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A sense of security – gone

Hamas' attack was aimed at Israel's very existence. In order to survive, the country must destroy the terrorist organisation's military capabilities

On 11 September 2001, the world was shocked by the largest terror attack in human history, which claimed the lives of nearly 3,000 people. On 7 October 2023, the citizens of the State of Israel woke up to horror in the form of the most devastating terrorist attack in the country's history, in which 1,400 children, women and men were killed, and over 240 were kidnapped.

This is the sad reality that Israeli citizens must confront. While the attack on the World Trade Center brought with it widespread international shock and condemnation, many Israelis feel deserted by global public opinion and are suffering an unfathomable blow watching anti-Israel demonstrations around the world and diminishing international support, as they are forced to deal with the tragedy almost on their own.

The State of Israel is not the United States, with 33 times fewer residents and 440 times less land. The kibbutzim in the southern part of the country, where the Hamas terrorists infiltrated, are no more than a two-hour drive from the homes of over 70 per cent of Israeli citizens.

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Israelis have experience with wars and acts of terror, but the events of the Black Sabbath changed something deep within each of us. We lost the almost imperceptible sense of personal security that we had until 7 October, the feeling of protection granted to us by the strong State of Israel.

There is almost no Israeli citizen who has not been personally and painfully affected by this catastrophe. The incomprehensible disaster is almost indigestible; children were murdered and kidnapped, parents were brutally killed in front of their children, and families waited for hours in safe rooms as parents tried to quiet their children in order to not be heard by the murderers. An incomprehensible cruelty reminding us of the

deepest trauma of every Jew, the Holocaust.

Around 130,000 Israeli citizens from communities near the Gaza Strip, where the massacre occurred, and even further away have fled their homes and are not expected to return soon. The residents who lived closest to the border will not return to their homes until the State of Israel can guarantee their security. And the State has to provide this sense of security because they have no other land.

The need for a political solution

All my life, I have struggled for peace, for an end of the occupation and the promotion of a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many other residents of the kibbutzim in the south have also done so. I believed, and still do, in the right of the Palestinians to self-determination in their own state, with all my heart. I continue to believe in our need as Israeli citizens to fight against the occupation and expose the injustices it creates. I have criticised and continue to criticise the Israeli governments that weakened the Palestinian Authority and expanded the settlements in the West Bank. I did this as an Israeli fighting for the character of his state and its future. It is this belief that leads me to support the continuation of the Israeli military operation in Gaza, while at the same time making every effort to minimise any harm inflicted on innocent Palestinians.

I am not indifferent to the difficult scenes, the casualties – including many children – and the unimaginable suffering of the residents of Gaza. But I am fighting for my home, for my mere existence. It is not a war of choice. If brave citizens, along with the Israel Defense Forces, had not stopped them, Hamas terrorists would have continued to murder every Israeli they could. They attacked their victims like a hate-fuelled mob, Jews and Arabs alike, showing no mercy for anyone, not even children and infants.

We have no choice. If we do not win the war against Hamas, the residents of the towns, villages and kibbutzim who fled will not be able to return to their homes.

For years, despite countless rocket attacks from Gaza on Israeli settlements and cities, Israeli policy has been one of 'containment' — responding with limited force, giving work permits to the approximately 20,000 laborers from Gaza entering Israel daily and turning a blind eye to Qatari support for Hamas. But no country, especially not a small one like Israel, can tolerate such a broad and ruthless terrorist attack on its citizens.

We have no choice. If we do not win the war against Hamas, the residents of the towns, villages and kibbutzim who fled will not be able to return to their homes. Not only them but also the residents of northern Israel, living close to Lebanon, will not be able to return to the towns and kibbutzim that are attacked every day by Hezbollah terrorists supported by Iran. If they do not return, Hamas and Hezbollah, who are also enemies of the Palestinians and the Lebanese, drunk on their success, will continue to strike until no one – Jews and Arabs alike – can live in Israel anymore.

Reality is complex

Calls for an unconditional 'immediate ceasefire' may sound good in theory, but in practice, they are calls for surrender to the Hamas terrorists and for the abandonment of Israeli citizens to a reality in which those who have harmed them so severely will be able to regain their strength to harm them again in the future. Humanitarian pauses are justified if they assist in releasing the kidnapped and providing aid to innocent Gazans. Israel has no choice but to defeat Hamas, and, sadly, when the enemy operates from residential areas, setting up their command centres under hospitals, civilians get hit, too.

The world has become accustomed to painting a simplistic picture of good versus evil, weak versus strong, David versus Goliath. But the reality is more complex. Israel is not Goliath, and Hamas is not David. The reality is not black and white — it has many shades, and we would all do well to inspect it more meticulously and in a distinguishing manner.

Ultimately, the understanding that the existence of a sovereign Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel is an Israeli interest must be spread in Israeli policy circles.

Those who, 80 years after the Holocaust, do not see the justification for the existence of the State of Israel and call for freeing Palestine 'from the River to the Sea' are not people with whom I can find a common ground. But those who seek to fight for a better future for the Middle East must understand that without the ability to ensure basic security for its citizens, Israel cannot continue to exist. Right now, to achieve this, there is no choice but to eliminate Hamas' military capacities and rule in Gaza and deter Hezbollah. Currently, it is primarily the Israelis who are in danger, but some are already looking to the next stage. It is no coincidence that Putin and Erdoğan rushed to stand by Hamas. They understand that if the State of Israel is defeated,

it will be just the first step in their war against international liberal values.

From this tragedy, a positive outcome could occur in the form of a turning point. Ultimately, the understanding that the existence of a sovereign Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel is an Israeli interest must be spread in Israeli policy circles. Despite years of weakening the Palestinian Authority, it was and remains an important partner. Strengthening it and promoting a political solution that will also return it to rule Gaza must be a central component of the Israeli security concept.

In addition to the demand for and support of elections in Palestine, which, if held alongside a credible diplomatic horizon, will create a legitimate and supportive Palestinian address for a diplomatic solution. It won't be Hamas.

Victory must be *political*. The military operation will yield a purely tactical win at best. A political, regional and international diplomatic strategy is needed.

But in order to do that, it must be ensured that Hamas terrorists, who have tortured and murdered so many Israelis, cannot return and do it again. Therefore, we must fight. To return the captives back home and to ensure the return of security for Israeli citizens. To fight for the victory of liberal values — a victory for those who want to live, as opposed to the agents of death. To understand that just as Al-Qaeda sought to destroy the entire Western world on 9/11, so do the Hamas terrorists and their supporters. And that we cannot, under any circumstance, give in to their demands.

For a different perspective on this subject read here.



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