged the “pain” of the act but didn’t condemn the messages.) At Columbia, a student group scheduled a movie night with an accompanying message from its president: “Zionists aren’t invited” and “THE HOLOCAUST WASN’T SPECIAL.” (Columbia forbid the event for violating its antidiscrimination policies.)

A University of Michigan student methodically ripped down posters of 12 kidnapped Israelis, because, he said, “the settlers are not innocent civilians.” A George Mason student, after learning that the hostage whose flyer she had just torn up was Thai, not Israeli, cheerily responded, “That’s great!” Similar acts of almost banal cruelty occurred at Baruch, Penn, Boston University, VCU, USC, and NYU (twice). One of the NYU students—a former intern for the ADL, incredibly—explained her actions by falling back on the language of campus identity politics: “I have found it increasingly difficult to know my place as a biracial brown woman.” Commentator Josh Barro offered a more persuasive interpretation for the vandalism: “The posters cause cognitive dissonance; thus, they must be removed from view.”

Extremism Has Hardly Been Confined to Students. A few days after the massacre, Professor Jemma Decristo, a University of California-Davis specialist in “the interplay between sound, race, gender, and embodiment,” tweeted a message to “zionist journalists” in the United States: “They can fear their bosses, but they should fear us more.” She punctuated her tweet with a knife, a machete, and three drops of blood.

The UC-Davis president distanced the school from Decristo’s call to violence, but he was the exception among university leaders encountering Hamas apologists among their ranks. Columbia professor Joseph Massad, a specialist in Arab politics whose troubling treatment of Jewish students almost derailed his tenure bid in the 2000s, celebrated as “awesome” the “Palestinian resistance’s takeover of several Israeli settler-colonies near the Gaza boundary.” Yale professor Zareena Grewal, whose research focuses on race, gender, religion, and nationalism among American Muslims, asserted that “Israel is a murderous, genocidal settler state and Palestinians have every right to resist through armed struggle.” When a journalist pointed out that she was talking about the deaths of innocent civilians, Grewal was dismissive: “Settlers are not civilians. This is not hard.” George Washington professor Lara Sheehi, whose scholarship focuses on “decolonial and anti-oppressive approaches to psychoanalysis,” deemed the massacre a justified response to “Israel’s genocidal intent.” Columbia, Yale, and George

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At Cornell, a mentally imbalanced student was charged with threatening to kill Jewish students in the Kosher dining hall; at Columbia, an Israeli student allegedly was assaulted.
Washington each declined to condemn their faculty members’ remarks.

Perhaps the likes of Massad or Grewal could be dismissed as unrepresentative—except their perspective appeared in an array of joint statements from faculty members at elite institutions and blue-state public universities alike. These statements shared a common template. Each purported to defend the speech of anti-Zionist students but actually envisioned shielding them from intense public criticism. Each came primarily from the humanities and allied scholars in law, education, or softer social sciences; few faculty from math or the sciences joined. Each portrayed Israel as a state of settler-colonialists and was bathed in a decolonization theory that author Simon Sebag Montefiore recently termed a “historically nonsensical mix of Marxist theory, Soviet propaganda, and traditional anti-Semitism from the Middle Ages and the 19th century.”

At their core, the statements used—or, more accurately, abused—historical context to minimize the horror of the October 7 massacre. The letters suggested that Hamas’s actions might have been justified, either in whole or in part. They also positioned the worst mass murder of Jews since the Holocaust on a spectrum of 75 years of events in which Israel’s moral record was either worse than that of Hamas and other Palestinian terrorists or at least as deserving of no sympathy from outsiders.

According to a statement by 122 current Columbia professors, 37 of whom hold endowed chairs at the institution, “one could regard the events of October 7th... as an occupied people exercising a right to resist violent and illegal occupation.” The signatories included BDS activist and gender and sexuality scholar Katherine Franke as well as Rashid Khalidi, who holds the school’s Edward Said Chair and is known for his close ties to a previous generation of Palestinian leaders; they endorsed arguments from Columbia students that October 7 “represented a military response by a people who had endured crushing and unrelenting state violence from an occupying power over many years.”

At City University of New York, 120 full-time faculty members similarly minimized the massacre, which they euphemistically termed “the October 7 military operation by Hamas.” The CUNY signatories denied any “equivalence” between Hamas’s actions “and the subsequent military attack by the Israeli state, and certainly no equivalence to the systemic [sic] and the violence of Israeli settler colonialism. Israeli state violence has defined Palestinian life in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip since 1948.”

Both the Columbia and CUNY missives embedded their views on the massacre within pretextual demands for protecting student speech. The Columbia letter complained about the unfairness of criticism—admittedly harsh and public—of a student letter demanding the university dissociate from Israel. The CUNY faculty unconvincingly portrayed administrators’ announcement of increased security at the Students for Justice in Palestine protest, which they encouraged student leaders to move roughly 100 feet from in front of a classroom building to a position adjacent to campus, as an effort to “censor dissent.”

Academic units rarely if ever should adopt official positions on contentious political issues, lest they create political litmus tests excluding dissenting students or faculty. Yet since October 7, at least six academic departments—four at public institutions where the First Amendment would seem to frown on the imposition of an official orthodoxy—have publicly endorsed the Palestinian cause.

The University of Washington’s American Ethnic Studies Department accused Israel of “genocidal retaliation” before oddly singling out “thousands of Jewish Americans” who had expressed “solidarity with Palestinians to call for an end to apartheid.” UC San Diego’s Ethnic Studies Department, citing Michigan Representative Rashida Tlaib as a guidepost on the conflict, replaced a day of classes with pro-Palestinian content. The Asian-American Studies Department at UC-Davis supplemented its pro-Palestinian position with “resources on the situation in Palestine and Israel.” As if to prove an intent to propagandize rather than educate students, its reading list, which included the likes of Edward Said, Steven Salaita, Judith Butler, Omar Barghouti, and Ilan Pappe, did not include any book or article that even took a neutral, much less a pro-Israel, stance. Syracuse’s Women’s and Gender Studies Department, Northwestern’s Asian American Studies Program, and Colorado’s Ethnic Studies Department each explicitly linked a pro-Palestinian position to their academic missions—implying that pro-Israel faculty would be screened out of the department on purportedly academic grounds.

None of these departments appears to have been rebuked by campus administrators. As passionately as they condemned Israel, the officially pro-Palestine departments avoided any criticism of Hamas. Despite their purported concern with Arab lives, they expressed no opinion on the Israeli Arabs killed by Hamas. Instead, the massacre was described matter-of-factly, if at all. The Northwestern program stated:
“On October 7, 2023, Hamas, the political group that has controlled Gaza since 2006, attacked Israel.”

Disciplines or disciplinary bodies—again, from the humanities and allied fields—also joined the fray. An open letter from more than 200 philosophy faculty members condemned “the oppressor,” the “ethno-supremacist state” of Israel, while avoiding any reference to the events of October 7. An open letter from several hundred tenured or tenure-track sociology professors failed to mention Hamas murders of civilians. It did, however, accuse Israel of having “targeted hospitals,” citing an Al Jazeera article for the discredited Hamas claim that an Israeli missile struck a Gaza hospital killing 500 Palestinians. The University of California system’s ethnic-studies faculty council—representing more than 300 professors—criticized university statements condemning Hamas for “terrorism” and “unprovoked” aggression, because “to hold the oppressed accountable for ‘terrorism’ reinscribes a colonial narrative.”

If we can no longer ignore campus attitudes on Israel, it’s easier to identify what won’t work to address the problem. For legal, moral, and tactical reasons, suppressing pro-Palestinian speech is wrong. Students have a right to speak, and efforts to prevent them from doing so—seen most prominently when Florida officials moved to decertify Students for Justice in Palestine campus branches—have no merit. That doesn’t mean, of course, that extreme statements by students can’t be analyzed or criticized, as many of the Harvard faculty or the Ivy League student protesters seem to envision.

Universities can and should come under heavy criticism from outside stakeholders for a willingness to foster anti-Israel extremism. The nation’s leading law schools are now on notice, after a bombshell letter from 27 top law firms expressed alarm “at reports of anti-Semitic harassment, vandalism and assaults on college campuses, including rallies calling for the death of Jews and the elimination of the State of Israel.” The letter made clear that “such anti-Semitic activities would not be tolerated at any of our firms.” Pro-Israel major donors can and should reconsider their relationship with elite institutions—as has already occurred at Harvard, Columbia, and Penn.

Donors, however, looking to work through the system to create a more balanced environment on Israel are likely to be disappointed. A troubling lesson came a few years ago from the University of Washington, where a $5 million donation to endow a chair in Israel Studies wound up yielding a figure whose perspective on matters related to Israel seemed indistinguishable from that of her colleagues in Middle East Studies. The most effective response will have to come from within the academy—especially from faculty in less politicized fields such as STEM, business, or medicine. Professors from these disciplines have taken the lead in the rare joint faculty letters critical of the post-October 7 campus environment.

The most promising approach might be to revive the Louis Brandeis maxim: “Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants; electric light the most efficient policeman.” In the aftermath of October 7, three issues deserve a particular dose of light.

In recent years, as diversity, equity, and inclusion offices have proliferated, critics have dismissed them as little more than structures to enforce orthodoxy. But DEI defenders deem them necessary steps to ensure that marginalized groups can fully participate in campus life. As Armin Rosen discovered in a recent exposé for Tablet, DEI offices were all but inert as the Hamas massacre affected Jewish students. Pro-Palestinian faculty at the University of Michigan understood how the game is played. They framed their demand for a university statement criticizing Israeli military actions as necessary to fulfill the university’s “diversity and its DEI mission.” The signatories did imagine one way that DEI officials could assist Jews—for the “students, many of whom are Jewish, who are critical of the violence against Gaza but can only feel isolated and unseen.” Based on their performance in this crisis, it’s hard to see why, at public universities, taxpayers should continue to fund the DEI apparatus.

Second, even the best of university statements on the Hamas massacre displayed no interest in exploring why a mass murder produced such a counterintuitive campus reaction. There’s nothing new here. Last year, a New York City Council hearing investigating anti-Semitism at CUNY featured this otherworldly exchange with the chancellor’s designee, Vice Chancellor Glenda Grace:

Q: Are you aware of any campaign on any CUNY campus to boycott, divest, and sanction any of these countries for their human rights violations: Russia?
Grace: Not aware, no.
Q: China?
Grace: I’m not aware.
Q: Iran?
Grace: I’m not aware.
Q: Saudi Arabia?
Grace: I am not aware, no.
Q: North Korea?
Grace: Not aware.
Q: How about the State of Israel?
Grace: We’ve talked about the BDS resolutions that were passed at the Law School, and we’ve condemned them. So, yes. There have been about ... For Israel, yes.

Grace shouldn’t be singled out: A lack of curiosity for why only Israel has generated such negative passion on campus could have been expressed by the leader of any major college or university in recent years. Absent outside pressure—from donors, legislators, potential employers, the media—universities are never going to explore this question. New York’s Governor Kathy Hochul stepped in to order an outside review of anti-Semitism at CUNY. Heavy pressure from alumni and a large protest by Jewish students seem to have triggered Columbia to appoint a task force to explore anti-Semitism on its campus.

If these inquiries are conducted thoroughly, they almost certainly will implicate powerful faculty and bureaucratic constituencies. Institutions will not easily commit to a new hiring strategy prioritizing the restoration of intellectual or pedagogical diversity among the faculty. As Boston University professor David Decosimo recently noted, “years of faculty searches that have been explicitly ideological and partisan, prizing and hiring for the illiberal radicalism [are] on display in the... Hamas-praise.”

Finally, and most important, sunlight can illuminate the chasm between the campus reaction to the mass murders and reactions virtually everywhere else in the United States. That a massacre of almost unspeakable barbarity against Israeli citizens set the stage for widespread anti-Israel protests remains the single most remarkable aspect of higher education’s response to October 7.

It clearly distinguishes the academy from the rest of society. Hundreds of University of California professors recalled their shock, on October 8 and 9, “to realize that literally while Hamas terrorists were going house-to-house seeking to murder as many Jews as they could, some pro-Palestinian organizations on our own campus were gathering petition signatures for statements that celebrated these Hamas terrorists as freedom fighters and rejected any critique of their actions.” From the opposite perspective, the New Yorker summarized the hours after the massacre for an author of the Harvard student statement: “As Harvard’s campus awoke to news of the Hamas attack on Israel, a Palestinian-American student... rushed to her friend’s apartment, still in pajamas, to compose ‘an emergency statement’ on behalf of Palestinian allies on campus.”

Who responds to a horrific act of violence, one that recalled memories of the Einsatzgruppen, with an impetus to immediately protest against the country whose citizens had just experienced the mass murder? And what type of environment then sustains this sentiment? Apart from left-wing groups such as the Democratic Socialists of America, no other corner of U.S. society—even those with growing skepticism of Israel, such as congressional Democrats, the New York Times or Washington Post, or liberal churches—responded in this way, or had any difficulty recognizing the Hamas atrocities for what they were.

