

The exorbitant price we must pay for our defense

• By COOKIE SCHWABER-ISSAN

At a time when the very survival of our nation hangs in the balance, you'd think that the consideration of how we are viewed by the nations of the world would be the last thing on our minds. Apparently, it isn't.

Somehow, we are still obsessed with how others perceive us, to the point of asking ourselves if the targeted assassinations of our greatest enemies were worth our being marked as a pariah, earning us the most reviled title on the planet.

Ever since the death of Hamas leaders Ismail Haniyeh and Mohammed Deif, and Hezbollah senior commander Fuad Shukur, Israel has had to live with the looming threat of harsh reprisals. We wonder if "tonight" would be the big showdown, when we finally are forced to deal with deadly weapons other than the taunting intimidation of bluster that has accompanied us even prior to the October 7 massacre, but which has intensified since then.

In his article "Jewish extremism threatens Deif, el," (*Jerusalem Post*, August 9), Rabbi Kenneth Brander wrote, "That is where we remain today, asking ourselves when the attack will come and how bad it will be? Will we suffer again the horrors of Deif, and lasting trauma?" In yet another article, "Superpower Fatigue," Ruth Wassermander Lande expressed the worry that "a long list of countries are watching us with a very, very critical eye" (*Jerusalem Post*, August 9).

Sadly, this is the exorbitant price being paid by Israel for the right to defend her land and her people from the existential threat, manifested by the brutal October 7 massacre, in which an invasion took

place on Israel's sovereign territory, followed by constant rocket attacks, necessitating the evacuation and displacement of tens of thousands from our country's northern and southern borders.

But all of that is a side issue to the stringent demands constantly being placed upon our military, which is obligated, well beyond others, to follow the letter of the law when it comes to the rules of engagement of war. Welcome to the world of improbable expectations, where collateral deaths are forbidden and where surgical operations are demanded in order to ensure our high moral standards are impeccable observed.

No benefit of the doubt will be afforded to Jewish soldiers who are deployed to save the homeland. On the contrary, they will be expected to reconstruct every move, every order, and every bullet, in order to exonerate themselves should a Palestinian die as a result of the purposeful or accidental acts of their own terrorist fighters.

Even after a comprehensive dissection of the events has taken place, leaving no room for argument, the perpetrators were, it won't necessarily make a bit of difference to those whose agenda is to cast guilt on us.

IT SEEMS obvious, but security by "defeating" the terrorists is not only a waste of time, but a complete exercise in futility. When you are hated and reviled, based upon your ethnicity – the equivalent of the scarlet letter to our enemies – you can exercise the greatest caution and care, even placing yourself at a tremendous disadvantage to avoid blame, but it will almost always be to no avail.

Take, for example, the repeated libel characterizing us as a nation committing

genocide against innocent Gazans by starving them to death. It was the constantly echoed mantra heard from college campuses to the halls of international courts, declaring that Israel was deliberately preventing humanitarian aid from entering the areas where the Gaza people were concentrated.

It wasn't until photos were made available and aired on Israeli television, showing saturated marketplaces with enough food to feed a few populations, that those accusations subsided. Nor was it disclosed, until it could no longer be kept a well-hidden secret, that Hamas members were seizing many of the trucks carrying tons of food and other supplies earmarked for residents. The supplies were only released to Gazans once they forked over hard cash to Hamas, as they continued to extort their own people over whom the world's humanitarian organizations have exploited Palestinians for the sake of useful public relations was unconscionable, yet trivial and inconsequential to dishonest media and agenda-driven activists who desperately needed to paint Israel as the consummate villain in this war, where lying social media posts never die.

Rabbi Brander says that we need to do better as a society by "developing the intellect and mindset needed to live with the differences and challenges in Israeli society, such as respect for others... as well as Muslim and Arab citizens, strengthening each person's or community's individual identity."

It's great advice and works well when everyone engages in that kind of needed tolerance, but so long as much of the world is vested in seeing us through the prism of evil players who must be eliminated, we should not be unduly preoccupied with winning the gold for being the world's best neighbors, because we already are.

No other country is committed to feeding the same people who danced in the street following the massacre of our citizens. No other country would free 1,000 prisoners in order to secure the freedom of just one hostage. No other country would take in wounded terrorists and give them needed medical treatment to save their lives so that they can, one day, participate in a massacre of Israelis.

Yes, Israel is far from perfect, but it's head and shoulders above all others who stand in judgment of us while turning a blind eye to despicable nations that commit atrocities on their own people and deny basic rights and freedoms to their populations. Although slavery, human trafficking, and exploitation of minorities and children arise in so many countries, and well known to agencies such as the UN and the Hague, condemnation is reserved for Israel.

