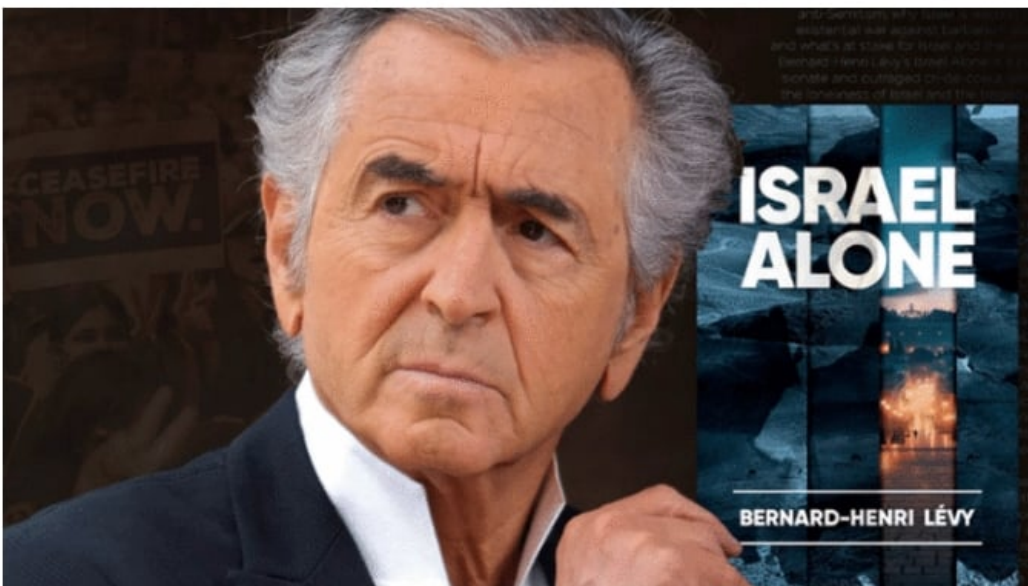


Voilà – A Sane Frenchman!

By Bruce Bawer

Born in 1948 in French Algeria to a family of Sephardic Jews but raised from infancy in France, where he has spent his long and productive life, Bernard-Henri Lévy has led a distinguished career as a philosopher, war correspondent, and prolific author and commentator. Unlike many members of his generation in France, he was not seduced by Marx, and has in fact spent much of his life criticizing Communism and other forms of tyranny, championing oppressed peoples around the world, and defending Israel and the United States at a time when most of his *bien pensant* French colleagues were doing the exact opposite.



In his new book [*Israel Alone*](#), Lévy covers in detail the atrocities of last October 7 and their aftermath, and addresses

pretty much every question, criticism, and morsel of “fake news” surrounding these horrific events. He traveled to Israel – a country that he has visited countless times over the decades – on the day after the Hamas attacks, and his book brings together on-the-spot reportage, history, philosophical reflection, and unflinching expressions of profound personal emotion. For Lévy, the Hamas incursion into Israel wasn’t just one more terrorist attack. It was, in the context of history, an Event – with a capital “E” – that involved a kind of

hostage-taking that was “without precedent since the rape of the Sabine women by Romulus’s Romans” and savages, also without precedent, advertising their villainy “in real time over social networks in posts exulting about bleeding the Jews like sheep.”

Yes, the democratic West knew beforehand about the barbarity of Hamas. But as Lévy says, it “is the eternal propensity of democracies, when faced with unthinkable barbarity, to know without believing, to possess the data without drawing conclusions.” We live in an era, in other words, “defined less by what it sees than by what the structure of its knowledge and the framework of its expectations render invisible.” We knew, that is, but chose not to know. For decades, consequently, Jews around the world, including those in Lévy’s own country, viewed Israel as a “refuge,” a place to which they could always flee if necessary; but on October 7 “the place that was the symbol of ‘never again!’” became the “was where ‘again’ had come down like a bolt of lightning.” Henceforth, there is now “nowhere in the world where Jews are safe....No land on this planet is a shelter for Jews; that is what the Event of October 7 proclaims.”

One major reason why October 7 was able to happen, Lévy posits, is that the West had lost sight of the enduring reality of evil. Even after two world wars, “the moderns...competed to convince us that evil was a thing of the past.” Some saw socialism as a cure-all for human misery; others thought that the very iniquities of those wars, and the founding of organizations like the UN, would snap mankind out of the habit of mass violence; still others bought into the idiotic notion (propounded by a political scientist who is actually still taken seriously by the mainstream media) that *homo sapiens* had reached “the end of history” and entered “a cool and peaceful world” in which everything that was wrong with human existence would be straightened out by “globalized capitalism.”