In a viral clip, a Cornell professor spoke of his personal exhilaration upon learning of the Hamas attacks (he later apologized). Behind him stood two students holding a giant banner: “Anti-Zionism ≠ Anti-Semitism!” This sentiment now seems at best willfully naive and at worst an Orwellian abuse of language. Academics think of themselves as positioned on the right side of history; the protections of tenure and academic freedom provide an ability to retain principled dissent when the broader public abandons basic morality. That vision of the academy now lies in tatters.
When he was a much younger man, Robert Malley worked in the administration of Bill Clinton in the 1990s as an adviser on the peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. In those hopeful days, Rob was always greeted by the late Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, with a memory and a kind word about his father, Simon Malley.

Each time Arafat would meet with Clinton and Malley, he would share a different and inaccurate story about Simon. Arafat claimed that the elder Malley was a founder of the Egyptian Communist Party (not true) and once a prisoner in an Egyptian jail (partially true). As the younger Malley shared in a 2008 lecture for Oxford University, Arafat once told Clinton that Simon had been a “world renowned Torah expert who could vouch for the fact that the Jewish Temple never had been built in Jerusalem.”

That last Arafat memory was a whopper. Simon Malley was Jewish, but he never had much patience for the actual religion. Instead, Simon found his calling in the Arab struggle against Western imperialism. He devoted his life as an editor and journalist to this cause. And in that pursuit, Simon Malley became a comrade and friend of Yasser Arafat.

Malley later claimed he would often quarrel about Arafat with his father, who would not hear a bad word about the Palestinian leader. But when Rob matriculated at Yale University in 1980, he was still very much his

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father's son. He wrote a fiery op-ed for the college newspaper that compared resistance to the Nazis in Europe to the Palestinian struggle against the world's only Jewish state.

Since then, Malley's politics have evolved. He does not engage in the noxious rhetoric of his undergraduate days. But he is still a moral, political, and foreign-policy relativist. He will condemn the actions of those who seek the slaughter of innocents in the name of liberation, but he has never been able to see his interlocutors for the dark beings they really are.

All of this is important in light of a recent scandal that has upended the Biden administration's Iran policy. In 2021, the president named Malley to be his point man on reviving the dormant 2015 Iran nuclear agreement, or JCPOA, which Donald Trump had scrubbed in 2018. Today, a humbled Malley finds himself under investigation by the FBI and the State Department's diplomatic security office for mishandling classified information. Two government officials tell me that Malley was picked up on an intercept revealing something he was not supposed to reveal in a private conversation with a foreign official.

Malley is also connected to another scandal exposed in September on the news website Semafor and the Persian-language television channel Iran International—an Iranian foreign-ministry scheme to cultivate a network of analysts to influence U.S. foreign policy that was known as the Iran Experts Initiative. Malley hired two of those analysts at the International Crisis Group, a think tank that promoted scholarship on the Persian-language television channel Iran International—an Iranian foreign-ministry scheme to cultivate a network of analysts to influence U.S. foreign policy that was known as the Iran Experts Initiative. Malley hired two of those analysts at the International Crisis Group, a think tank he helmed before joining the Biden administration. He then hired a third member of the Experts Initiative, Ariane Tabatabai, as an adviser when he became Biden's Iran envoy.

If this were a spy novel, all of this would be grist for a plot of intrigue and betrayal. Here we have a foreign-policy insider comfortable with presidents and all those at the highest levels of his government—but, raised by radicals, he is later caught spilling secrets and hiring agents of influence for Iran.

But on closer inspection, there's no skulduggery here, not really. Robert Malley was always open about his many meetings with terrorist leaders over the years. And he did not undermine the Biden administration by appeasing Iran; he was implementing its preferred policy.

“The positions that Rob has taken are positions that the president, Antony Blinken, and Jake Sullivan would have taken if he was not there,” says Reuel Marc Gerecht, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and a harsh critic of the Iran nuclear deal that Malley has sought to revive.

In this respect, Malley is a classic product of the Democratic Party's foreign-policy establishment. But this was not always the case. We do not here have a cautionary tale of a talented diplomat and scholar infiltrating Washington. No, this is a story about how America's foreign-policy establishment came to adopt an approach of appeasement toward what was once a leftist fringe in the United States.

The story begins in the aftermath of the failed Oslo peace process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, in the wake of the Clinton administration's end and at the beginning of the second intifada terror war led by Yasser Arafat against Israel. In August 2001, after his stint on Clinton's national-security council, Malley co-authored an essay for the New York Review of Books dissenting from the Washington consensus that Arafat had stubbornly rejected the offers from Israel and Washington for a final deal to create a Palestinian state.

The piece was a veiled criticism of his former boss, because Clinton had blamed Arafat for the collapse of the peace process. “I am a failure, and you made me one,” Clinton famously told the Palestinian leader. This view of Camp David was “remarkably shallow,” Malley wrote (without naming Clinton). “It acts as a harmful constraint on American policy by offering up a single, convenient culprit—Arafat—rather than a more nuanced and realistic analysis.”

That essay did not go over well in the Democratic Party in the years after the Clinton presidency. By 2001, Arafat was no longer feted by presidents and prime ministers. He had reverted to the radicalism of his earlier years, those wondrous days when Malley's father adored the Palestinian leader for the same reason that decent countries abhorred him: his commitment to armed struggle through terror.

The other reason Malley's essay was politically toxic was that it was published a month before 9/11. The terrorist attack changed U.S. foreign policy in an instant. No longer was America willing to try terrorists patiently in courts of law. Now it would scour the earth to hunt them down. In those initial years after the twin towers fell, Robert Malley was in the political wilderness.

He eventually found a home at the International Crisis Group, a think tank that promoted scholarship on conflicts all around the world. As head of its Middle East program in this period, Malley met with groups shunned by most in the Washington policy community. Chief among them was Hamas, the terror movement responsible for the October 7 atrocities in Israel.

In a 2010 documentary called Cultures of Resis-

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Malley sounds a call for nuance similar to the one he had made years before. Of Hamas and Hezbollah, the Lebanese terror group that currently has at least 100,000 missiles pointed at Israel’s northern border, he says: “None of them are crazies. They may do things that we consider belong to a different realm of rationality, but within their own system, it’s often very logical.” In the film, Malley goes on to make the case that Israel should recognize the group’s social-welfare programs and allow Hamas “to govern” Gaza, the territory Hamas seized in 2007.

He became an informal adviser in 2008 to Barack Obama’s presidential campaign—a good fit for a candidate who argued during the Democratic primaries that he would never fear negotiations with rogue states. But Malley’s role in Obamaland did not last long. On May 9, the Times of London published a piece that said Malley had been ousted as a Middle East adviser with the Obama campaign after it had emerged that he had held meetings with members of Hamas. In a letter published in the New York Times, Malley bristled at the suggestion that he had misled anyone; he never hid his engagement with Hamas, he said. Nonetheless, he wrote that he would be stepping away from the campaign “to avoid any misperception—misrepresentation being the more accurate word—about the candidate’s position regarding the Islamist movement.”

Matt Duss, the vice president at the Center for International Policy who worked closely with Malley on Senator Bernie Sanders’s presidential campaign in 2016, told me that he thought Malley had been pushed aside because of his 2001 essay on the peace process. “I remember when that happened to Rob,” he said. “I knew his work. He wrote an important piece with Hussein Agha complicating what happened at Camp David. That made him persona non grata with other Democrats who very much preferred the older narrative.”

Obama never did engage Hamas during his presidency. But he did bring Malley back into the fold five years later to engage with the organization’s principal international patron, Iran. By Obama’s second term, the foreign policy of the Democratic Party had changed. No more were Democrats seeking to prove how tough they were against America’s enemies. Instead, they wanted to kill Iran’s hardliners by showing kindness to its moderates.

The policy alteration that led to the 2015 Iran deal has a lot to do with Obama himself. But he received an assist on his signature foreign policy from key organizations that comprised what his deputy national-security adviser, Ben Rhodes, would later call an “echo chamber” inside Washington.

The initial efforts to shift U.S. policy on Iran began with the Rockefeller Fund, which, after 9/11, gathered national-security experts to discuss outreach to the Islamic Republic. Between 2001 and 2015, the philanthropic foundation gave nearly $5 million to groups to pursue engagement with Tehran. By 2002, the Rockefeller initiative called itself the Iran Project. It reached out to Javad Zarif, who was then Iran’s ambassador to the United Nations. It began hosting meetings with the Institute for International and Political Studies, an Iranian-funded think tank.

In those early years, their efforts were kept quiet. At the same time, participants briefed high-level officials in the George W. Bush administration, including Bush’s second-term national-security adviser, Stephen Hadley, and Condoleezza Rice, who was then secretary of state. In a 2015 article in Businessweek, R. Nicholas Burns, who had served as an undersecretary of state in the Bush years, said the insights shared were valuable because the U.S. government had virtually no contacts at all with Iran’s regime.

There was also an initiative from the Ploughshares Fund, a well-funded nonprofit that makes grants to arms-control groups. In 2011, the fund formed a loose coalition of organizations to help mold public opinion in favor of a nuclear bargain with Iran. According to emails from a private Ploughshares listserv, the first meeting of the group counseled affiliated nonprofits to attack opponents of Iran diplomacy as “pro-war.”

Another organization, the National Iranian American Council, or NIAC, also played a role in advocating engagement with Iran. As I reported in 2009, NIAC helped to organize an effort to prevent Obama from appointing veteran diplomat Dennis Ross to oversee his Iran policy, on the grounds that Ross was too close to Israel. That effort failed, but the council nonetheless made alliances inside the Obama administration and the Democratic Party and became a key node in the White House echo chamber.

All of this is to say that while Malley may have been toxic in the Bush years in his own camp, by 2013 he was firmly ensconced within the mainstream of the Democratic Party. When the Obama administration finally did reach a deal with Iran in 2015, Malley was part of what Obama considered his administration’s greatest foreign-policy achievement. Malley’s “nuanced” approach had won the day. With enough patience, money, and resolve, America and its negotiating partners were able to tame the regime that took the U.S. Embassy hostage when it came to power in 1979.

But the nuclear agreement was deeply flawed. After negotiations finished, Iran’s General Qassem Suleimani flew to Moscow to forge an alliance to assist the Syr-
ian regime’s war on its own people. Key limitations in the JCPOA on the number and quality of Iran’s centrifuges expired over time. And a majority of Congress voted against it in 2015. In 2018, then president Donald Trump withdrew America from Obama’s agreement.

After Biden won the 2020 election, Malley was perfectly positioned to guide U.S. policy toward Iran. He was close friends with Antony Blinken, who would become Biden’s secretary of state. Malley and Blinken attended the same high school in Paris and worked on the yearbook together. In Washington, they played on a recreational soccer team. To some, this might suggest that the current investigation into Malley is so serious that even his old and powerful friend could not save him from it.

That said, it’s too early to know the nature of the probe into Malley’s mishandling of state secrets. There has always been a tension between the State Department and the FBI when it comes to rogue regimes. The job of a diplomat is to engage with foreign officials. One hazard of this work is that sometimes a piece of classified information may slip into a conversation. For example, Henry Kissinger, in a meeting with his Soviet counterpart, famously shared the fact that America was reading Egyptian cable traffic. Or consider the case of Martin Indyk, a former U.S. ambassador to Israel. His clearance was suspended in 2000 after it was learned he had been sending classified emails from the Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv. No evidence ever emerged that Indyk or Kissinger was a spy.

A better way to understand the scandal around Malley is to look at the people he himself hired and mentored in recent years. These include Ali Vaez, who is currently an analyst at the International Crisis Group. The emails disclosed in the Iran International and Semafor investigations show Vaez seeking approval from his contact at Iran’s foreign ministry for op-eds he would later publish in Western outlets. In an October 2, 2014,missive to Iran’s foreign minister, Vaez wrote, “As an Iranian, based on my national and patriotic duty, I have not hesitated to help you in any way.”

Malley tried to bring Vaez into the Biden administration, but Vaez could not get a security clearance. Malley did hire Ariane Tabatabai as an adviser. According to Semafor and Iran International, Tabatabai actually asked for guidance from her Iranian foreign-ministry contact on whether she should visit Saudi Arabia and Israel.

Tabatabai is now chief of staff to Christopher Maier, assistant secretary of defense for special operations and low-intensity conflict. Last month, Maier testified before the Senate that the Pentagon is investigating “whether all law and policy was properly followed in granting my chief of staff top-secret special compartmented information.” In October, the Pentagon announced that Tabatabai would keep her security clearance after the investigation.

Says Gerecht, “If you’ve known Malley’s position on Iran, it makes perfect sense he would hire these people. The fact that these individuals were apparently...
The Anti-Jewish Violence Is Happening
And so is the ‘Islamophobia’ dodge
BY NOAH ROTHMAN

PRECISELY ONE WEEK after the October 7 massacre of Israeli citizens, foreign nationals, and Jews of all stripes by hundreds of Hamas terrorists and their supporters in Gaza, President Joe Biden delivered an address at the Human Rights Campaign's 2023 national dinner. There, according to Reuters's characterization of Biden's remarks, the president condemned "all hate."

“We have to reject hate in every form,” Biden said to a smattering of unenthusiastic applause. “History has taught us again and again anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia—they’re all connected.” Hate “left unanswered” only "opens the door for more hate;" the president continued. For the benefit of the largely Democratic audience, Biden likened the grotesque orgy of bloodletting in southern Israel to “what happened in Charlottesville”—at least, insofar as hate “hides under the rocks until there's a little oxygen blown under,” at which point “it comes roaring out again.”

To hear Biden tell it, there is only one hate. Its permutations are only cosmetically distinct. There must be comfort in that notion for him, because the Biden White House spent the first three weeks that followed the...
10/7 massacre insisting that anti-Semitism and “Islamophobia” are twin phenomena. But the world refused to cooperate with Biden’s observation. As is often the case, the poisoned minds who see Jewish perfidy in day-to-day events found license in the murder of Jews to mete out more violence and intimidation.

A KNIFE-WIELDING assailant broke into a home in Studio City, California, after reportedly seeing a mezuzah affixed to its doorframe. Shouting “Free Palestine,” he threatened to kill the family he accosted before he was subdued. A Minneapolis man was assaulted and had a caustic substance sprayed into his eyes after he unwittingly drove into an anti-Israel demonstration in which his assailants brandished Hamas flags. Brief but violent scuffles broke out amid anti-Israel protests in Skokie. There, one local resident gave chase to a demonstrator who tried to deface his car, but he was set upon by dozens of violent demonstrators and freed himself only after he fired a gun into the air.

Efforts increased to intimidate American Jews into hiding. A swastika was spray-painted onto the side of a truck in St. Louis. Orthodox worshippers in Teaneck, New Jersey, were accosted by a crowd wearing keffiyeh, flying Palestinian flags, and chanting “Allahu Akbar.” The Richmond, California, city council passed a resolution blaming Israel for “ethnic cleansing and collective punishment,” alleged crimes that were both the response to and cause of the 10/7 slaughter. “You have put me in this situation,” one Richmond resident said of the shame and apprehension her city had imposed on her.

At a rally dubbed “Flood Brooklyn for Gaza,” a direct reference to the name Hamas gave its plan to slaughter Israeli civilians (the ‘al-Aqsa Flood’ operation), 19 demonstrators were arrested for a variety of disturbance, including setting fires in the streets and attacking police officers. After an investigation into the incident. In the meantime, a “highly visible police presence” would be deployed to mitigate the threat to Jewish students. Not every academic institution has been similarly proactive.

The threat posed by anti-Israel demonstrators was so acute that Cornell University felt compelled to advise Jewish students and staff to stay away from the campus’s kosher dining hall. Their safety couldn’t be guaranteed—not when the university’s forum was alive with threats to “follow [Jews] home and slit their throats” or “shoot up” buildings frequented by Jews, because “Jewish people need to be killed.” Nor were these threats merely aspirational, according to the charges the Justice Department filed against one Cornell student who had pledged to “shoot all you pig Jews.”

A braying mob informed of the presence of Jews in Cooper Union’s library descended on its doors and beat at them, mindlessly chanting slogans such as “globalize the intifada from New York to Gaza.” Cooper Union encouraged the event, according to New York City Councilwoman Inna Vernikov. Faculty promoted an anti-Israel walkout by cancelling classes and offering extra credit to attendees. When events spiraled out of control, some faculty saw to their own safety while leaving Jewish students to barricade themselves in the library. No arrests were made, and no disciplinary action was taken against

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the school’s staff. Indeed, Cooper Union’s sterile description of this event was limited to the observation that “the library was closed for approximately 20 minutes while student protesters moved through our building.”

These terrorizing incidents build on a solid and growing foundation of anti-Semitism in America. Episodes of recordable anti-Jewish violence in the United States already increased by 35 percent between 2021 to 2022, according to the Anti-Defamation League’s figures. What’s more, PBS marveled, “the rise in Jew-hatred in the U.S. is not limited to white supremacists.” Some of that hatred was attributable to the “far left” too! And yet, the ADL and chroniclers of its findings felt the need to justify at least some of the left’s anti-Jewish antipathy by registering their dissatisfaction with Netanyahu’s “ultra-nationalist” government. This finely nuanced view was not in evidence in the streets and on college campuses, where the 10/7 massacre and Israel’s justified response to it precipitated a campaign of anti-Jewish terrorization rivaling any in American history.

And by early November, these eruptions claimed their first Jewish life. On November 6, in Ventura County, California, 69-year-old Paul Kessler was, according to witnesses, beaten by a Hamas defender armed with a bullhorn. Kessler fell backward onto the pavement and bled for several minutes before he was taken to a hospital, where he was pronounced dead. Just hours earlier, a 34-year-old woman in Indiana drove her car into what she thought was a school full of Jewish children. “Yes, I did it on purpose,” she confessed to police. It was only through luck and stupidity (her target turned out to be an institution run by the hate group Black Hebrew Israelites) that she failed in her quest to kill Jewish kids.

It’s possible that itemizing these incidences of anti-Semitic violence and intimidation does a disservice to the nationwide outbreak of anti-Jewish hostility. It gives short shrift to the uncountable episodes of harassment and intimidation targeting Jews: the bomb threats, the poster thieves, the pogromist graffiti on Jewish-owned businesses and synagogues, the letters from professionals and academics that set out to contextualize Hamas’s violence and euphemize murder. A crime tally takes no account of the social-media algorithms seemingly optimized to haunt American Jews with the ubiquitous images of their tormentors, whose menacing enthusiasm for their depraved work betrays the lack of any accompanying social consequences. The terror that began on 10/7 has not yet abated.

Yet, in response to all this, Joe Biden’s allies insisted that the president hadn’t condemned Islamophobia with sufficient intensity.

In a prime-time address to the nation in which the president sought to underscore the threat to U.S. security represented by both Israel’s war against a constellation of Iran-backed terrorist networks and Russia’s war of conquest in Ukraine—two distinct conflicts orchestrated by instigators who are increasingly aligned—Biden took a time-out to preemptively criticize Israelis and Ameri-

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not in evidence in the streets and on college campuses, where the 10/7 massacre and Israel’s justified response to it precipitated a campaign of anti-Jewish terrorization rivaling any in American history.

And by early November, these eruptions claimed their first Jewish life. On November 6, in Ventura County, California, 69-year-old Paul Kessler was, according to witnesses, beaten by a Hamas defender armed with a bullhorn. Kessler fell backward onto the pavement and bled for several minutes before he was taken to a hospital, where he was pronounced dead. Just hours earlier, a 34-year-old woman in Indiana drove her car into what she thought was a school full of Jewish children. “Yes, I did it on purpose,” she confessed to police. It was only through luck and stupidity (her target turned out to be an institution run by the hate group Black Hebrew Israelites) that she failed in her quest to kill Jewish kids.

It’s possible that itemizing these incidences of anti-Semitic violence and intimidation does a disservice to the nationwide outbreak of anti-Jewish hostility. It gives short shrift to the uncountable episodes of harassment and intimidation targeting Jews: the bomb threats, the poster thieves, the pogromist graffiti on Jewish-owned businesses and synagogues, the letters from professionals and academics that set out to contextualize Hamas’s violence and euphemize murder. A crime tally takes no account of the social-media algorithms seemingly optimized to haunt American Jews with the ubiquitous images of their tormentors, whose menacing enthusiasm for their depraved work betrays the lack of any accompanying social consequences. The terror that began on 10/7 has not yet abated.

Yet, in response to all this, Joe Biden’s allies insisted that the president hadn’t condemned Islamophobia with sufficient intensity.

In a prime-time address to the nation in which the president sought to underscore the threat to U.S. security represented by both Israel’s war against a constellation of Iran-backed terrorist networks and Russia’s war of conquest in Ukraine—two distinct conflicts orchestrated by instigators who are increasingly aligned—Biden took a time-out to preemptively criticize Israelis and Ameri-

As New York Times contributor Rozina Ali mourn-
ed nearly four weeks after the 10/7 attacks, Muslims in America “fear a new outbreak of violence,” and the Biden administration had not risen to meet the perceived threat. The campaign of moral blackmail from professional Muslim advocacy groups directed at the White House became so great and the supposed threat to Biden’s electoral bottom line in places like Michigan became so acute that, by November 1, the White House announced the creation of a “national strategy to counter Islamophobia.” “For too long, Muslims in America, and those perceived to be Muslim,” the White House release read, “have endured a disproportionate number of hate-fueled attacks and other discriminatory incidents.”

Of course, there have been efforts to harass, intimidate, and harm Muslim-Americans following Hamas’s massacre, but these were exceptionally heinous acts performed by literally deranged people. In his speech, Biden focused on one particularly abhorrent episode outside Chicago in which a young Palestinian mother was attacked, and her six-year-old son stabbed to death, by a man who was, according to prosecutors, inspired by Hamas’s actions. A man in Illinois was charged with a hate crime after he verbally abused and threatened to shoot two Muslim men in a parking garage. A Muslim woman in Maryland was the target of a hateful tirade at a parking light, and a teenage girl reported having her hijab pulled off on the New York City subway. All these antisocial acts are worthy of condemnation, but these incidents were the totality that NBC News could assemble in its October 31 report on the “spike in hate” that is “reminiscent of post-9/11 Islamophobia.”

The Times, too, tried to create balance in its coverage of explicitly pro-intifada demonstrations in the city’s streets by highlighting the arrest of two men who “shouted anti-Muslim slurs while attacking three other men” a week earlier. But that only underscores the disparity that NBC News could assemble in its October 31 report on the “spike in hate” that is “reminiscent of post-9/11 Islamophobia.”

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The most glaring disproportionality—substantiated both by an overwhelming cascade of anecdotes and FBI statistics—is the hate directed toward America’s Jewish minority in response to a demonstration of their vulnerability. The White House’s compulsion to adulterate that hate with the introduction of a variety of other competing hates only exacerbates the acute sense of isolation America’s Jews have experienced since 10/7.

Democratic lawmakers certainly know they are erecting an elaborate false equivalence. Indeed, they once committed the country to a prolonged lecture about its very willful blindness at the height of the Black Lives Matter movement. BLM activists and their Democratic allies took exception to the rejoinder “all lives matter” because, they repeatedly explained, generic expressions of antipathy toward every expression of bigotry and discrimination were just a way of condoning the very specific bigotry that produced the moment everyone was experiencing. There is logic in this admonition, but as we now know, its proponents never meant a word of it.

Turns out they were not articulating a universal principle. Rather, they were reaching for the nearest superficially legitimate weapon to hand so they could bludgeon their opponents into silence. So many of the same voices who once lectured Americans about their unenlightened views toward minorities have simply adopted the habit they once condemned now that it applies to Jews. What’s more, they have spent years incubating the very sentiments that they now supposedly find so shocking.

The 2017 anti-Trump movement known as the Women’s March sprouted up organically and was speedily embraced by the Democrats who suddenly found themselves in the political wilderness. But signs of trouble—the march’s hijacking by unsavory elements—were apparent early on. When one of the group’s organizers, Linda Sarsour, called for “jihad” against the president, it seemed to bother only the American right. “Muslim activist Linda Sarsour’s reference to ‘jihad’ draws conservative wrath,” the Washington Post reported. It was only

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The BDS activism coincided with the popularization of a pedagogy that emphasized transgenerational grievances, sorted students into opposing camps based on their immutable demographic signifiers, and set them against one another.

entreats its students to marinate in racial and creedal stereotypes so they might navigate a world that is supposedly dominated by dedicated bigots. Intersectionality reduces people to the traits they inherited at birth, flattens the distinctions among them, and categorizes the groups it creates into a hierarchy of oppression.

There’s a fine line between internalizing stereotypes to combat bigotry and simply assuming them for yourself, and too many overeducated young adults seem to have absorbed the negative tropes that contribute to anti-Semitism. American Jews are well-off and influential disproportionate to their numbers, the toxic intersectional worldview maintains. They are a clannish Diaspora everywhere save the one nation on earth they have “colonized” at the expense of its indigenous inhabitants, whose melanin content renders them second-class citizens, at best.

Indeed, social-justice warriors often apply the heuristic of American racial politics to the conflict in the Middle East—if only to get their hands around a part of the world they know little about. For example, at a Philadelphia rally celebrating the slaughter on 10/7 less than 24 hours after the massacre, one speaker gushed over the way in which Israelis “woke up in the morning and they found the field hands in the house with a knife ready to cut their f—ing throats.” That isn’t just bloodthirsty; it’s nonsensical. The only people in the Israel–Gaza conflict who ever were slaves en masse were the Israelites. And

the idea that Jews are supreme to everybody else.” So by the time the Women’s March found itself implicated, as a result of reporting in Tablet, in an anti-Semitic scandal involving the deliberate isolation and ouster of Jewish members, the shock of it all was limited only to Democrats and media professionals whose default assumption is that conservatives are just being paranoid.