So why engage in second-guessing since it won't change anything? Israel has an obligation, first and foremost, to its citizens and residents, just as any other civilized nation. It has the further responsibility of acting within the moral framework of its high ethics and values. We take great pains to do that.

Consequently, there should be no price too great to continue to defend ourselves – whether or not it is acknowledged as being within our right to do so – and to justify. The writer is a former Jerusalem elementary and middle school principal. She is also the author of *Mistake-Proof Parenting*, available on Amazon, based on the time-tested wisdom found in the *Book of Proverbs*.



A GAZAN driver loads humanitarian aid destined for the Gaza Strip, at the Kerem Shalom crossing in southern Israel, last month. The constantly echoed mantra charged that Israel was deliberately preventing humanitarian aid from entering, says the writer. (Amir Cohen/Reuters)

The lost art of conversation

The high pitch of election discourse



ABOVE THE FOLD
• By MICAH HALPERN

It is election season again in the US. The pitch is high, and the intensity will only crescendo as we approach the elections on November 5.

The 2024 elections will be the 60th quadrennial presidential election in the US. It is hard to imagine that four years have passed since the last presidential election. Once an election ends, the next begins almost immediately, but as the date approaches the pitch heightens. It becomes shrill.

With each passing presidential election, I have witnessed a transformation in the style, method, and content of the dialogue between people. This is true not just of the candidates and their proxies, but also of the average voter on both sides of the aisle.

People have moved into their proverbial corners and, as opposed to coming to discuss differences and policies, they shout at one another and transform their opponents into Neanderthals and Darth Vaders. The "other" is either evil incarnate or simply too stupid to understand. I watch and listen to the arguments and I am stupefied.

The problem with these arguments is that they are no longer conversations or debates. Peo-

ple are frozen into their perspective and convinced that they are correct. They so firmly think that the opposite is not just wrong; the opposite side is blatantly evil and destructive.

They think the opposing side is made up of Nazis and Hitlers. The other side is destroying democracy, destroying America, and destroying personal rights. Think about the arguments on both sides of these topics: gun control, abortion, immigration, and freedom of speech.

The discussions become battles. The word "argument" derives from the Latin "arguer," which means to make bright or to enlighten, to make known or to prove.

Today, to argue is to fight with words. Seldom do people win arguments. More often than not, people just end the argument upset and frustrated.

Conversation, on the other hand, is a dialogue. Conversation is a banter, discourse, even debate. It is civilized, and it is fun. Lively conversation is edifying. It is also a lost art.

The words "converse" and "conversation" also derive from Latin. "Con" means with and "verse" is a line, as in a line of poetry. "Verse" in Latin really means the line dug with

a plow. The essential point of the word is that two or more people are talking together, and even if they disagree with one another, they are in line with one another.

Today, in politics, agreeing to disagree is absent. The parties and the people do not respect one another. And as a result, the discussions have devolved.

BUT WHAT neither side recognizes is that there is an enormous group of people who are not on the poles. There is a significant minority of voters who are moderate and in the middle. Those undecided voters are the ones who will sway this election in November.

These voters are not convinced by invective or clichés, drama, and populism. They are not, and will not be, convinced by depicting the other side as extremely evil.

The reason they are undecided is that they are, by definition, uncommitted. Therefore, the best strategy to entice them is using moderate arguments, not extremes.

A moderate, undecided voter may also possibly choose to avoid the entire election because they are turned off by such extremes. A strategy of shouting at the moderates that if they don't vote, then evil will win is a poor strategy. Shouting that the only way to defeat evil is to vote for good will just further distance the swing voter.

This tautology will not bring

in votes for either side. This argument will only antagonize the moderate would-be voter.

The candidates are not going to change their styles. The candidates firmly believe that their style is successful, and their style has gotten them this far. Trump will not become nice, and Harris will not stop laughing.

Still, the campaigns are run by sophisticated people who have strategy, and they craft messages not just about the candidates but about platforms, objectives, and vision.

The campaign leaders know that they must win. But they do not seem to understand this.

It is clear that the US is split down the middle in terms of voting. That was the case in the last election and will certainly be the case in November as well. The only path to victory is to attract the swing voter, who in the last election voted Democrat and in the one before voted Republican.

For some reason, the campaigns have missed this fundamental point, and they are preaching only to the converted.

This election will come and go. What worries me most is that the art of conversation will soon become extinct, replaced by unhelpful argumentation.

The writer is a columnist and a social and political commentator. Watch his TV show *Thinking Out Loud* on Jewish Broadcasting Service.