To be sure, Lévy doesn't pretend that October 7 is without precedent. This is a man who covered, among other atrocities, the genocides in Bangladesh, Rwanda, and Darfur; the wars in Bosnia, Algeria, Ukraine, Angola, Burundi, Somalia, and Afghanistan; and the horrors in Syria, "when a dictator ordered his opponents dissolved in acid baths" and in Nigeria, "where Boko Haram and Fulani militants were hacking up Christians with machetes." And yet most of the Westerners who even deigned to pay any attention to any of these outrages, he observes, saw them as "peripheral, epiphenomenal" – exceedingly minor growing pains on the unimportant fringes of an exciting and wonderful developed world that had reached, yes, "the end of history."

Lévy knew better. Evil had always existed, and it had no plans to go away. All of these monstrous happenings around the world were about evil, pure and simple, ancient and undying, senseless and ubiquitous: "Evil for nothing and for no reason; evil raw and unadorned. Evil having neither power as its motive, nor pain as its memory, nor Lebensraum or a will to conquer as its obsession. Evil untethered to a war between ethnicities, nations, or ideologies. Evil, true evil, that of the empty railway cars of Auschwitz, the repopulated rice paddies of Cambodia, and the Armenians forcibly marched to their deaths in the desert of Deir ez-Zor."

Forget Francis Fukuyama's muddle-headed proposition that after the end of the Cold War, the developed world was sliding smoothly into a golden and never-ending epoch of globalist prosperity and freedom. The end of history? Balderdash. Lévy has a contrary view: at present the West is contracting, and is making room "for five new kings, five potentates" – namely, "Russia, China, the Iran of the ayatollahs, neo-Ottoman Turkey, and the Arab countries prone to jihadism." And Hamas is, in some sense or other, "the sword and toy" of all five of these powers. Israel, for its part, is often viewed as a colonial outpost of the West, whereas what October 7

demonstrated, in Lévy's view, is that Israel "is a little more than just Israel." As he puts it:

Tragedy is Greek, not Jewish.

The major task of a Jew is not, like Oedipus at Colonus, to determine that the gods are cruel and that irreconcilable forces run the world behind our backs; it is to survive.

And from this point of view, yes, the Jews are more alone than they have ever been.

Why? Just look at the way in which so many governments and individuals in the West reacted to October 7 and its aftermath. For months after that diabolic day, malicious, misguided, or just plain moronic souls in cities around the West held pro-Hamas marches and tore down posters depicting children taken hostage by Hamas. They drew (at best) moral equivalencies between Hamas and Israel. More often, dropping Hamas's actions down the memory hole entirely, they accused Israel of genocide and of carrying out a massacre in Gaza. There were widespread calls for a ceasefire, and even for full Palestinian statehood and UN membership – as if the brutalities of Hamas should not be punished but rewarded. And the perennial, preposterous characterizations of Israel as a "colonial power" were repeated more fiercely than ever.

In a way – in a number of ways, in fact – it's an embarrassment that this elegant, passionate, and deeply intelligent book should have had to be written. For example, Lévy feels obliged to correct misunderstandings of history – ancient, medieval, and modern – that no remotely educated person should ever have bought into in the first place. He feels obliged to explain why Israel is not an apartheid state or colonial power or satrapy. He feels obliged to explain why Israel has the same right to self-defense as every other country. He feels obliged, ridiculously, to explain that the Jewish presence in the Holy Land predates the Balfour

Declaration.

Do I have any criticisms of this book? Almost none. I do think that the author is unnecessarily worried about the sincerity of – and motives underlying – the devotion of most American Christians to the State of Israel. I also balked at his expression of concern about the pro-Israeli credentials of Donald Trump, “who, when asked about his personal relationship with the Jews, responded that ‘short guys wearing yarmulkes’ are the only people he wants counting his money.” I never heard Trump make that joke, but I do know that he has Jewish grandchildren, moved the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, recognized Israel’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights, and engineered the Abraham Accords. No American president has ever, in his heart of hearts, been a truer friend to Israel. He’s precisely the ally Israel needs, and every supporter of the Jewish state – including Bernard-Henri Lévy – should pray for his return to the Oval Office. Just as every American who has bought into lies about Israel should read this eloquent and powerful book.

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