

Two enemies, two paths – and one deadly objective

By DANIEL PIPES

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What followed the October 7 massacre last year clarified a reality: while most people and governments around the world accept [the existence of Israel](#) and welcome its Jewish inhabitants well, two determined sets of enemies with different qualities and posing distinct threats want it and its Jewish inhabitants destroyed.

Each of them, [Iran's regime](#) and [the Palestinians, has a network that makes it fearsome](#) in contrasting ways.

The Jewish state has faced a unique barrage of six threats. These include, going from most to least violent:

- Weapons of mass destruction: [Iran poses the primary threat](#) but both Iraq and Syria made earlier efforts to [build nuclear bombs](#), while Saudi Arabia, Egypt and North Korea also have shown interest.
- Conventional military attack: Armies, navies and air forces have attacked Israel on numerous occasions, especially those of Egypt, Jordan and Syria but also Iraq, Lebanon, and the Arab League.
- [Low-intensity warfare, also known as terrorism](#): Attacks have come from many sides, including the extreme left (for example, the Japanese Red Army), extreme right (neo-Nazis), Arab nationalists (the Arab Liberation Front), Palestinian nationalists (the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) and Islamists (Hamas, Hezbollah).
- Demographic assault: Higher birthrates offer the lure of overwhelming Israel, especially if it can be induced to open its doors to a “right of return”.
- Economic boycott and blockade: Financial and trade boycotts as well as other attempts to undermine its economy have always dogged Israel.
- Ideological delegitimation: To undermine its appeal, Israel's Palestinian and leftist enemies [associate Zionism with imperialism, communism, Nazism, apartheid, white supremacism, Jewish exclusivism](#) and other repulsive ideas.

The listing prompts two observations. First, no other contemporary state faces such an array of threats; indeed, probably none in history ever has. In this sense, Israel has inherited the Jew's burden. Second, Israel has effectively defeated numbers 2 to 5, leaving just No.1 and No.6 as major challenges. That is, Iran and the Palestinians.

From its inception, the [Islamic Republic of Iran has defined itself by enmity to the US and Israel](#), the so-called Greater and Lesser Satans. Across a 45-year period, the regime has devoted vast resources and endured great hardships in pursuit of these goals. Specifically, it built a “ring of fire” around Israel with the intent of destroying the Jewish state, in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank, Gaza and even Yemen, with enemies so numerous and well-armed that their combined forces would overwhelm it.

While this Iranian effort has won some political support, the main focus has always been on violent means. [Iranian aggression has integrated Israel](#) into a regional Tehran alliance.

The Palestinian threat is more subtle. Israel's strengths and Palestinian weakness rankle the need to win over Palestinians.

Already in 1977, Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin declared: “I don't need Palestinian recognition for my right to exist.” Israeli politician and diplomat Arie Eliav echoed Begin's view in 1981: “Nobody does Israel any service by proclaiming its ‘right to exist.’” Benjamin Netanyahu added in 2007: “Our existence does not depend on the willingness of the Palestinians to make peace with us.”

The “peace process” that dominated the country's politics for decades receded; by 2013, only 10 per cent of Jewish Israelis considered those negotiations the

It played almost no role in the five Israeli elections of 2020-22.

For most Israelis, debating the fine points of Palestinian diplomacy became, a former Israeli prime ministerial aide commented, as irrelevant as “debating the the shirt you will wear when landing on Mars”. Summing up the general mood, Israeli strategist Efraim Inbar dismissed Palestinians as a “strategic nuisance”.

But [scorn of the Palestinian issue](#) makes sense if one looks only at violence, for Palestinians threaten less than Hezbollah and much less than Iran. They present a different danger, however, flogging an incalculably harmful anti-Zionist narrative to all the world.

Leftist opposition to Israel focuses its anger narrowly on Israeli policies towards the roughly 3.5 million Palestinians living on the West Bank, in Gaza, and in Jerusalem. This is the left’s almost exclusive issue vis-a-vis Israel. It barely notes or cares about Israel’s domestic topics, nor does it care much about foreign matters such as a possible attack on Iran’s nuclear infrastructure or Israel’s own possession of nuclear weapons.

Through masterful marketing, the perceived victimisation of a small and powerless population has [catapulted it into becoming a premier global issue of human rights](#) absorbing infinitely more attention than the far larger conflicts in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Ethiopia or Myanmar.

Leftist support explains why the Palestinian Authority and Hamas engage in violence against Israel even when they know in advance they will lose every military contest, because they also know the fighting enhances their status on the left. Academics tout their cause, apparatchiks send them money and politicians celebrate extremism. Palestinians may invariably initiate the violence but Israelis get slammed for responding. Thus, Palestinian attacks have the double benefit of killing and fuelling the left’s anger.

Leftist anti-Zionists include educators, journalists, artists, bureaucrats, priests, pastors and rabbis. A wide range of non-government organisations from Amnesty International to the World Council of Churches have jumped on the bandwagon. The Black Lives Matter platform accuses Israel of apartheid and genocide. In many countries, politicians almost everywhere represent the most anti-Zionist views in their countries.

“Woke” corporations have joined the battle. Airbnb, an online marketplace for short-term homestays, banned Israelis living on the West Bank from renting out homes on the platform while permitting Palestinians to do so, before reversing itself when facing discrimination lawsuits.

Among politicians, it is true Bernie Sanders did not become US president or Jeremy Corbyn British prime minister, but rabid anti-Zionists have a foothold in many countries’ legislatures; in one example, they opposed the US House of Representatives’ resolution congratulating Israel on its 75th anniversary. Anti-Zionism is on the ascent globally, as witnessed by Gabriel Boric (“Israel is a genocidal and murderous state”) and Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, elected the presidents of Chile in 2022 respectively, while Humza Yousaf was elected Scotland’s first minister in March last year. Current trends suggest the Elysee Palace, 10 Downing Street and the White House are within eventual reach.

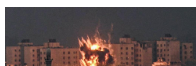
Leftist hostility towards Israel can take extreme verbal forms, as several examples before October 7 reveal. Slogans shouted during a demonstration at New York’s Central Terminal, one of the city’s most prominent spaces, included: “Free them all, Zionism must fall! Settler, settler, go back home! Palestine is ours alone! We want no two states, we want all of it! Five, six, seven, eight, crush the settler Zionist State!” English musician Roger Waters compared Israel to Nazi Germany. Morris of the All-African People’s Revolutionary Party stated at a Washington DC rally: “The only good Zionist is a dead Zionist.”

Some leftists go beyond words: Rachel Corrie made the ultimate sacrifice in 2003 by purposefully placing herself in the path of an armoured bulldozer operated by the Israel Defence Forces, getting herself crushed, killed, and turned into a Palestinian “martyr”.

Iran and the Palestinians pose opposite existential dangers to Israel: violence, not narrative; narrative, not violence. From the Jewish state’s vantage point, Palestinian acceptance is as important as ending the Iranian threat. Their interplay has synergism, with each reinforcing the other. Together, they obstruct Israel’s becoming a normal state. Until it can overcome them, its existence remains in question.

Daniel Pipes (DanielPipes.org, @DanielPipes) is president of the Middle East Forum and author of the just-published Israel Victory: How Zionists Win Acceptance and Palestinians Get Liberated (Wicked Son), from which this article partially derives. © 2024 by Daniel Pipes. All rights reserved.

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