Prior to Trump’s ascension, student and faculty groups in support of the so-called BDS (boycott, divest, sanctions) movement, which puts pressure on Western institutions to do no business with Israel or Israeli-owned companies, had already exhibited great self-confidence. By 2014, events such as “Israeli Apartheid Week” had become social staples on American campuses, and hundreds of colleges had adopted pro-BDS statements. In early 2015, BDS activists united to deny Rachel Beyda a seat on the UCLA judicial board because it was assumed that being “a Jewish student and very active in the Jewish community” compromised her. “Zionists off campus,” students chanted the following year at Brooklyn College, a school that hosted pro-BDS lectures from “philosophers” including Judith Butler and Omar Barghouti.

It shouldn’t be surprising that this and other campuses friendly to BDS then experienced an uptick in anti-Semitic incidents—because that’s what BDS encourages. A 2016 study conducted by the AMCHA Initiative found that 95 percent of schools that host BDS activity on their campuses reported “anti-Semitic expression,” compared with 33 percent of schools with no BDS activity. Moreover, 56 percent of BDS-friendly schools were the scene of “incidents that targeted Jewish students for harm.” The intervening years have not seen an improvement in the quality of life on American campuses.

This activism coincided with the popularization of a pedagogy that emphasized transgenerational grievances, sorted students into opposing camps based on their immutable demographic signifiers, and set them against one another.

The curriculum arrayed around the nebulous concept of social justice instilled in its adherents a variety of pathologies masquerading as thought experiments. Among them is the theory of “intersectionality,” which

the paranoid right that “read violence into Sarsour’s anti-Trump” remarks, the Daily Beast insisted. “The people disagreeing with [Sarsour] clearly don’t understand what Jihad means,” Temple University professor Marc Lamont Hill claimed.

Democrats closed their eyes to what was staring them in the face. Sarsour’s allies claimed that little could be gleaned from Sarsour’s support for anti-Semites like Louis Farrakhan or the Palestinian terrorist Rasmea Odeh. They were unimpressed by her attacks on Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the Somali-born activist and intellectual who, Sarsour said, had deserved to be assaulted for the sin of opposing female genital mutilation. They didn’t see a problem when Sarsour insisted that Israel was “built on
the analogy makes no sense within the context of the Israeli–Palestinian dynamic. But the same logic finds its way into the mouths of intellectuals as well as rabble-rousers. Indeed, what is going on is anything but complicated, according to celebrated author Ta-Nehisi Coates. “I immediately understood what was going on over there,” he said of the conclusions he drew from his visits to the West Bank in a post-10/7 interview. “Where your mobility is inhibited, where your voting rights are inhibited,” and “where your right to housing is inhibited, and it’s all inhibited based on ethnicity”—it was all too “familiar to those of us familiar with African-American history” to avoid drawing parallels between Israel and the Jim Crow South. Voting rights are indeed inhibited in Palestinian areas—but by Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, not the Jews.

This outlook is of a piece with efforts in academia and the press to impose foreign concepts on the conflict. In this approach, decades-old court cases over individual property rights in East Jerusalem have become “ethnic cleansing,” and the Israeli government’s management of the West Bank has become “apartheid” irrespective of the status of Israel’s Arab citizens. This cultural exchange has been a two-way street. The BLM activists who rioted in the summer of 2020 deemed themselves the executors of an “American intifada.” Theirs was a revolt against not just their external conditions but their “internal colonialism” consisting of what vox.com’s Russell Rickford identified as “racialization, dispossession, underdevelopment, and state violence.” (Russell Rickford is also the Cornell professor who professed himself “exhilarated” by the attacks and then took a leave from the university.) In these narcissistic narratives, Israel serves as an abstract stand-in for the evil that is America.

The academic theories that buttress anti-Semitism were made operational in 2019 in the effort to compel House Democratic leaders to back down from their effort to censure Representative Ilhan Omar for her flagrant anti-Semitism. The backlash from the left was wildly successful. Because she wanted the censure, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was dubbed by Linda Sarsour a “typical white feminist upholding the patriarchy doing the dirty work of powerful white men.” Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez agreed. “No one seeks this level of reprehend when members make statements about Latinx + other communities,” she insisted. “We all have a responsibility to speak out against anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia, racism, and all forms of hatred and bigotry,” then senator Kamala Harris wrote. And yet, “the spotlight being put on Congresswoman Omar may put her at risk.”

A united front emerged, and Democratic leadership was convinced to subordinate its better instincts to the social justice solidarity movement that formed around Omar. In the end, the caucus produced not a censure of Omar’s prejudice but a watery statement of general opposition to bigotry.

The least charitable interpretation of the Democratic establishment’s internal turmoil in the weeks that passed since the 10/7 attack is that its leading lights are inveighing against the scourge of Islamophobia to give cover to anti-Semitic elements within their coalition. And it is not without evidence—the evidence of years of cowardice, caviling, and making deals with the devil.

Progressives and liberals alike abetted decades of policy preferences, campaigns to coerce and cajole donors, indefensible tenure-track recommendations, efforts to debase humanities departments, and the creation of a media-academic industrial complex designed to house the products of this ill-considered education. They built an elaborate new lie—the threat of “Islamophobia”—that hijacked the enduring reality of the world’s oldest lie. It should be a source of profound unease to all people of good will, and to all people who fear the consequences of these apologies for anti-Semitism, that the White House’s first instinct when confronted with the rotten fruits of their coalition’s labors is to throw yet another lie on the pile.⇒

Commentary
What It Means to Be Better

Values are central to American foreign policy, and there’s no use pretending otherwise

BY TOD LINDBERG AND CORBAN TEAGUE

A consistent point of contention in the debate over American foreign policy has to do with the respective roles of American interests and American values. On the center-left in the United States, it’s common practice simply to assert that American interests and values are, if not one and the same, at least in substantial accord. This is also a view significantly held on the center-right. But it has come under challenge in recent times by those on the right who are seeking to clarify and simplify matters by chucking values (viewed as sentimental self-indulgences) out of the debate in favor of strict calculations of national interest. In dueling manifestos released over the past year and a half, “national conservatives” and “freedom conservatives” have laid out contrasting visions for the future of the United States. But though they differ in many ways, both place the advancement of U.S. national interests as the top American priority in its relations with the rest of the world.

Now, the national interest is, of course, something every state pursues by definition. But the course of global events sometimes imposes choices on countries with an inescapable moral or values component—choices that have no less urgency than questions of national interest. One such event was the unprovoked Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Another was the Hamas massacre of civilians in Israel on October 7. In both cases, opposing sets of...
values were clearly on display. One set seeks the obliteration of an enemy and is more than willing to attack civilians in pursuit of that end. The other seeks an end to such wanton aggression. Those not directly involved in these conflicts are forced to decide whether to take a side, and if so, which one. This is a values question as much as a question of national interest. Opinion polls show that Americans support Ukraine and Israel rather than Russia and Hamas. Moreover, the situations of Ukraine and Israel, as victims of barbarous attacks, more closely align with American sympathies than those of Russia and Hamas as perpetrators. The question of what practical policy choices and real-world involvement the country should engage in when America, any association with Realpolitik must take into account the core values of the first society in history to have been explicitly created in the name of liberty.”

For these and others like them, it never was the case that values had no place in American foreign policy. Indeed, as these examples suggest, they believed values were foundational. Rather, the complication involves what our “values” are and, in a world with finite resources and capabilities, how far we can go in trying to spread them to other places and how to weigh that effort against competing priorities. While we may (and do) dispute how policymakers come down on these questions in particular instances, any attempt to avoid or evade these essential questions is preposterous. We can’t decide what to do without thinking about what we should do, and the values we hold will by definition figure in this task.

So what, then, are the values that the modifier “American” implies? Or to borrow from Morgenthau, what is that “American purpose” to which our interests should be connected? While Morgenthau suggested “equality in freedom,” the truth is that we should look to an even more fundamental element from which equality and freedom both spring—and that is, simply, human dignity. At our nation’s very beginning, the Founding Fathers articulated in the Declaration of Independence what would become our nation’s core value proposition: that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” By this, the Founders were expressing the (quite literally) revolutionary idea that each person has an intrinsic dignity, something given to them “by their Creator” rather than another human, and therefore a quality inherent to their very being.

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it comes to these matters is one thing. But the values choices Americans have made—and not just Americans—are inescapably part of the calculation.

Even when we think about American interests, the modifier “American” carries a lot more weight than it would in any other case where we’re simply describing a place on a map. Yes, American interests should be framed around the country to which the interests belong, namely, the United States. But more than just a geographical or sovereign tag, “American” also refers to a set of values that shape what American interests are and how to pursue them.

Contrary to what one typically hears from today’s self-styled “realists,” recognizing both the centrality and usefulness of values in American foreign policy is in no way a new thing, or a post-9/11 fantasy, or confined to starry-eyed liberal internationalists. The great classical realist Hans Morgenthau, who died in 1980, believed that national interests needed to connect to a national purpose and stated that a nation should “pursue its interests for the sake of a transcendent purpose.” Even Morgenthau’s most famous disciple, the realpolitik master Henry Kissinger, closed his 1994 masterwork, Diplomacy, by making the case—surprising, coming from him—that American foreign policy needed to remain grounded in national values and ideals. Kissinger declared that America “must not abandon the ideals which have accounted for its greatness” and that “for
prefer one a this-worldly ground for ideas about rights. Whether God-given or otherwise, from this equal dignity flows to each person a set of “unalienable rights,” at the core of which are “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Rather than the state being the force that gives worth and meaning to each person, it is instead the individual that gives purpose to the government, which is here to protect those unalienable rights owed to each because of their equal dignity.

It is particularly telling that the Founders chose to start with this values proposition, and that only after establishing it did they move on to discussions of issues more commonly associated with core interests.

Each state or actor must define its interests and the methods through which it chooses to pursue them in the context of some values framework. The inclination of many in the foreign-policy establishment to bypass this central fact creates the unfortunate tendency to assume a ‘moral equivalence.’

Far from seeing values as a liability or an afterthought, our Founders rightly understood that values served as our greatest strength, and that our interests, both personal and political, flow from them, not the other way around.

In doing so, the Founders illuminated a profound but underappreciated truth—that national interests are intricately intertwined with national values. It is not, then, just the United States that must grapple with questions of values. It is that every nation—and every non-state actor with political aspirations—must do so as well. Each such state or actor must define its interests and the methods through which it chooses to pursue them in the context of some values framework. The inclination of many in the foreign-policy establishment to bypass this central fact creates the unfortunate tendency to assume a “moral equivalence” in the pursuit of national interests. They seem to believe that each country is just doing what every other country is doing.

The truth is, not every nation’s values, and thus the interests it chooses to pursue, are of equal moral standing. Some are better than others. While it is not unique to the United States for national values to affect national interests, what is uniquely (or at least distinctively) American is to have the values framework grounded so definitively in the principle of human dignity. And this very particular American values framework is in fact a superior one compared with the values frameworks held by such threatening geopolitical competitors as China, Russia, Iran, and Hamas.

Take for example three principles commonly associated with core national interests—security, freedom, and prosperity, the protection of which are core responsibilities of the state. These principles correspond at the state level to the Declaration’s enumeration of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” as rights belonging to individuals.

At an abstract level, all states pursue security, freedom, and prosperity. But what Americans mean by security, freedom, and prosperity is very different from what China’s Xi and Russia’s Putin mean. “Security,” for example, can mean merely the security from the “state of nature” that Hobbes found in a Leviathan state. Or it can mean the security of the citizens of a state against invaders through a strong military capable of deterring or defeating an invader. Security in either or both of these senses is something Putin or Xi would have no difficulty embracing. But security in the sense of a set of rights that inhere in the person and that the state is bound to intervene to protect when someone seeks to violate them—that indeed, the purpose of the state is to protect the security of individuals in exactly this sense—takes us to a richer place, one where Xi and Putin cannot go.

Similarly, “freedom,” which, in international relation terms, means that a state should be able to pursue its own course without interference in its internal affairs from others. This is a matter of “sovereign right,” and Xi and Putin claim to be leading defenders of this aspect of statehood against meddlesome outsiders. Freedom in this sense is not just a matter of principle; it requires a nation to possess the strength that will prevent outsiders from interfering. The United States would agree. But though we have here reached the limit of what Putin and Xi mean by freedom, we have not exhausted its meaning to the United States as something to preserve. Once again, the United States values freedom as the condition of individual liberty Americans enjoy by right—and which the state has a constitutional obligation to protect. In Xi’s China, ethnic and religious minorities are rounded up and
subjected to unthinkable atrocities. In Putin's Russia, political opponents are poisoned with lethal nerve agents and its citizens are conscripted into a war of aggression. To Hamas, “freedom” appears to be impossible without the destruction of Israel and the elimination of Jews from the Middle East. While it is a truism that all states, including the United States, can improve on their human-rights records, it is simply true that some states have far more improving to do than others.

Even in the narrow sense of sovereign freedom, it is noteworthy that Russia and China demand it for themselves but deny it to their neighbors, whom they seek to dominate. But doesn’t the United States seek, sense or in the richer American sense. True, Putin has turned out to be rather self-destructive in this regard, inflicting economic misery not only on the mass of the Russian people but also on his “oligarch” elite through sanctions following the invasion of Ukraine. In China’s case, however, one can truly marvel at how much increased economic freedom over several decades has done to improve the lives of hundreds of millions of Chinese people (while disproportionately enriching a favored Chinese elite as well, to be sure). So it is that securing the ability to pursue “prosperity” is, once again, not merely a national aim but, aspirationally, also an individual endeavor.

Rather than seeking refuge in an abstract neutral standpoint that ignores major moral differences, conservatives should unashamedly make the case that U.S. foreign policy should protect and advance U.S. values, and that these are not the same values all other countries seek to protect and advance.

We have entered a new era of great power competition and violent challenge, which once again is at its core a dispute between fundamentally incompatible values frameworks. Rather than seeking refuge in an abstract neutral standpoint that ignores major moral differences, conservatives should unashamedly make the case that American foreign policy should protect and advance American values, and that these are not the same values all other countries—particularly our chief competitors—seek to protect and advance. While the United States has been guilty at times of a flawed application of its values, the values of Xi, Putin, Iran’s leaders, and Hamas are simply fundamentally flawed.

We are better.
The Genius of Israel, Even Still

A book written before October 7 charts the way for Israel after October 7

By Bret Stephens

My commentary review of The Genius of Israel, Dan Senor and Saul Singer’s fascinating and compulsively readable follow-up to their 2009 international best-seller Start-Up Nation, was written, edited, and ready for publication when the catastrophe of October 7 put it on hold. I had given the book a glowing write-up. It offered, I thought, a timely and compelling antidote to the gloom that had beset so many Israelis and Diaspora Jews amid their bitter divisions over Benjamin Netanyahu’s judicial-reform bills. And it showed why Israel was likely to continue to be an outperformer among nations.

After October 7, it was a review that demanded a rethink.

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How could one speak of the “genius” of a country that had just suffered the greatest military debacle in its history—a debacle that owed not only to the barbarism of the enemy but also to the heedlessness of its supposedly brilliant military and political leadership? What was so smart about entrusting a petulant and bigoted nebbish like Itamar Ben-Gvir with ministerial responsibility for national security? Where was the wisdom in permitting Qatar to give billions to Hamas, knowing full well that funds meant to sustain the Palestinian economy were instead underwriting terror tunnels and Kassam rockets? Who thought that an enemy as fanatical as Hamas would be stopped by the 21st-century Maginot Line that was Israel’s border wall with Gaza? When did surveillance technology become a substitute for strategy, initiative, and foresight, particularly in a country that cannot afford a single day of weakness?

These are important questions, particularly regarding the crisis that Israel is now in. But there are other questions, too, more important ones, about whether Israel will be able to surmount its crisis and
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Israel has developed habits of mind and action over 75 years of sovereign life, and thousands of years before that, which distinguish it from neighbors and peers.

**Demography:** With an average of roughly three children born per woman, Israel is the only developed country that exceeds the “replacement rate,” which is the number of children women must have (2.1) in order to maintain population levels. In the U.S., the figure is just under 1.8; in South Korea, it’s about 0.8. By 2050, Japan will lose about one-fifth of its population; Israel’s will grow by nearly half. Among the many advantages of a society in which the median age is 37 or younger—Israel’s is 30—is that it has an entrepreneurship rate double that of countries where the median age is 41 or older. In the European Union, it’s currently 44.

What makes these factors more remarkable, Senor and Singer note, is that ordinary explanations fail to account for Israel’s exceptionalism. Israeli politics aren’t exactly a model of harmony, and Israelis lead lives that—as the recent weeks of tragedy and threat have shown—are vastly more stressful than those in most Western countries. But neither political dysfunction nor ubiquitous threats seems to have much of an effect on Israelis’ health or happiness. Israeli teens are just as screen-addicted and exposed to social media as their American peers. But they aren’t suffering equivalent rates of depression and anxiety. And contrary to stereotype, Israel’s positive demographic trends aren’t just a factor of Israeli Arabs and the ultra-Orthodox having very large families. Secular Israelis, too, want relatively large families by Western standards, with three or four children being considered perfectly normal.

So what’s Israel’s secret sauce—the “genius” of the book’s title?

One elegant answer is given by the Israeli philosopher Michah Goodman. Israel, he told Senor and...
Singer, “is a small country with a big story... Big enough to give you meaning and small enough for you to have influence on it.” The United States, Goodman elaborated, is a big country with a big story, but relatively few Americans will ever have opportunities to shape that story in significant ways. A little country—a Belgium or a Slovakia—may be small enough for an individual to make a difference. But a difference for the sake of what?

Still, it’s not sufficient to have a big-enough story in a small-enough country. What counts are the institutions, values, and habits that make it possible for Israelis to find ways to make themselves a part of that story—and to do so in ways that enrich their own lives. Despite the many failings of Israel’s political system, it manages to do at least two forms of politics extremely well: one at the meta-level, the other at the micro-level, and each far more significant than whatever goes on in the Knesset.

At the meta-level, there are those wailing sirens of memory, on Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron—Holocaust remembrance and national remembrance days—that are so unique to Israel. They do more than commemorate tragedy and sacrifice. They also explain the country to itself.

“To Israelis, the nation is neither abstract nor assumed,” Senor and Singer write. “Israelis are socialized to understand this because they will be called upon to sacrifice years of their lives, if not more, as their turn comes to protect the palpable vessel that they personally must continue to build. And in doing so, they gain a sense of belonging not only to a people and a project that is larger than themselves, but to a shared purpose.”

Giving shape to the touchstones of remembrance and belonging is the institution of the IDF. There is nothing remotely like it elsewhere in the world.

The world also witnessed two additional examples of meta-politics during the last months of mass protest, in the form of thousands of Israeli flags forming the primary symbol of opposition to the government’s judicial ambitions. This is extraordinary. In other Western countries swept by “mostly peaceful”
protests in recent years, there’s been a burn-it-all-down ethos: statues torn down, stores looted, people hurt or killed. In Israel, not only have the protests been entirely peaceful, they have also been entirely patriotic. David Grossman, the Israeli novelist, gave voice to that sentiment in a speech he gave at a demonstration shortly before Passover. “We did not realize how deeply we belong to this state,” he said.

Belonging, caring, solidarity: words that have taken on existential dimensions and solidity as this night falls upon us. We ourselves did not imagine how much love was hidden inside us for the way of life we have managed to create here in Israel.

The second example happened on October 7, and the days right after. In the wake of the greatest military setback in Israeli history, reservists from Melbourne, Chicago, Dubai, Miami, New Jersey, and elsewhere packed El Al flights, racing to get back to their old units. These were people who, overwhelmingly, would have had the option to stay home, to let someone else don a uniform. Compare that with Russia, where millions of young men fled conscription, or to Europe and the United States, where most young men wouldn’t consider it even if their countries were in mortal peril. Again, Israel stands alone, and stands out.

But it’s not just the meta-politics of Israel that remain healthy, at least when compared with other democracies. There’s also micro-politics: the Israeli experience of everyday life at the level of family, classroom, neighborhood, military unit, professional network, and hevre, or friendship circle, over which hovers the spirit of bonding, or gibush. Israelis still reserve Friday nights for dinner with extended family. They expect their neighbors to look out for their kids. They accept that teachers will put the interests of the entire classroom ahead of the interests of individual students. They encourage those children to join youth movements and have adventures. They send their kids to intense pre-army courses known as mechinot. They become intensely bonded to Israelis from different walks of life while serving together on a base, in a tank, aboard a ship. They emerge from their military service and decide to start an A.I. company (there are some 2,000 A.I.-related start-ups in the country) or try to land an unmanned spacecraft on the moon.

In short, they rely on one another. “Rather than seeing strangers as a threat, Israelis see strangers as a layer of safety that they can depend on because everyone is part of the same community,” Senor and Singer write. What it produces, they add, is “a culture of mutual responsibility.” The emphasis on the group does not come at the expense of the individual. Instead, they balance, reinforce, and enhance each other. As in no other modern society today, togetherness matters.

This is the social trust at the heart of Israel’s success. In 2020, nearly all Israelis were able to put aside their personal and political reservations about Netanyahu and trust him to get vaccines into their arms—which he was able to do by giving Pfizer access to (anonymized) medical data in exchange for the shots. The Haredi community also had enough trust in the IDF to deliver food and other necessities to hundreds of thousands of people in B’nei Brak during the most intense phase of the lockdowns. Even amid the fury over judicial reform, Senor and Singer note, “Israelis are largely in agreement on a wide range of issues,” particularly when it comes to issues of national security and economic policy.

Trust also remains strong despite Israel’s supposedly unbridgeable divisions between its various “tribes”: secular, national-religious, Haredi, and Arab. Part of this is that these tribes intermingle more than is often thought. Only half of Haredi men might be in the workforce, but nearly 80 percent of Haredi women go to work, probably among the highest rates of female workforce-participation rates anywhere in the world. More than 1 in 5 incoming students at Israel’s Technion, in Haifa, is an Arab Israeli, and 80 percent of Israeli Arabs, according to a 2020 survey, tell pollsters they “want to be an integral part of Israeli society.”

“Somewhere in the Israeli’s family, somebody might have become ultra-Orthodox,” Asa-El tells the

The emphasis on the group in Israeli society does not come at the expense of the individual. Instead, they balance, reinforce, and enhance each other.
Policy Studies believe that the Haredi population will grow from 13 percent today to around 15 to 17 percent in the next 20 to 25 years. As for Israeli Arabs, their fertility rate has fallen slightly below the Jewish one, meaning their share of the overall population is likely to shrink slightly in coming years.

None of this, of course, should be surprising, if only because Israelis have spent 75 years living with predictions of imminent or inevitable disaster that never materialized. Why? Not because Israel doesn’t face appalling threats. It’s because Israel’s quiet strengths tend to outpace its more glaring weaknesses.

Fifty years ago, after the near-calamity of the Yom Kippur War, when Israel’s survival depended on an emergency American airlift, it would have been difficult to imagine that one day Israel’s Iron Dome would defend America’s military installations in Guam while Israel’s Trophy active-protection system would be fitted to America’s fleet of M-1 tanks. Forty years ago, during the period of Israel’s hyperinflation, it would have been difficult to imagine that the country would ultimately enjoy a higher per capita GDP than Japan while drawing more foreign direct investment than Great Britain. Twenty years ago, at the height of the second intifada, it would be equally difficult to imagine that the Israeli–Palestinian conflict would not get in the way of forging peace agreements with various Arab states.

But it happened. That’s not a reason to be Polly-annish about this moment of crisis. It is a reason not to despair. Many countries make terrible mistakes, based on appalling strategic miscalculations that lead to bitter reversals: Britain at Dunkirk; America at Pearl Harbor. Great countries know how to recover from them. In that sense, Israel was and, I’m confident, remains a great country.

Critics of the book will say this is too generous—that the governmental failures leading up to October 7 were a reflection of, rather than an aberration from, what ails Israel. They’ll say that Netanyahu’s personalized and high-handed style of governance is more in keeping with Middle Eastern values than Western ones. They’ll say the same about the nationalist extremism typified by Ben-Gvir, or the corrupt self-dealing of a figure like Aryeh Deri of the ultra-Orthodox Shas party. Critics will also note that Senor and Singer offer no discussion of the settlements, and that Palestinians are kept almost entirely off-stage throughout their narrative. In some ways, the book seems more attuned to the Israel of early 2022, when Israel was governed by the broadest ideological and religious coalition in its history, rather than to the Israel of late 2023, when, under the narrowest of coalitions, it was beset by disaster.

But such criticisms would largely misapprehend what “The Genius of Israel” is about. It was never intended as a current-events book, addressing a moment in Israel’s history. In some ways, it is less a work about contemporary politics than it is of political science, albeit one completely stripped of academic jargon.

It is also a book that deserves a wide audience in the United States and other modern democracies. In reading The Genius of Israel, I found myself repeatedly thinking, wincingly, “That used to be us.” What happened to the America that raised its adolescents to seek adventure, not “safety”? What happened to the America where extended families were close, and multigenerational dinners happened every week, not just at Thanksgiving? What happened to the America in which people had great common formative experiences of public service, including military service, that bonded them in spite of political differences? What happened to the America in which everybody felt free to say exactly what was on their mind, and nobody felt embarrassed by ordinary expressions of patriotism? What happened to the America in which the most ferocious critics of a right-wing government were fiercely devoted to preserving the institutions of government, rather than to tearing them down? What happened to the America in which the words “Let’s try it” came readily to the lips of entrepreneurs, military officers, and even bureaucrats, as opposed to “Check with legal”?

Given current trends, it’s far from unthinkable that the kind of disaster that befell Israel on October 7 could, mutatis mutandis, hit the United States, too. If, God forbid, that were to happen, The Genius of Israel, for all of its seeming untimeliness now, could offer a timely guide for us then, when we might need a model for picking ourselves up once again.
I FINISHED READING Target Tehran, an excellent new book on the Mossad’s shadow war to keep Iran from going nuclear, over Shabbat on October 7. I had missed synagogue services that Saturday morning and hadn’t heard the news of Hamas’s invasion. Instead, I spent the day offline in a dream world—the one we had all lived in—where Israeli intelligence services knew everything and could do anything. The one in which Israel was pressing forward diplomatically, forging a new Middle East. My wife and I arrived at a Simchat Torah party that night with smiles on our faces. We were the only ones.

The book is as good as one would expect from its co-authors, the Jerusalem Post’s Yonah Jeremy Bob, now an indispensable English-language analyst of the war, and Ilan Evyatar, the former editor of the Jerusalem Report. In astonishing detail, the fruit of access to every relevant former Mossad chief and a great many other players in Israel and America, Bob and Evyatar tell the inside story of how Israel outfoxes Iran. Each chapter tells of a new success—the heist of the nuclear archive, the Stuxnet virus, supply-chain sabotage, targeted assassinations, spymaster diplomacy—that demands its own Daniel Silva thriller. Did Gabriel Al-lon ever get tired of winning?

Bob and Evyatar are well aware of Iran’s parallel advances and fanatical perseverance, but they conclude that “the overall situation in the Middle East is now very different from what it was when the Mossad’s war against Iran began nearly three decades ago, and those differences are largely to Israel’s advantage.” They point out that “over twenty years had passed since experts predicted that Iran was just a few years away from breakout.” The Mossad, plus the Israeli leaders who dared to unleash it, deserves substantial credit for this delay. Now, when Iran finds
itself not a few years away but right on the nuclear threshold, it “faces the most powerful opposition that has ever existed to its messianic ambitions to destroy Israel and spread radical Shiite Islam and terrorism throughout its region.”

This mostly means the new alliance with Gulf Arab states, which Bob and Evyatar consider a testament to “Israel’s skill in advancing its interests simultaneously on two separate but related fronts: forging a historic peace with former enemies and waging a bitter, gritty, risky shadow war with Iran.” The great strength of Target Tehran is its reporting, but a close second must be its subtle analysis of the Abraham Accords and Israel’s subsequent diplomatic breakthroughs, which they treat as an intelligence coup.

Mossad Director Yossi Cohen played a highly unusual role in the negotiations, a reflection of how much his agency’s work on the Iran file impressed Israel’s Arab partners. The ability to hit the Iranians where it counts meant more to these Arab statesmen than did any Israeli gesture of goodwill toward the Palestinians. It’s worth remembering that as Israel faces down Iran’s proxies today.

Mossad has bought Israel time—and perhaps partners, too. But the war forces us to ask: Has Iran used that time even more effectively? The Iranians built a proxy network that spans the entire region, constructing a “ring of fire” around Israel on at least five fronts. The result is that Israel finds itself heavily constrained in exercising its celebrated right to defend itself. Attacked from the south, the Israelis had to hesitate to respond, lest they open themselves up to an even heavier punch from the north.

Just as important, the proxy network’s ability to turn any one fight into a larger regional explosion means that Iran can count on the U.S. to restrain Israel as it fights back. America, with bigger fish to fry in China and Russia, mostly wants calm in the Middle East—even the mirage that existed on October 6. Witness the Biden administration’s early effort to forestall Israeli escalation in the north against Hezbollah and to delay an Israeli ground invasion of Gaza. That was an accomplishment of Iranian policy, even if it can’t hold back the tide forever.

We don’t know how the regional picture will look when the fighting stops. But Iran has hit Israel hard by proxy and followed up with direct threats. The parsing of Iran’s precise involvement in the October 7 attacks was always silly: The invasion of Israel and murder of its Jews are what Iran gives Hamas funds, weapons, and training to do. That the Iranian regime celebrated the slaughter after the fact, and brought its power to bear in defense of the slaughterers, should be a reminder of why Israel can’t live with a nuclear Iran.

It is here that Bob and Evyatar’s Mossad reporting is most instructive. First, Israel’s Shin Bet and Mossad have already formed a joint unit to hunt down the perpetrators of October 7. The evidence Yonah Jeremy Bob and Ilan Evyatar provide in Target Tehran suggests that no part of Iran will be safe.

On October 10, in an interview for the Wall Street Journal, I asked Yonah Jeremy Bob what the U.S. could do that would most help Israel in the emerging war. His answer began as follows: “Give Israel bunker-buster bombs.” Those are the dream weapons for a strike on Iran’s nuclear program, and Israel’s possession of them would alter the balance of power in every sphere of the fight. So far, however, American policymakers have had the opposite instinct. Should they finally realize that their Iran policy is untenable—overtaken by events, to say the least—and reevaluate, Mossad may be the least of the Aytollah’s problems.
The Problem Isn’t Cancel Culture

The Canceling of the American Mind: Cancel Culture Undermines Trust and Threatens Us All—But There Is a Solution
By Greg Lukianoff and Rikki Schlott
Simon and Schuster, 443 pages

Reviewed by Naomi Schaefer Riley

In the wake of the October 7 massacre in Israel, University of Pennsylvania president Liz Magill declined to comment because, she said, she didn’t think it was the role of college administrators to express an official view on controversial political issues. And she noted that “as a university, we also fervently support the free exchange of ideas as central to our educational mission.” Magill went on: “This includes the expression of views that are controversial and even those that are incompatible with our institutional values.” The recent embrace of the principles of “free speech” on campus and the sudden desire of administrations to remain “neutral” on political questions have come as a surprise to many observers, who have been complaining for years that certain views have been stifled thanks to faculty and administrators. What an odd coincidence that violent anti-Semitic protests have awoken these educators’ desire for a “free exchange of ideas”!

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What should the reaction be toward this hypocrisy? Thanks to some vocal donors who are closing their wallets and some employers who want nothing to do with these students once they graduate, those administrators who have spent the past decade making life uncomfortable or worse for those with views that do not conform to the latest campus fashion are getting a taste of their own medicine. This is not the resolution that Greg Lukianoff and Rikki Schlott favor. In their new book, The Canceling of the American Mind, they worry that “for some on the right, a false sense has arisen that the way out of Cancel Culture is More Cancel Culture.”

Lukianoff, the president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Expression (FIRE), and Schlott, a columnist at the New York Post, devote much of this work to the flashiest examples of cancel culture at work, organized helpfully by the sector of the economy this destructive trend has affected. There are chapters on the woke takeover of not only education but also publishing, medicine, and even psychology. Regular readers of conservative media will not find much that is new, but it is worth having a chronicle in one place of this insanity and how quickly it has spread.

How did stating the most obvious facts about the world become something that could get you fired from your job? To take just one outrageous example: Carole Hooven, the co-director of undergraduate studies in human evolutionary biology at Harvard, dared to tell a reporter of her concern that medical schools were teaching students to ignore a patient’s biological sex. “To ignore or downplay the reality of sex and sex-based differences is to perversely handicap our understanding and our ability to increase human health and thriving,” she wrote. Hooven became the target of a cancel mob at Harvard, with students demanding her resignation and administrators publicly criticizing her for “using dangerous language… [to] perpetuate a system of discrimination against non-cis people within the med system.” Hooven couldn’t actually conduct the course she had planned on—because no graduate student would serve as her teaching assistant.

But what exactly is the relationship between cancel culture and free speech? FIRE has a long history of applying the same standards to conservatives as it does to liberals. There is no doubt that FIRE’s founders and current employees are deeply principled people committed to free speech and determined to elevate it above other values.

So the authors are often at pains to show that cancel culture is a problem across the political spectrum. Take their section on the new spate of “book bans” across the country, which they say amounts to a “tsunami.” “According to a report from the American Library Association, 2021 saw the largest number of banning attempts recorded in their twenty-year history.” The conceptual problems with The Canceling of the American Mind begin here. Lukianoff and Schlott offer no acknowledgement of the tsunami of completely inappropriate books coming out for children—books filled with pornography and other topics that do not belong in elementary-school libraries. Lukianoff and Schlott only go so far as to say that “some of the titles frequently singled out for banning could conceivably hit the threshold of inappropriate for school-aged children.”

Even the word “ban” is off the
mark in these cases since most of these supposedly suppressive actions are merely removing books from school libraries or moving them out of children’s sections and into adult sections of libraries. Adults can still access them, and kids can find a lot of this stuff online more easily anyway. Is this problem the same as online mobs forming to demand that publishers cancel the contracts with authors who violate woke ideology?

You can see how far Schlott and Lukianoff are willing to go to find examples of conservatives engaging in cancel culture when they call out Liberty University. This is like a man with a high-powered rifle deliberately trying to find a barrel that has a fish in it to shoot. Liberty has been racked by corruption, scandal and academic nonsense for decades. It has been nothing more than a mouthpiece for Jerry Falwell Jr. A quarter century ago, when I asked to visit the school for a book I was writing about religious colleges, its administrators turned me down because they were worried about any kind of criticism. By comparison, Bob Jones University—famously controversial on almost every front—said yes. People who come to Liberty expecting free speech are even more naïve than those who come to NYU expecting it. It’s not on their menu.

While FIRE supports freedom of speech and freedom of expression, it has always had to apply different standards to different institutions because they are governed by different rules—and often by different laws. So in this book, the question of what is legal does, at times, get muddled with what would be culturally beneficial. Even within higher education, there are questions of what is allowed at a public versus a private school. It is relatively easy to say that the University of Michigan—a land-grant school that must follow the dictates of the state’s constitution and statutory rulings by courts governing public works—cannot decide to allow Ta-Nehisi Coates to speak but not Glenn Loury, cannot give funding and space to a Muslim group but not an evangelical one, and cannot allow a protest from Democratic Socialists of America but ban an “affirmative-action bake sale” by campus Republicans.

Privately owned schools are, and always have been, a different story. And while FIRE is right to say that a school that promises free speech for everyone should deliver on that promise, many private colleges have placed certain boundaries around what is acceptable that are easily known to all who apply and are accepted there. Religious universities, for example, often have community standards for not just what kinds of expression are allowed, but also how those things can be said.

To this end, FIRE recently sent Hillsdale College a warning for instigating policies that “clearly and consistently state that it prioritizes other values over a commitment to freedom of speech.” Does it? Hillsdale’s code states that “you may assert and defend any argument you conceive, as long as you do so in a way that is civil, academic, and conducive to thought and deliberation.” And as its president, Larry Arnn, wrote in the Wall Street Journal: “College is where people come together to use their capacities for speech and thought to understand ultimate questions. It is part of human nature to do this better as a group. But we can’t do it if we are screaming, hostile, or babbling.”

The difference between the limits that Hillsdale places on student speech and the limits placed by, say, Penn, is that Hillsdale (like most religious universities) is fairly transparent about what is and isn’t allowed. Prior to the past couple of weeks, many Jewish students on college campuses were likely unaware that students are allowed to yell genocidal slogans on campus with no consequences or that faculty members are allowed to place students in different groups based on whether they are deemed to be “colonizers.” What they did know is that if a student had yelled the n-word in the middle of campus or called for a Klan rally, that kid would be sent home. That kid could have called FIRE to defend him, but the truth is that no one was yelling the n-word and no one would dare. Turns out, the same standard is simply not present when Jews are at issue.

Lukianoff and Schlott are right to say that the culture on these campuses, and not just the right to free speech, matters. And they argue that the culture should be one in which just about anything goes. Short of threats and harassment, they argue, the best way to challenge bad ideas is out in the
open, offering good ideas instead. But this assumes that we are all playing by the same rules and that debate is actually possible.

What has happened since October 7 should make everyone skeptical that this is any kind of solution to the monstrous devolution of university culture. Lukianoff and Schlott make a powerful case that we have failed to teach students how to think and argue rationally. We have failed to teach them how to separate the person from the argument. We have failed to teach them that words are not violence. We have failed to teach them that a person’s identity doesn’t mean he has to hold certain views. We have failed to teach students how to argue in good faith. In such an atmosphere, advocating to let a thousand flowers bloom seems not only beside the point, but naive. The people who use their freedom to cut down the thousand flowers have a thousand times more power than the ones who plant them.

And far from condemning the few schools out there like Hillsdale that demand students construct thoughtful and civil arguments to make their points, FIRE should be encouraging other schools to follow their example. Freshman orientation should not be a time to assign books about oppression and conduct sessions in microaggression, but rather a time to require students to engage in formal debates and force them to take sides they don’t agree with.

