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OCTOBER 7 AND THE UKRAINIAN POGROMS OF 1919

A Comparative Analysis of Motives,
Impacts, and Reactions

Sharon Vance



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Sharon Vance*

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Introduction

The Hamas attack on southern Israel on October 7, 2023, was the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust or, as it is called in Hebrew, the Shoah. Comparisons of the two were made by some survivors and freed hostages. The former described the impact that October 7 had on them 80 years after the liberation of Auschwitz.¹ Hostages released from Gaza and examined by medical staff were found to be suffering from similar conditions as Holocaust survivors, and some Holocaust survivors were among the victims, hostages, and survivors of the October 7 attack.² Nevertheless, the chairman of Yad Vashem rejected this comparison given the enormity and uniqueness of the Shoah.³ Another, less well-known comparison was made, namely to the Eastern European pogroms prior to the Holocaust. Derek Spitz, a Trustee of the London Centre for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism, quoting Trotsky's description of the 1905 pogroms, compared the October 7 attack to them. Brandeis University professor Ilan Troen, whose grandmother was murdered in the 1919 pogrom in Ukraine and whose daughter was murdered on October 7, called what happened in Israel a pogrom.⁴ Others have also made the comparison, including Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation (Kan) reporter Akiva Novick, in his podcast *Lekh Tizkor* (Remember), and Allan Arkush, in his review of Jeffrey Veidlinger's *In the Midst of Civilized Europe: The Pogroms of 1918–21 and the Onset of the Holocaust*.⁵

In this paper, I will carry out an in-depth comparison of the events of October 7, 2023, and the pogroms in Ukraine in 1919. I choose to focus on these pogroms because of the availability of Veidlinger's in-depth history, along with Irina Astashkevich's *Gendered Violence Jewish Women in the Pogroms of 1917 to 1921*,⁶ which focuses on mass rape as a weapon of war. In addition, these pogroms occurred after the Russian-led publication and distribution of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which served as a justification for the pogroms and for subsequent waves of mass violence against Jews, and which has been widely distributed in the Middle East. When considering the comparison, the differences are obvious, particularly regarding the number of victims, the duration of

the wave of violence, and its consequences. And yet there are some striking similarities both in terms of the brutality of individual massacres and in terms of the justifications of the perpetrators.

In addition, I will consider American reactions to both events and the way they were covered in the news media. American news coverage of the pogroms was of course confined to print media. The Library of Congress's "Chronicling America" database lists 161 items on the pogroms in Ukraine that were published between 1919 and 1921. This includes the Jewish American press. The *New York Times* searchable database returns six articles for the same period.⁷ In contrast, it contains 564 articles on the October 7 massacre and kidnapping published between October 7 and November 1, 2023. NewsBank, a database covering over 600 print and broadcast news media outlets, produces 40,875 results from American sources in the same period.⁸ My analysis of its coverage surveys the first 48 hours, which contained over 3,000 items, and my focus was on articles that described what happened on October 7. As will be seen, extensive coverage does not guarantee empathetic coverage.

The Ukrainian Pogroms of 1919

With the collapse of the Russian Empire in the wake of World War I and the outbreak of the October Revolution, Ukraine became a war zone contested by many militias aligned with clashing forces in the Russian Civil War or with Ukrainian and Polish nationalists. Despite their battles with each other, all these forces committed pogroms against the Jewish population in the region. While this violence can be seen as a continuation of the earlier waves of pogroms, the period from 1918 to 1921 was unprecedented in the level of brutality and destruction. It was only overshadowed by the Shoah two decades later. The overall number of victims is estimated to be 100,000, resulting in the destruction of the rural Jewish community. Within these series of pogroms were hundreds of instances of massacres and individual acts of cruelty, humiliation, torture, mutilation, gang rape, and murder. The overall number of victims does not give a sense of the atrocities committed or how these individuals met their end. At the same time, one cannot understand the signifi-

cance of the justifications for these acts without knowing the details of what happened and the immediate environment that facilitated the violence.

Prior to and during these pogroms, there was often a carnivalesque atmosphere where Jews were paraded, dehumanized, and humiliated in front of crowds, many of whom participated in the attacks and plunder.⁹ This occurred during the Ovruch pogrom, which lasted three weeks from late December 1918 until mid-January 1919, in which between 50 and 80 Jews were murdered and over 1,200 homes were pillaged. Often mass rape took place in what Astashkevich called “a carnival of violence,” such as during the Gornostaipol pogrom between January and May 1919, in which the instigators ordered the Jews to prepare a feast to be served by Jewish girls who were then raped. The goal was to “redefine the relationship between Jews and their neighbors in terms of dominance and hierarchy.”¹⁰ During the first Zhytomyr pogrom after the Bolshevik Revolution, in which 53 Jews were killed between January 8 and 13, soldiers affiliated with the Ukrainian military leader Palienko arrived in trucks, chased away other looters and began looting and killing Jews while their neighbors pointed out which homes belonged to them. Groundskeepers who were employed by Jews also took part in the looting.¹¹ At least one Jewish man was found beheaded in a synagogue courtyard and girls were gang-raped in their homes. During the second pogrom, after the Bolsheviks captured and then lost the city, Directory soldiers affiliated with Ukrainian nationalists entered and began hunting and killing Jews in the streets. Jews were also hunted in the hospitals.¹² The justification for both these pogroms was that the Jews were Bolsheviks and had usurped the peasants’ property.¹³ In both the Zhytomyr and the Proskuriv pogroms, bodies of women, children, and the elderly were left in the street. Survivors described seeing their families hacked to death with sabers and bayonets. Two Jews were paraded through the town’s main street and tortured to the delight of the crowd and the accompaniment of music. Officers in the Ukrainian nationalist army and local recruits participated in the pogrom. Later when the city once again came under Bolshevik control, a committee concluded that 317 Jews, most of whom were not wealthy, had been killed.¹⁴

The Proskuriv pogrom took place in February after young radicals tried and failed to stage a pro-Bolshevik revolution. However, prior to this, officers in the Ukrainian national army stated that Jews should go to Jerusalem or be exterminated because Ukraine did not need them.¹⁵ Troops affiliated with Ukrainian nationalist Simon Petliura's army,¹⁶ along with Cossacks, began massacring Jews in Proskuriv shortly after the radicals departed when their reinforcements failed to arrive. They set up machine guns around apartment buildings where Jews lived and began killing them in the streets. Two city council members were alerted, entered the streets and saw the bodies of Jewish women, children, and elderly. One of the leaders of the Cossack troops, Ivan Semosenko organized a banquet for his troops with lots of alcohol to celebrate the upcoming massacre, demanding his drunken soldiers swear an oath to their flag. He ordered his men to kill the young and old but not to steal. The massacre, or at least this stage of it, was ordered to start in the afternoon.¹⁷ They entered Jewish apartment buildings and, according to the survivors who were able to hide or pretended to be dead, stated they had orders to kill everyone but not to steal. These survivors then saw their family members "riddled with bullets." Other survivors, such as Shlem Kibrik, saw their families slaughtered with sabers and bayonets. Some survivors had severed limbs and suffered for years from wounds that never healed. Jews were also murdered while praying in their synagogue. Children and babies were killed. One was impaled and spun around on a bayonet. Khaim Teneboym saw his family members murdered, including a month-old baby that was thrown in the air and stabbed with a bayonet. Soldiers tossed grenades into Jewish homes to force those hiding inside, including young girls, to come outside, where they were grabbed. A few broke free, many were gang-raped and later succumbed to their wounds. Whole families were slaughtered. Their gruesome end was reported by survivors and non-Jewish witnesses.¹⁸ Despite the command not to loot, soldiers did just that, as did neighbors after the troops left. The most conservative estimate is that 911 people were killed in this pogrom. Hundreds of soldiers from many units, along with police, and even nurses and ordinary citizens participated in the massacre and looting. After this pogrom, it became clear that the goal in

Ukraine was the destruction of the Jewish population.¹⁹ The remains of the mutilated and bloodied bodies were gathered and buried in a common pit. The wounded, including mutilated babies and young women, were left screaming in hospitals until they died of their wounds, according to a nurse named Khaya Greenberg who was working for the Ukrainian Red Cross.²⁰ When Jews tried to flee massacre sites they were also killed.²¹ As the pogroms continued throughout Ukraine in 1919, the mass murder continued and those who survived reported hiding under piles of corpses as peasants broke into their homes and shot at the inhabitants, many of whom tried to hide by lying flat on the floor, such as during the pogrom in Slovechno in July 1919.²² Others fled into the woods and lay in ditches, as M. Rekis did during the pogrom that destroyed his shtetl of Rotmistrovka in May of that year. He did his utmost to document the atrocities, including the rapes.²³ These pogroms took place as the Bolsheviks battled nationalists as well as White Russians loyal to the Czar.

In the second phase of the pogroms, which was conducted by the White Army under the leadership of officers of the former Czar, the killings increased substantially, such as in the city of Fastiv, where 1,800 Jews were murdered. Cossack soldiers set fire to Jewish homes and forced victims inside. Jews were taken hostage in a synagogue and threatened with being burned alive if they did not pay a ransom.²⁴ Again, Jews were murdered in the streets. Their bodies were left to be eaten by dogs and pigs.²⁵ While they had the upper hand, the White Army also celebrated their pogroms with elaborate balls, which were accompanied by mass gang rapes and torture. Such atrocities were repeated in multiple pogroms in Smela throughout 1919, both by Gregoriev's troops and by the White Army.²⁶ When the Whites heard the Bolsheviks were advancing, they committed a pogrom in Tetiiv starting in December 1919. Women and young girls were violated, and Jewish homes and stores were burned down. By January, they reached Kryve Ozoro. The massacres were repeated, celebrating their exploits with a ball accompanied by music and card games. Once again, the massacres were accompanied by a carnivalesque, celebratory atmosphere, as if the raping and killing of Jews were a cause for jubilation. The mass rape and the dance

parties were part of the process of dehumanization, domination, and destruction of Jewish women and Jewish families. Before leaving, the White Army burned the town down. When the Red Army finally arrived, the Jewish population had been practically wiped out. Corpses were strewn in the street. Surviving Jews and a Christian school teacher transported four hundred bodies to a burial pit.²⁷ Yet the Bolsheviks could not control the area and, in March 1920, peasants revolted against them and began raiding Tetiiv. Vynnychenko, the Bolshevik leader, withdrew from the town to pacify the countryside. He urged Jews to form self-defense units, but these had not proven successful in the past and led to even more massacres. These units also did not have enough arms. In Vynnychenko's absence, peasants set fire to the Jewish quarter and Jews were shot and burned alive in their homes and synagogues. The peasants forced over a thousand victims inside a synagogue and then threw in grenades and burning logs. As Jews tried to escape the burning building, insurgents shot at them. The insurgents entered homes and killed family members in front of each other. They called for the annihilation of the Jews from the youngest to the oldest.²⁸ When survivors tried to flee, they were robbed and killed by bandits. