

Has the world learned anything in a year?

By Matthew Hausman

One year later, Israel finds herself fighting an existential war on seven fronts, while the wider world portrays her as an aggressor in need of taming. Op-ed.

The world has learned nothing since Shemini Atzeret 5784 (October 7, 2023) and in fact seems to have regressed significantly. Even before Israel could retaliate for the brutal atrocities committed by Hamas and subsidized by Iran, antisemitic protesters throughout America and the West took to the streets to glorify terrorism, slander Israel, and call for the Jews' extermination. They projected their own hatred and bloodlust onto the Jewish state, falsely accusing her of genocide in Gaza, mindlessly repeating terrorist propaganda regarding civilian casualties, and condemning Israel for defending herself. Meanwhile, mainstream media outlets, university campuses, and the progressive left became hotbeds of antisemitic Israel bashing, where blood libel and ancient stereotypes gained new currency, violence was praised, and Jews were dehumanized with Nazi-like ferocity.

One year later, Israel finds herself fighting an existential war on seven fronts, while the wider world portrays her as an aggressor in need of taming. Despite claiming to support Israel's right to self-defense, the Biden administration imperiously demands that she temper her response against Iran for shooting nearly two-hundred ballistic missiles at her and criticizes PM Netanyahu for authorizing the elimination of Hezbollah's command structure. Given Biden's constant disparagement of Netanyahu and failure to censure antisemitism within his party, his administration has no moral authority –

and no credibility – to demand anything.



Joe Biden and Kamala Harris

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As an ally of Israel, the US under Biden gets poor marks for its efforts to undermine Netanyahu's coalition, interfere in Israeli domestic politics, and promote ceasefire proposals that would leave terrorists in power and Israel at their mercy. And as a putative strategic confidante, the administration's performance is suspect, given the number of leaks that have come out during the war concerning, among other things, Israeli tactical planning and a recent confidential letter demanding that Israel implement fifteen "humanitarian" measures in Gaza or face a potential US arms embargo.

Has the US imposed similar constraints on military aid to Ukraine?

As if the administration's treatment of Israel were not bad enough, it actively seeks to placate antisemitic progressives in its party and thus effectively tolerates vile bigotry. Kamala Harris did so when she stated in an interview in "The Nation" that anti-Israel (i.e., antisemitic) protesters on

college campuses are “showing exactly what the human emotion should be,” as did Biden during his address at the Democratic National Convention, when he stated that hateful demonstrators outside the convention hall “have a point.” This ominous tone was set by Barack Obama almost immediately after October 7th, when he drew moral equivalency between Israel and Hamas, stating that “nobody’s hands are clean” in the conflict in a transparent attempt to absolve Hamas of evil. Such analogies are morally reprehensible.

With antisemitism running rampant throughout the American political and cultural landscape, politicians displaying gross moral blindness, university presidents refusing to condemn campus Jew-hatred, and a major political party coddling antisemites to solicit their votes in November, what are Jews to do? What ever happened to decency and civil discourse?

Unfortunately, even friends and sympathizers fail to understand the existential ramifications for Israel and the Jewish people, particularly when they use their own experiences as a yardstick for uneven comparison. Antisemitism is not like any other hatred, but rather is unique in its historical breadth and scope. It is based at once on religion, ancestry, ethnicity, nationality, economics, and culture. Jews have been hated by Christians and Muslims alike, based on scriptures and doctrines that contain anti-Jewish stereotypes which ultimately transcend parochialism to influence common culture beyond specific faith communities.

And as a migratory people who refused to disappear into their host societies through assimilation, Jews were perpetual targets of xenophobic hostility. Incongruously, they were hated by socialists and communists for being wealthy and by plutocrats for being socialists and communists. They were hated by church fathers, popes and reformers like Martin Luther; liberal philosophers and theoreticians like Voltaire, Baron d’Holbach, and Diderot; post-enlightenment despots, reactionaries, and revolutionaries; and twentieth-century

dictators like Hitler and Stalin.