In a recent tweet, the economist Russ Roberts said he was reconsidering the views of a friend who once told him that “there should be free speech for everyone except those who hold ideologies that do not believe in free speech.” Once a group gives up on classical notions of speech that are our legacy from John Milton and John Stuart Mill, communicate only by screaming death chants or reciting anti-Semitic poetry or creating art to celebrate murder, and try to shut down any other group that is speaking or writing, what is the point?

The fact that such people are being publicly named and shamed or told that they will be missing out on job opportunities after college or be fired from their current positions is not cancel culture in any way—at least as most people understand it. Just as public Holocaust denial might have gotten you fired from your consulting job 20 years ago, so celebratory tweets about the murder of Jews by Hamas might mean some companies won’t want to hire you. Them’s the breaks.

In the meantime, I wonder whether the obsessive desire on the part of Lukianoff and Schlott to demonstrate that “both sides” are guilty of free-speech violations is a productive exercise. In the face of speech that really does quickly slide into violent threats if not outright assaults, what should colleges do? Is the culture they want to create one in which anything goes? I am all for consistency, but maybe this moment calls for a higher standard. Maybe it demands arguments that are civil and thoughtful. Because campuses are filled right now with students who are “screaming, hostile, or babbling.” And we need something better, because people wearing kippot are getting menaced and injured for the crime of walking on the campuses of America’s elite universities—and lots of free speech isn’t going to solve that.

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THE COMMENTARY MAGAZINE PODCAST
Engine of Innovation

The Mysterious Case of Rudolf Diesel: Genius, Power, and Deception on the Eve of World War I
By Douglas Brunt
Atria, 384 pages

Reviewed by Michael M. Rosen

Engine of Innovation

EDISON, BELL, Ford, Wright—all immortal names in the pantheon of inventors. “Diesel,” however, evokes a sparkless engine and the compressed fuel that powers it, not its eponymous creator, let alone his extraordinary scientific and geopolitical importance. Rudolf Diesel, sadly, has mostly been lost to history.

No longer. In Douglas Brunt’s superb biography, the fin-de-siècle Franco-German Diesel reemerges in vivid color as an ingenious engineer, an aggressive businessman, and a fully formed innovator whose life’s work strongly influenced the First World War and fundamentally remade numerous industries. To top it off, Diesel perished mysteriously shortly before the conflagration that his (fire-free) engine helped ignite.

Calling the diesel engine “a quantum leap forward in humankind’s ability to convert a substance into power,” Brunt unapologetically declares it “the most disruptive technology in history.” Edison himself characterized it as “one of the great achievement of mankind.” Winston Churchill dubbed diesel-powered ships “the most perfect maritime masterpiece of the century.” It’s not surprising, therefore, that Diesel’s pivotal creation got him crosswise of giants like John D. Rockefeller and Kaiser Wilhelm II, fueling speculation about the cause of his untimely demise.

Brunt’s skillful retelling of Diesel’s life and times has an almost cinematic feel: a young man, torn between two countries, against a backdrop of brewing international conflict, confronting entrenched business interests and overcoming immense technical skepticism at the peak of the Industrial Age.

Born in Paris in 1858 to German parents, Diesel lived a mostly charming life in the City of Light. He spoke perfect French and enjoyed visiting the Conservatoire national des arts et métiers near Le Marais. And at the 1867 World’s Fair, he encountered, significantly, the first coal-gas internal combustion engine, which was twice as efficient as its steam-powered predecessor.

In 1874, when the Franco-Prussian War sparked virulent anti-German sentiment, the Diesel family sought exile in London. Rudolf’s parents ultimately sent the teenager to Augsburg, Germany, a small industrial Bavarian city 50 miles northwest of Munich, where he apprenticed and eventually enrolled in technical university.

While engrossed in study, Diesel grew obsessed with a single, central question, recorded for posterity in one of his notebooks: “Can one build steam engines which realize the perfect cycle process without their being very complicated?” After earning his degree, Diesel went to work at the Paris factory of his mentor, Carl von Linde, a refrigeration pioneer—Diesel himself would later invent the ice cube—while continuing to pursue his primary research focus.

After marrying and starting a family, Diesel relocated to Berlin and then Munich. His son, Eugen, recalled a moment when Rudolf explained to the children the principle behind his obsession by means of a pneumatic cigar lighter—a sparkless, syringe-shaped tool that ignites when its plunger is depressed and compresses the air inside. “Now just imagine that some petrol or petroleum or coal dust were in there instead of the tinder,” Diesel said. “Of course it would have ignited, and the increased gas pressure from this combustion—because heat expands objects and air, too—would naturally push out the piston.”

Diesel continued to refine this concept, both on paper and in the lab. In 1891, he published a 64-page monograph about his engine; in February 1893, he received his first patent on the idea; and in January 1894, he completed his first test engine, which exploded, nearly killing its creator. The inventor received nothing but scorn and disbelief from colleagues and rivals in the industry. As Diesel would later reflect, “publishing my brochure provoked violent criticism, on the average very unfavorable, if not utterly annihilating.”

And so, it wasn’t until 1897 that the tide turned: A then-39-year-old Diesel first submitted his engine to a public test, which it passed with flying colors, recording a mind-blowing 26.2 percent thermal efficiency—more than twice that of the internal combustion engine. In addition, the absence of a spark meant Diesel’s engine ran safer,
cleaner, and quieter than gasoline engines.

He and his patrons in Augsburg then inaugurated an international licensing campaign. They began in Scotland, where none other than Lord Kelvin opined that “Diesel’s process of heating the air, simply by compression, to a temperature far above the igniting point of the fuel… supersedes all use of flame or hot chamber for ignition.”

A few months later, Adolphus Busch traveled to Augsburg from St. Louis and became the exclusive licensee of diesel engines in the United States and Canada for the modest cost of $9 million in today’s money.

And the following year, Diesel executed an agreement with Emanuel Nobel, son of Alfred, for exclusive engine-building rights in Russia. He signed at least 22 licensing compacts across Europe and North America from 1897 to ’98 alone, and the technology spread as far as Japan and South America.

The new engine’s maritime applications were abundant. In 1903, Nobel became the first to install a diesel engine on a ship: Unlike steamships, diesel-powered tankers required no coal, no stokers, no refueling stops, and little maintenance. Those same characteristics made the new engine especially suitable for the developing technology of submarine craft, and the French navy launched its first diesel-powered submarine in 1904. Brunt surmises that the technology accounted, at least in part, for the success of the Antarctic Amundsen expedition, whereby a Diesel-powered ship enabled the Norwegian to win the race to the South Pole.

Meanwhile, Kaiser Wilhelm II, determined to boost Germany’s nascent naval power, focused his efforts on integrating diesel engines into both surface ships and U-boats, ultimately focusing on the latter when he concluded he would never match British prowess in the former. But Diesel himself grew disaffected with the German war effort and the country’s budding militarism, and as his patents began to expire, he explored partnerships in Britain and the United States.

So when Diesel died suddenly in September 1913—nine months before the outbreak of the Great War—after boarding a ship crossing the English Channel from Antwerp to Harwich, speculation abounded. Some fingered the Kaiser or the robber barons as hiring hit men; others trafficked in rumors that Diesel’s faltering health and mounting debts prompted suicide; yet others blamed an accident.

Brunt carefully considers all of these possibilities and arrives at a compelling way of resolving the conflicting evidence. Without spoiling his bold and creative conclusion, it implicates geopolitical intrigue, British intelligence officers, and an abrupt acceleration of the Allied effort to develop advanced submarines.

Brunt dwells in a bit more detail than necessary on the vicissitudes of the inbred, quarrelsome Wilhelmine family line and on Rockefeller’s and Standard Oil’s interesting but not entirely relevant backstory. He might instead have devoted more space to Diesel’s actual development of his ground-breaking technology.

Yet this indispensable book documents just how important Diesel’s innovation—and life—proved. Nowadays, nearly all maritime, rail, and truck traffic are powered by diesel engines, as are roughly 35 percent of the 1.4 billion cars on the road. The global diesel market is valued at more than a trillion dollars. And, for good or ill, the technology transformed modern warfare and international relations. At a moment when mononymic innovators such as Musk, Bezos, and Gates wield outsized influence on global economics and politics, there’s much to ponder in the life, death, and legacy of Diesel, one of their worthiest predecessors.
Hoop Dreams

When the Game Was War: The NBA's Greatest Season
By Rich Cohen
Random House, 288 pages

Reviewed by Jonathan V. Last

Tell me when you think the golden age of Saturday Night Live was, and I'll tell you what year you graduated high school. Such is the power of nostalgia. It makes us think the cultural artifacts from our own particular salad days were the product of a special moment. As we age, and decline, we see that decline mirrored all around us. The new stuff is never, to us, as good as the old stuff. They don't make movies like they used to. The mid-list novel is dead. Today's hitters couldn't have touched Satchel Paige.

But sometimes our nostalgia is right. The early Aughts really were a golden age for scripted television. The '97 Yankees really were that good. And the 1987–88 NBA season was the best ever.

That last is the contention of Rich Cohen in his book When the Game Was War: The NBA's Greatest Season. I agree with him—but I have to say that during the season in question I was 13 and basketball-crazy. I cared as much about the NBA that year as I have ever cared about sports, and there are times when Cohen's book feels less like mass-market nonfiction and more like a bespoke piece of fan service directed specifically at me. And in a sense, When the Game Was War really was written for me. Because Cohen was also a teenager during the '87–88 season, living and dying with every game. This is what led him to choose to chronicle a now-forgotten piece of Gen-X history for his 14th book, which follows previous semi-autobiographical accounts of his family's triumph in the artificial-sugar business (Sweet'n Low), his father's negotiating genius (The Adventures of Herbie Cohen), and what it was like to grow up in the northern suburbs of Chicago (Lake Effect).

Cohen starts out by trying to convince readers who are not precisely our age why the '87–88 season was special. For starters, there were more future Hall of Famers active that year than in any other single season. And not just replacement-level Hall of Famers, but top-shelf greats: Jordan, Kareem, Magic, Bird, Worthy, Dominique, Moses. All of them played important roles in meaningful games that season.

Also, the season was the bridge that connected the NBA's past to the modern era. As Cohen points out: "Kareem [Abdul-Jabbar] played his first game in 1969, when Bob Cousy, who'd played his first game in 1950, was still active. He played his last seasons in the league with Reggie Miller, who continued until 2005, when he (Miller) played with Dwight Howard, who was still going in 2022."

You could see this entire tapestry, even then. The past, the present, and the future of basketball were all happening on the court, at the same time. The '87–'88 season featured Kareem's skyhook and Michael Jordan's dunks. It had old man Bill Walton and a rookie named Dennis Rodman.

The final ingredient for the season's greatness was the presence of four legitimate dynasties—the Lakers, Celtics, Pistons, and Bulls. But what made this dynamic so interesting is that each of them was at a different stage of development. The Celtics might have been the greatest team ever to play, but they were at the precise minute when the tide ebbed. The Lakers, meanwhile, were the best they would ever be. The Pistons were a rising power that had been built to beat both Boston and Los Angeles. And the Bulls, while still a year or two away, had begun to put the right pieces around the greatest player in the history of the game.

When the Game Was War is a story about a season that's a story about four teams that's a story about four men: Larry Bird, Isiah Thomas, Magic Johnson, and Michael Jordan.

Cohen gives us broad-stroke histories of these four figures and manages to include bits even serious fans might not know. For instance: Bird had never seen an NBA game before he played in one. When Magic was in middle school, he visited the Milwaukee Bucks locker room after a game, asked Kareem for his autograph, and called him "Sir."

But Cohen understands that in the NBA, great players are necessary but not sufficient. Organizations win championships and, as Cohen explains, "behind every NBA dynasty is a trade that looks like a crime." The Celtics dynasty, for instance, emerged after Red Auerbach traded Bob McAdoo and Joe Barry Carroll for Kevin McHale and Robert Parish. He then added Dennis Johnson—a third Hall of Famer—for the price of two future second-round picks and a broken-
down center who would retire 50 games later.

The creation of the Pistons dynasty is the most interesting of these heists because it involved finding not two or three players, but nine of them.

The Pistons started their build by taking Isiah Thomas—a 5’ 10” point guard—with the second pick in the 1981 draft. Later that year, they traded a sack of beans for Bill Laimbeer. (Who would go on to become the most hated player in the league without a felony rap sheet.) Over the next six years, the Pistons would add Vinnie Johnson, Joe Dumars, James Edwards, Adrian Dantley, Dennis Rodman, and John Salley. Of this group, only two were considered high-level talents; they would all become stars in the NBA.

This Pistons team was known as “the Bad Boys” because of their physical and often dirty play. They were my favorites. I grew up a Philadelphia 76ers fan, but in years when the Sixers weren’t contending—which was most of them—I took my pleasure with the Bad Boys from Detroit.

