

HAARETZ

Editor: Aluf Benn

English Edition
 Editor: Esther Solomon
 Managing Editor: Jillian Jones
 Print Editor: Liz Steinberg
 Managing Director, Haaretz Group
 Rami Guez
 Managing Director, English Edition
 Aviva Bronstein

Haaretz Daily Newspaper Ltd.
 21 Schocken St., Tel Aviv 61350 Israel.
 Tel: 03-5121212 Fax: 03-6810012
 Customer Service Tel: 03-5121750 Fax: 03-5121703
 E-mail: nyti@haaretz.co.il. Advertising: 03-5121774, 03-5121112
 Letters to the editor: LTE@haaretz.co.il

Protect the Arab citizens

The police and state prosecution issue statements to the press every day, boasting of arrests they made and of indictments they filed against people who allegedly expressed support for Hamas. But they are gentle and lenient when it comes to racist acts and incitement against Arabs, even though these actions cause considerable and dangerous damage.

The damage that will be caused to Israeli society from the disintegration of the Jewish-Arab partnership in many social and economic aspects will be hard to mend.

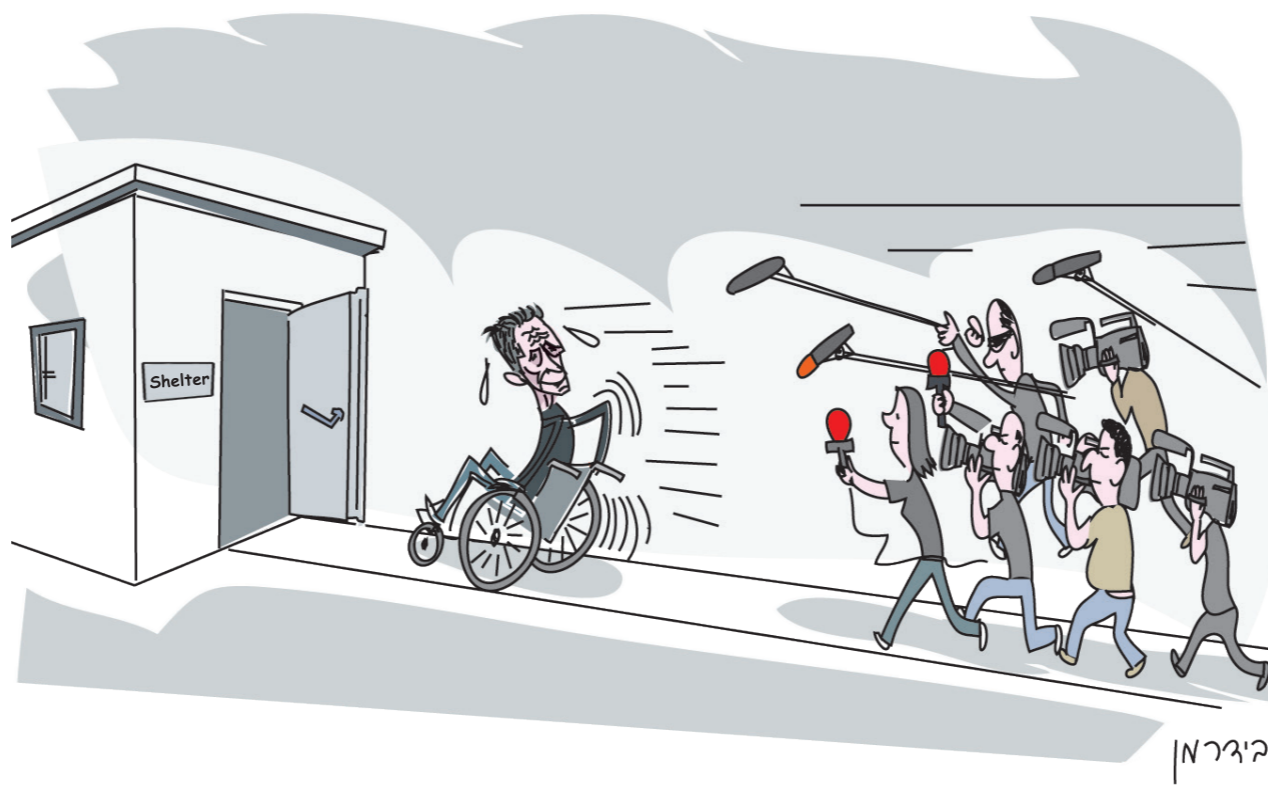
The displays of racism are numerous. A Jerusalem bus driver who has been employed for more than a decade, knows the passengers and greets them with "good morning" was required by some of the passengers to prove his loyalty repeatedly since October 7. For them, he is before all and after all an Arab. A man who got on a bus prevented the driver from closing the door and demanded he utter a derogatory statement against Hamas. Another loyalty test, which could come with curses, threats, spitting and physical violence. The result: Only about half of the Arab bus drivers in the capital report to work because they are frightened and feel threatened (TheMarker, Tuesday).