Unlike any other form of hatred, antisemitism is an equalizer that bridges the gaps between religious and secular, Christian and Muslim, rich and poor, right and left. And even those who abhor it cannot truly understand how Jews feel or the weight of Jewish history.

Those who claim, for example, that “October 7th was Israel’s 9/11,” do not truly grasp the historical nuance. The horrors of 9/11, as shocking and profound as they certainly were, were distinct from the events of October 7th. Al-Qaeda’s attacks on the World Trade Center, Pentagon, and United Airlines Flight 93 were horrendous and dastardly, but the terrorists’ delusional aim was to spark a holy war that would end with submission to Islam. In contrast, Hamas’s pogrom of October 7th – with its torture, rape, and unspeakable brutality – was an act of genocide. The atrocities associated with both dates are distinguishable by motive and goal and thus, despite shared similarities and outrage, are also marked by fundamental differences.

If there is a more appropriate analogy to be made, one might say that 9/11 provided the US with a sense of what Israel has experienced since 1948, and Jews have suffered for millennia at the hands of gentile society, whether in Christian Europe or the world of Islam. However, the events of October 7th stand on their own for their genocidal impact. And whereas the global community empathized with the US for years after 9/11, its sympathy for Israel began eroding only a few days after October 7th.

Over the last year, I have heard from people who follow me in print or on radio. Some have been incredibly insightful while others have offered loaded statements about Israel’s one-way humanitarian obligations or the Jews’ responsibility to rise above the horrors and indignities inflicted upon them and morally outshine their enemies. Of the latter group of

critics, some seem naive while others are ignorant or downright hostile.

It smacks of antisemitism, for example, when they claim that Israel deliberately targets civilians, when in fact she takes unparalleled measures to minimize casualties by sending notice of impending operations, thereby broadcasting military intentions to her strategic detriment. Unlike any other country, moreover, Israel provides medical care and aid to civilians in battle zones.

It is also antisemitic when they argue that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza. If Israel were doing so, I respond, how can they explain the exponential Arab population growth there since 1967? False claims of Israeli genocide constitute a modern-day blood libel that is oft-repeated on college campuses, in the news media, and by the progressive left. It is antisemitic, too, when they characterize Gaza as "occupied," though Israel withdrew in 2005 (and forcibly removed all Jewish residents), leaving no residual presence – only to see Hamas elected by a populace that even now approves of the October 7th pogrom.

Two of the most fatuous platitudes I hear regarding the current conflict are that "violence only begets violence" and "you make peace with enemies, not friends." Such statements, however, ignore the reality famously articulated by Golda Meir when she observed: "If the Arabs put down their weapons today, there would be no more violence. If the Jews put down their weapons today, there would be no more Israel."

Apologists for terror usually argue that only Israel is obligated to risk security for peace and that defending herself radicalizes Palestinian Arabs.

But the war is not radicalizing anybody insofar as the rejection of Jewish humanity, dignity, and sovereignty is embedded within traditional Islamic society, where subjugating

Jews is a cultural mandate. Indeed, the precariousness of Jewish life under Islam was recognized one-thousand years ago in Iggeret Teiman ("Epistle to the Jews of Yemen"), which Rambam (Maimonides) wrote to provide guidance and comfort to Jews who were suffering greatly under the yoke of Arab-Muslim persecution.

It is the medieval image of the Jew as weak, broken, and spiritually defective that drives Islamic rejectionism today and has embroiled Israel in a multifront conflict she cannot afford to lose. The difference is that in Rambam's time, the threat came from Peninsular Arabs bent on subjugating Jews whereas today it comes from Iranian Shiites committed to destabilizing the region and acting out their apocalyptic eschatology.

By confronting Iran and its proxies head-on, Israel is doing precisely what the West should be doing to promote global security, instead of appeasing terror.

As G-d stated through the prophecy of Yeshayahu nearly 2,800 years ago: "I will make you [Israel] a light of nations, so that My salvation shall be until the end of the earth." (Yeshayahu, 49:6.) In addition to spreading knowledge of Torah and Hashem, perhaps being a light to the nations also requires Israel to act for the global good when no other nation will do so.

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