For me, the Celtics were too old, too patrician, too boring, too white. The Lakers, with their Showtime fast breaks, were too flashy. And the Bulls? Let’s just say that I have a great deal of sympathy for Stu Inman. He was the general manager of the Portland Trailblazers in 1984; he was the man who picked Sam Bowie over Michael Jordan. The 13-year-old version of me, like Inman, thought Jordan was a volume shooter who would be good, but not great, in the pros. Oops.

When it comes to many of the games Cohen discusses in the book, I can tell you where I was and who I was with as I watched them. (My best friend Chris’s house, with Chris.) I can tell you what color the carpet was in the room. (Blue.) I remember the exhilaration I felt during Game 6 of the finals watching Isiah score 21 points in the third quarter on a busted ankle—that was the moment I learned the connection between sports and heroism.

There are also things in the book that, at the time, I didn’t understand. In that same Game 6, the Pistons were robbed. Up 3 games to 2, they had a 1-point lead and the ball, with 14 seconds to play. Suddenly the whistle blew. The refs called Bill Laimbeer for a foul against Kareem. That foul call mattered a great deal to me—a stand-in for all of my teenage resentment of authority. It was evidence that the world wasn’t fair.

In the years since, this play has become legendary as “the Phantom Foul” because not only did Laimbeer not touch Kareem—he wasn’t anywhere near Kareem. But while it wasn’t fair, it was just.

Cohen says the Phantom Foul “was the result of a lifetime of good and bad works, the first of which made people trust and respect Kareem, the second of which made people suspect and disdain Laimbeer.” Reading this passage, for the first time, I felt at peace with Game 6.

The Pistons would go on to lose that game and the series, making the Lakers the first back-to-back champs in a generation. But this crucible also forged the Pistons into greatness themselves: They would go on to win the next two NBA championships. And then the Bulls would win the following three. It was an age of empire.

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RICH COHEN’S BOOK is full of pleasures. In one sequence, he describes interviewing Dominique Wilkins while shooting hoops in Wilkins’s driveway, which is almost impossibly cool. In another, he describes the delicate chemistry of NBA teams: “A basketball team is a family, a collective, a series of alliances, relationships, rivalries, and triangles. Horace Grant loved Scottie Pippen, who loved Michael Jordan, who also loved Michael Jordan.”

You will learn a good deal about basketball history from When the Game Was War. But I doubt you will love it as profoundly I did, unless, that is, you too were 13 in 1987.
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 64  out there in the dark. When you include yourself in the term “American viewing public,” it’s a lot easier to know what projects to invest in. They’re the ones you’d watch yourself.

These days, no one goes on instinct. Instead, studios and streamers send out “content mandate” manifests that describe, in hilarious weasel words, what they’re looking for.

“We’re interested in subversive, social commentary through the lens of comedy,” one network announced recently. They didn’t just say “looking for comedy” or “interested in satire” or any other conventional description of a genre. Asking for comedies just didn’t seem sophisticated enough, perhaps. Announcing to the creative community of Hollywood that what they really wanted to produce was “funny comedies about funny stuff that’s happening these days” doesn’t have the marketing-science pop of “social commentary through the lens of comedy.”

In fact, describing anything as seen “through the lens of comedy” pretty much guarantees that it’s not going to be funny.

Another studio sent out this request for pitches: “We want diverse projects that are aspirational, rom-coms, nothing too dark (but still edgy and noisy, with major impact points in characters, setting, and tone).”

Honestly, I have zero idea what that means.

I have been told that a certain streaming service is searching enthusiastically for a project that is “emotional, but not sad,” and another that is looking for “a big, funny, energetic comedy that avoids polarizing and discordant cultural fault-lines, but that has the potential to deliver water-cooler moments and conversation starters among viewers both online and in office/workspace/etc.”

Imagine any old-time Hollywood mogul saying those words. Imagine Robert Evans, the last of the larger-than-life studio chiefs, the guy who ran Paramount Studios in the early 1970s and made Chinatown and The Godfather, saying something like, “We are looking for stories that celebrate cultural touch points in an inclusive way via the mode of humor.”

When the world was falling apart 50 years ago, nobody in show business stopped to look. They just pumped out glittery musicals, screwball comedies, action-packed gangster pictures, star-studded disaster movies, and something called The Fish That Saved Pittsburg. They gave us hilarious, relevant comedies like All in the Family and The Jeffersons, but also sweeping family stories like the Godfather movies, space epics like Star Wars, and jokebook pictures like Kentucky Fried Movie and Airplane.

Not these days. Now, they send out “content mandates.”

Some history: During the 1980s and 1990s, when the world was emphatically not falling apart, show business did very well. Comedy, especially, had a Golden Era. The big broadcast networks were clogged with half-hour situation comedies. Half of them were about families with quirky, hyper-articulate children, and the other half were about groups of young adults behaving in a sexually liberated way in urban environments. There were arch dialogue exchanges, clever storylines, and tiny—almost minuscule—emotional stakes.

That’s because from roughly 1983 to 2007, America and the world experienced one of the greatest increases in personal wealth in the history of mankind. Except for a few blips here and there, money seemed to grow magically and exponentially, in financial markets, in real estate holdings, in retirement savings accounts. The world, which had seemed on the brink of nuclear destruction, suddenly felt more prosperous and peaceful.

As a result, show business got fat and lazy. It’s reflected in the thoughtless way each studio invested in a streaming service. When interest rates are low and money is essentially free, you can convince yourself of pretty much any financial stupidity. But it’s also clear from the tired, out-of-gas Marvel “Cinematic Universe” and the meaningless blah-blah of the multiple content mandates that each studio and streamer puts out. And it’s evident in the rickety finances of movie studios and streamers, which are discovering that despite spending billions of dollars on content, they have no idea what the American viewer wants to watch. And why should they? They don’t know any American viewers.

Right now, show business ought to start cleaning up. That’s what happened before, when the world was on fire. This is a perfect time for show business to reconnect to its audience and correct its recent mistakes. But if the content mandates are any indication, Hollywood is about to blow this opportunity to make book on tragedy. And then, there won’t be a Hollywood the next time the world falls apart."
THE WORLD, I don’t need to tell you, is falling apart. That’s bad. On the other hand, bad years for the world often mean terrific years for us in Hollywood. The rule is: When times are lousy, people go to the movies. That's what they did during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Those were banner years for the business. Audiences were desperate for a few hours of relief from the relentlessly terrible economic news, and after 1941 they were aching for something to distract them from war in Europe and the Pacific, telegrams from the War Department, from a world that was falling apart.

In the earliest days of the movie business, in fact, motion pictures delivered literal relief from the outside: Theaters were among the few places that had air-conditioning in the summer and plentiful warmth in the winter. Sometimes people went to the movies just to be more comfortable. It didn’t matter what was playing on the screen.

Some of the biggest movies of the 1930s were sunny and upbeat fare—musicals, romantic comedies, the merry lives of the super-rich. Maybe when you’re surrounded by poverty and depression, it’s nice to lose yourself for a few hours in glamorous Manhattan skyscrapers and elaborately costumed dance numbers.

And if you look at a list of the top movies from 1941 to 1945, you’ll still find lots of musicals, Westerns, romantic dramas. You could spend the whole day at the movies and never know there was a war on. That is, as long as you didn’t pay attention to the newsreel.

Decades later, when the world was falling apart (again) in the late ’60s and early ’70s, among the biggest movies were Doctor Zhivago, The Sound of Music, Love Story, Airport—you get the idea. When young American servicemen are dying in Southeast Asia and crazed death-cult hippies are murdering everyone in the house at 10050 Cielo Drive, who can blame audiences for thinking, Let’s go see “Paint Your Wagon” because Clint Eastwood sings! Or A VW Bug that’s sentient! I’ll grab the car keys!

Show business, in other words, is at its most successful when it counter-programs against a world that’s falling to pieces. But “counter-program” is probably not the right phrase to use, because it’s highly unlikely that any movie-studio mogul, way back in 1939 (or, for that matter, 1969) commissioned a focus group and hired a marketing research team to figure out just what the national mood was.

People were selling apples on the street. The national mood was pretty easy to discern then. And then later, when the children of the Greatest Generation were old enough to read and adopt revolutionary left-wing claptrap, nobody in show business needed to conduct a national survey to know that the nation was having a slow-motion nervous breakdown. Just look at Hank Fonda’s daughter! She’s over there yukking it up with the commies! Quick! Somebody green-light Tora! Tora! Tora!

Studios and television networks operated mostly on instinct back then, which was easier to do because the men—and they were 99 percent men—who ran those companies were deeply connected to the great, chaotic American Experiment. They weren’t producing movies and TV shows for a distant, unfathomable crowd of nobodies somewhere.
The Israel Genocide Slander
Of all the lies told by Israel’s enemies, the accusation of genocide is the greatest falsehood—refuted by the word’s meaning and all facts. Why do they repeat it?

Despite a complete absence of aggression targeting any people based on religion or ethnicity, despite unmatched efforts to spare the lives of enemies bent on Israel’s destruction—and make peace with them—the world’s only Jewish state still draws the unjust accusation of genocide.

What are the facts?
In May 2021, as Israel defended itself against 4,500 Hamas missile attacks from Gaza, actor Mark Ruffalo accused Israel of genocide. Later, Ruffalo retracted, saying the missile attacks from Gaza, actor Mark Ruffalo accused Israel of genocide in May 2021, as Israel defended itself against 4,500 Hamas missile attacks from Gaza, actor Mark Ruffalo accused Israel of genocide. Later, Ruffalo retracted, saying the missile attacks from Gaza, actor Mark Ruffalo accused Israel of genocide. Later that year, a college student told Vice President Kamala Harris that Israel is involved in “ethnic genocide.” Harris responded that “your voice, your truth, should not be suppressed.” Unlike the Vice President, Ruffalo was correct: The statement is anti-Semitic, because it’s slanderous—a lie.

What is genocide? “Genocide” defines “acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.” The Jews of Europe are the best-known victims of genocide. Hitler’s Germany tried to eliminate the Jewish people—killed six million for their “crime” of being Jewish. Likewise, the Armenian genocide: In World War I, Ottoman Turks targeted Armenians in order to reduce their population to prevent an Armenians state. Some 600,000 to 1.5 million Armenians were killed. More recently, East Timor, with a population of 650,000, was invaded by Indonesia in 1975. In the next 25 years approximately 18,600 people were killed and another 84,200 deaths were caused by Indonesia’s starvation campaign to exterminate the East Timorese.

While many other modern incidents have been termed genocide, they all have in common the intentional murder or physical displacement of a national, ethnic or religious group.

Are Palestinians victims of genocide? Since Israel’s founding, an estimated 20,000 Palestinians have been killed in military conflicts—the majority in wars or terror attacks initiated by Palestinians against Israel. Of these, an estimated 4,000-5,000 Palestinians died as non-combatants involuntarily exposed to battle, usually as human shields. Clearly, combatants killed in their own aggressive attacks are not examples of genocide—nor are unintentional civilian casualties of such battles.

Has Israel tried to eliminate the Palestinian people? There’s zero evidence that Israel has intentionally targeted innocent Palestinians. Indeed, Israel’s attacks on its enemies are uniformly defensive responses to unprovoked aggression. In addition, Israel famously avoids harming civilians during its battles with Hamas and other terrorists—even issuing advance warnings of retaliation. Israel also annually donates thousands of tons of medicines, food and other essentials to sustain Palestinians in Gaza—despite regular attacks on Israel by Hamas. Thousands of Palestinians also travel to Israel every year to receive free medical care.

Have Palestinians been illegally removed from their land? While Israeli courts do evict Palestinian “squatters” from lands owned by Jews and from Israeli public lands, this is simply rule of law. Palestinians also claim to “own” vast territories on which they have never had sovereignty and to which they have no legal claim.

In addition, about 750,000 Arabs left Israel during Israel’s 1948 War of Independence—when Arab armies invaded. At least half fled of their own free will. Others were removed by Israel for their safety or they were suspected enemies. (Some 156,000 Arabs chose to remain in Israel during this war and have thrived.) Such dislocations take place in all major military conflicts—millions of Europeans in World War II and between 10-20 million people when India and Pakistan became independent in 1947. Dislocation as a result of war—rather than as its goal—is not genocide.

Palestinian-Arabs have multiplied with no interference from Israel: Palestinian population at Israel’s birth in 1948 was about 1.3 million—today it’s about 6.8 million, of which some two million are Israeli Arab citizens. Such robust population growth alone refutes accusations of genocide.

Why do Israel’s enemies repeat the anti-Zionist slander? Those who oppose Israel’s existence cannot use honest facts to convince people of good will that Israel is evil. In fact, Israel wants peace and has offered it many times to Palestinians over 74 years. Yet, the Palestinians have greeted these offers with thousands of terrorist attacks, killing some 3,500 Israeli civilians.

Time to refute the Israel genocide lie. False accusations of genocide are attempts to delegitimize the Jewish state, demonize Jews and destroy Israel. These tactics perfectly fit the globally accepted definition of anti-Semitism. Those who attack Israel with this falsehood fully deserve the label of anti-Semite.

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