The Jewish public is indifferent to the racist acts targeting Arab citizens and suspicion against them is spreading. Every expression or simile that isn't understood is immediately suspected as support for terror. Dr. Abed Samara, director of the Intensive Care ward in Sharon Hospital, was suspended after his Facebook profile picture, a Muslim flag, was erroneously interpreted as a Hamas flag. The hospital hastened to issue a statement to the press saying the post "apparently supports terror." Even if Dr. Samara is returned to work, the damage will be extremely hard to mend.

Other incidents of blatant racism toward Arab employees occur in supermarkets, store chains and even in high-tech companies. Fear fuels racism and becomes hatred.

Meanwhile, the government is doing nothing about it. Although the threats against Arab drivers are seriously impairing public transportation for all the country's residents, Transportation Minister Miri Regev hasn't done or said anything about it. Her disregard for the state's responsibility to public transportation employees is criminal.

The end of the war and the conclusion of this difficult, brutal chapter of the Jewish-Arab conflict cannot be seen on the horizon yet. But like in previous chapters, two nations will remain here interwoven, and many of their sons and daughters want to live together, in dignity and security. Israel is obliged to protect the silent majority that wants to live safely in its state. Protecting the citizens from racism and violence is imperative so that we can live together at the end of the war.



Amos Biderman | amosb@haaretz.co.il

Gideon Levy

And darkness

And darkness was upon the face of the deep. Upon the face of the abyss of the massacre in the south, darkness is taking hold of Israel. Now it is still a gathering of clouds, but it may turn to darkness: Israel is going mad. The left is "wising up," the right is growing more extreme and McCarthyism and fascism reign.

Wartime is always a time of silencing, uniformity of opinion, racism, incitement and hatred; absolute enlistment in service of propaganda, the end of tolerance and the persecution of anyone who dares step out of line. The atrocities perpetrated by Hamas in the south brought all of these manifestations to extreme levels, as if the atrocities justify the loss of all restraint. The emotional turmoil is of course understandable, but not the totalitarianism that followed in its wake. If it is not stopped, the danger posed to democracy will be a thousand times that posed by the government coup, which made the whole system here go haywire.

The first to lose their minds were, as usual, the leftists. They "wised up." Those who before the war set out with determination to fight for democracy are

now sabotaging it with their own hands. Those who before the war considered themselves liberals, people of peace and human rights, are now adopting an updated worldview: They are indifferent to the atrocities taking place in the Gaza Strip, a majority even want to see them intensified.

Why? Because they perpetrated atrocities against us. For how long? Until the end. At what cost? At any cost. This left now thinks about Gaza exactly as the right does: Strike and strike, it's the only option. Those who before the war underestimated the importance of addressing apartheid and the fate of the Palestinian people now think, to hell with everyone. They can go hang. Let them suffocate. Let them die. Let them be expelled. Those who before the war considered themselves enlightened now support consensus. Hamas also turned the Israeli left upside down. From now on it is permitted to do anything to Gaza, the left will even give its blessing. From now on it is forbidden to even empathize with the residents of Gaza.

Human rights activist and former Peace Now director Yariv Oppenheimer watched Amira Hass shedding in-

spiring tears over the fate of Gaza's inhabitants and hastened to write: "I admit that I have grown numb." Even in the face of the bodies of 2,360 children, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry as of Tuesday, the left's heart is sealed. As at the start of every war, this left is for it. The left "wises up," and afterward somehow returns to itself. That seems unlikely this time.

The situation is even worse outside of the left. Fascism has become the only proper position. The local TV stations aligned themselves with Channel 14; when it comes to Gaza there's no difference. Reporters and anchors call Hamas Nazis in a repulsive display of Holocaust trivialization and denial, and the crowd cheers. Hamas did abominable things, but they're not Nazis.

Any other opinion is now condemned to persecution. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres spoke truthfully and courageously about the context of the October 7 atrocities, and hastened to stress that nothing can justify the horrific attacks by Hamas; Israel responded with a frenzied attack on Guterres, whipped up by the media. Every diplomatic correspondent who

never expressed his opinion on anything knows that the secretary general's remarks were "outrageous."

I, for one, was not outraged. They were true. The actor Maisa Abd Elhadi was detained by police and held overnight over a social-media post that broke no law, and Israeli TV channels are removing her films from their streaming archives. McCarthyism is ashamed. The ransomed captive Yocheved Lifshitz gave a moving performance, and the mainstream journalists complain because she told the truth. PR consultant and internet personality Rani Rahav sees a video of the destruction in Gaza and writes: "That's how I like it!!" (All of the drooling exclamation marks are in the original text). Journalist Zvi Yehezkel urges Gaza's destruction nightly. The entire Gaza Strip. And his Channel 13 News colleague Netali Shem Tov sees "too many buildings standing in Gaza." Such is the distilled evil in the face of the Gaza catastrophe, the horrors of which are almost never shown to Israelis.

This is the dark time. The time of the barbaric attack by Hamas and the time of the lost conscience and sense of reason in Israel.

Uri Misgav

By his own words, Bibi must go

"They tell us cynically: he who failed will carry out the repairs. The captain must not be replaced. That's like saying after the Titanic disaster that had the captain survived, they should have given him another ship. The life of a nation isn't a prime minister's personal survival course. The first question to be asked is, what did you do there? You didn't set strategy, you didn't lay down policy, you didn't give a guideline. So what were you doing there? In the IDF they call it treading water. Going in circles. In combatants' words: to lose the way. And today it's already clear, how could there be a victory if you, who are responsible for the war, didn't even know what you were doing?"

"That's what happens when the prime minister has no judgment and no strategic vision. When everything is shallow, superficial and transactional and changes according to political needs. What explanation can you offer the public, when you're clinging to your ministries? You say the good of the state is before your eyes, when in fact you mean your own good. Government stability, you say, when in fact you mean your government's stability. Keeping the country safe, you say, when you really mean keeping your seats in office."

"Israel cannot afford to continue with such a failing, irresponsible leadership. A negligent leadership that enables months and years of missile fire on our communities, citizens and children. Many citizens from all parts of the nation want another leadership. A leadership that doesn't change its way according to its own survival needs."

"This desire today unites numerous people of various opinions, from right and left. They are tired of tricks and ruses in a world where politics is everything because public discourse in Israel has recently been taken over by a culture of deceit, which we must not accept. The lie is truth, bad is good. Failure is success. Is that the leadership we'll show our children? Is that the example? This

cynicism? Irresponsibility? Mister prime minister, you cannot evade the public's justice for long."

These penetrating words were uttered by Benjamin Netanyahu from the Knesset podium after the Second Lebanon War. One thing you can't take away from him: He always knew how to talk. But we're not in 2006 now. This is the Year Zero. Nor do we have the privilege to wait for the public's justice. We are caught between a barbaric attack from the south and a threat to our survival from the north, as part of a regional move led by Iran. The signs raising suspicion of Russian involvement are increasing, while the Chinese have sent warships to the area. We simply cannot survive in this deluge with Netanyahu at the state's helm.

He has officially relocated his residence to a huge mansion owned by the duty-free tycoon, extreme-right supporter Simon Falic. He leaves for work from there every day close to 11 A.M. In wartime! An analysis of the photos makes it clear that he hasn't parted with the bullet proof vest he wears under his coat. Against the law, he has brought Arye Dery, who isn't a minister, into the cabinet and into strategic meetings (with Joe Biden).

As is his custom, he set up for himself alternative staffs. Gal Hirsch operates apart from the IDF's staff for abductees, a spokesman employed for this purpose only briefs military reporters against the army, a special adviser was hired to strengthen ties with people from the Russian-dominated Commonwealth of Independent States. Netanyahu conducts "consultations" with Yitzhak Brik and Gabi Ashkenazi – all this is to isolate the defense establishment and mark its leaders as exclusively responsible for the October 7 disaster.

He has no interest in the victims and the families. It is doubtful if a human heart is even pounding in his body beside the advanced pacemaker.

The Israelis and their army will not be able to beat jihadist terrorism as long as this is their prime minister. He has to go. Now.

Shany Littman

Bring them back, at any price

Two photographs tell the entire story of the issue of freeing the hostages held in Gaza. One, released the evening that Natalie and Judith Raanan were freed, shows the government's hostage coordinator, Gal Hirsch, holding their hands and smiling. Without getting into personal issues, this photo was clearly meant to send Israelis the message that we – that is, the State of Israel – freed them.

But the truth, as we all know, was different, and it was revealed in the photo on Haaretz's front page the next morning. It showed the freed hostages – smiling, grateful and moved – on the phone with U.S. President Joe Biden. We and they know that if it weren't for Biden, they would still be in the clutches of their captors in the Gaza Strip.

This photograph embodies a threat to the essence of Israel. If, in the end, the only freed hostages are those with foreign citizenship, this would send an unequivocal message to Israelis: You have no state. The shock of the army's failure to protect civilians from the Hamas terrorists would be followed by an even greater shock – that the state was abandoning its citizens and was willing to let them be killed in order to continue the bloody,

pointless war in Gaza.

The goal of Israel's establishment was to protect Jews, but now the government is telling its citizens: Go back to Poland, Morocco, America. Maybe they'll take care of you there.

Consequently, Israelis must mobilize en masse behind the uncompromising demands by the families of the hostages: To do everything possible, including a cease-fire, humanitarian aid and releasing Palestinian terrorists, to bring all the hostages home immediately – women, men, children and the elderly.

The first relative of a hostage to set up a protest tent chose to do so at the Kaplan Street entrance to army headquarters in Tel Aviv. This is a problematic location, because it's identified with the protests against the government's judicial overhaul. The time for that protest will yet come, and also for demands to replace the prime minister, if he doesn't do the right thing and resign. But this isn't the time, and we mustn't be tempted to deal with this now.

The only message that should emerge from that tent is, "bring back the hostages." This is the government's supreme obligation at this moment, at any price. There is nothing more important, not even ending Hamas' control

over Gaza. That can be handled later.

On Saturday night, several hundred people gathered at the Kaplan Street protest tent together with the hostages' families. That was more than had shown up on previous days, but it still isn't enough. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis need to demand the hostages' immediate return.

We mustn't give in to the confusion in the prime minister and others are trying to sow by drawing distinctions between the families of hostages that support him and those that oppose him, between right and left. We need to unite behind the hostages' families like a fortified wall and demand that the hostages be freed immediately, and that there be no invasion of Gaza until all of them are brought back.

In September 2004, Chechen terrorists barricaded themselves in a school in the city of Beslan and took hundreds of hostages, most of them children. Russian President Vladimir Putin's aggressive approach to the crisis caused the deaths of 334 hostages, including 186 children. If that is also the fate of the hostages taken by Hamas, we will all know that in reality, we live in Putin's Russia. We must oppose this with all our might.

'Doing a Netanyahu': Pursuing a suicidal path

In the near future, the world will be using the expression "to do a Netanyahu" to refer to a head of government who is leading his country to suicide. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is directly responsible for the biggest crisis in the annals of Israel's history and will be remembered as the primary destroyer of the Jewish nation from within.

Despite the fact that we are at war, he has to be removed from office now. Calls for his dismissal abound, but I would like to highlight two aspects of the situation. One is how to present it to foreign leaders, including those who have recently visited Israel. It's relevant to them because it's in their own interest for Netanyahu to go, and they can advance the process of replacing him. The second is a practical proposal for an alternative governing coalition for the country.

Foreign leaders don't realize that Netanyahu's remaining in office would be dangerous for the entire region. They don't see that he is actually acting in opposition to Israel's interests, and on top of it, that he is vulnerable and replaceable. If they had understood that, they wouldn't have publicly embraced him.

Netanyahu, who has been serving as prime minister for more than 16 years, is essential responsibility for the current Israel-Hamas crisis. Not only was the prime minister never a good leader. He has actually turned into

a Putin – a leader inflicting damage to his own country.

Netanyahu is in a bind vis-a-vis Hamas and Hezbollah. Under his failed leadership, Israel has lost much of its deterrence. If he were to threaten but then not to act, any remaining deterrence would evaporate. But if he were to threaten and act, he would set the entire Middle East on fire.

And Israel has not proven that it has the capability to contain such a conflagration. So the West is dealing with an Israeli leader who has failed and is facing only bad options.

As a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies, I was an author of a long-term plan for solutions for Gaza that was offered to Netanyahu's government. He preferred not to resolve anything. On the contrary, he facilitated the transfer of funds from Qatar and Iran to Hamas.

Netanyahu has always been blind to key geopolitical developments. He was in favor of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, despite experts' warnings, and the invasion ended badly. Now another colossal error of judgment on his part has been revealed. He promoted Hamas, thinking that he could "divide and rule" the West Bank and Gaza. While delivering vacuous speeches about deterring Hamas or even eliminating it, he was actually being outmaneuvered by it.

One would be hard-pressed to find a case in which he understood or

managed international developments well. His abilities are similar to those of Vladimir Putin, Viktor Orban and Recep Tayyip Erdogan. They're in the sphere of illegal and immoral acts rather than strategy.

Since October 7, when Hamas invaded Israeli border communities and went on a killing spree that took the lives of 1,300 people, Netanyahu hasn't internalized the extent of the crisis and his own responsibility. He's busy engaging in PR, blaming oth-

Western leaders could signal that they stand with Israel but not with Netanyahu. There's a feasible and realistic alternative.

ers, clinging to his extremist political partners, and listening to lunatics in his immediate vicinity. His personality and the incentives before him contradict Israel's interests and the need to de-escalate tensions in the region.

He's leading the country into an invasion of Gaza that would place Israel in a quagmire without eliminating Hamas. He's also capable of getting us into a direct confrontation with Iran that would wreak havoc on the Middle East. And he has barely spoken to the nation, to the bereaved families, to the families of the hostages.

After his extremist government was installed in late December, it pursued a fundamental overhaul of

the country's judiciary that would have likely made Israel nondemocratic. A majority of Israelis opposed these changes and doggedly took to the streets in opposition to the plans.

But the strife and internal conflict in Israel were not lost on its neighbors. Iran didn't need to hack into the prime minister's cellphone – or his new pacemaker. His weakness and blindness were readily apparent, as was the weakening and unprecedented division of the Israeli

Western leaders could signal that they stand with Israel but not with Netanyahu. There's a feasible and realistic alternative.

military and Israeli society. October 7 was one building block in an Iranian plan, and Netanyahu could be awarded Iran's highest honors.

It is not clear why Western leaders are willing to work with such a man. He could actually exacerbate the crisis and his actions run counter to Western interests. But there is a feasible and realistic alternative.

Western leaders could signal that they stand with Israel but not with Netanyahu. Ongoing dialogue with Israel on policy and military matters in response to the Hamas attack should always be undertaken with the members of the expanded unity government and not through direct meetings

with Netanyahu. That would signal that decisions require adults in the room.

The United States and other G7 countries should signal that they support a democratic Israel and that ensuring democracy requires a new prime minister and governing coalition. Such a change of government has to come from within and could be facilitated by an existing provision of Israeli parliamentary procedure.

Without a new election, the current coalition could be replaced by one consisting of 46 Knesset members from center-right and center-left parties, who could be joined by 18 members of the ultra-Orthodox parties, the latter of whom are realizing that Netanyahu will be unable to provide them with the support that they seek for their community.

In the 120-seat Knesset, such a 64 member majority would be sufficient. It could be augmented by between five and seven breakaway members from Netanyahu's Likud party. Outside pressure might also very well include the necessary boost. The Biden administration, for example, has regular contact with all the parties involved and could facilitate the formation of such a government. Netanyahu needs to be stopped here and now.

Eran Yashiv is a professor of economics at Tel Aviv University and a research fellow at the London School of Economics Center for Macroeconomics.