Donald Trump is not a friend of the Jews

• By AMY NEUSTEIN

Last week, *Newsweek* reported that Donald Trump, speaking at a news conference at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, declared – for the umpteenth time – that "he is the better candidate for Jewish voters, saying that any Jew who votes for the Democratic ticket needs to get 'their head examined.'"

Though it is no secret Trump had been peddling that myth for quite some time – freely assigning mental illness labels and cognitive impairment to any Jew who votes Democratic – what has not been spoken about is how skillfully he manipulated the progressives in the Democratic Party to topple Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro's chances of being chosen as Harris's vice presidential running mate.

Marc Caputo, national political reporter for *The Bulwark*, in an article titled "Trump World Fueled an Anti-Shapiro Whisper Campaign," quoted a Trump campaign adviser who said: "Where we could, we amplified the leftists on Twitter. We fed Shapiro [opposition research] to the media. We did what we could to create more noise and discontent."

The Trump camp succeeded in its sabotage of Shapiro. After all, it was not hard to foment anti-Jewish sentiment in this incendiary post-October 7 world – marked by the raging anti-Israel protests on college campuses and in the streets.

On the surface, one may simply chalk this up to run-of-the-mill politicking. Shapiro's more or less centrist views – support for school voucher programs, opposition to a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war, and so forth – risked pulling voters away from the Trump/Vance ticket. So, Trump used cunning to preempt Shapiro from getting on the ticket in the first place.

But on a deeper level, Trump's machinations had a far greater effect. And it may have actually alloyed the patronage he had enjoyed from certain sectors of the Jewish community that he previously pledged support for him.

You see, it's been 24 years since a Jew has been chosen as a vice presidential running mate. So, when Shapiro was named recently as one of the three finalists – undoubtedly leading the small group of contenders – the same feelings of exclusion abounded among Jews both in the US and around the world, as when US senator Joseph Lieberman (now deceased) had been chosen as Al Gore's vice presidential running mate.

With the rumors of Shapiro leading as the front-runner among the shortlist of potential nominees, we thought perhaps we'd finally broken the barrier. I spoke to friends, neighbors, and relatives about this dream come true. We felt enormous pride.

No doubt, it was a terrible letdown when Shapiro was passed over, and that was something many of us in the Jewish community had to

process. It was also apparent that Trump's sinister role did not end there. Rubbing salt on the wound, the Trump/Vance team immediately chastised Harris as antisemitic and cowardly for skipping over Shapiro and choosing Minnesota Governor Tim Walz as her running mate instead.

What a Machiavellian game Trump was playing. First, he incited the progressives to eschew Shapiro – wreaking havoc in the Democratic Party and posing a serious threat to unity among the Democratic voters. Then, after Harris had to make the best decision to hold the party together, Trump rallied against the Harris campaign as covering to "antisemitism" on the progressive Left.

In reacting to the Shapiro disappointment, I posted a reader comment on the San Diego Jewish World website:

"For those old enough to remember, I was immediately reminded of how my family... felt when President Lyndon Johnson cajoled associate Supreme Court Justice Arthur Goldberg to leave his venerated position on the US Supreme Court to serve as US ambassador to the UN, on the pretext that he was urgently needed to effectuate an ending to the Vietnam War. Everyone in the Jewish community knew that getting Arthur Goldberg to step down from his eminent position on the US Supreme Court was to rid the Court of a Jew."

Continuing in my post, I wrote: "It's a given that with all our advances, we still maintain the handmaiden status in the US. We are an apurtenant, an assistant, but never a first place. I struggle for answers as to why American society allows Jews to rise but quickly presses the 'shutoff valve' right before ascension to the highest levels of leadership. In Josh Shapiro we saw leadership, drive, charisma, and congeniality – all the qualities that... would have allowed him to break the glass ceiling."

All things considered, because Trump's campaign saw Shapiro as a potential threat to its electoral victory in November, Trump arrogantly declared the fate of a potential Jewish candidate on the Democratic ticket. As a result, much of the Jewish community was awash with those all too familiar feelings of being pushed to the side – consigned to the status of "outsider" – never able to achieve inclusion in the traditionally coveted places that remain closed to Jews.

After all, in our 250-year history as a nation, a Jew has still never served as president or vice president. I know for certain, I was deeply wounded as a member of the Jewish community last week. And for that reason alone, I cannot forgive Trump. And how can any other Jew?

The writer, a PhD, is a sociologist, and an author of 16 academic books. Her two most recent books, *From Madness to Mutiny*, second edition, and *Moral Schisms*, will be published by Oxford University Press. She resides in Fort Lee, New Jersey.



THE CANDIDATES are not going to change their style. Trump will not become nice, and Harris will not stop laughing, says the writer. (Umit Bektas/Kevin Mohatt/Reuters)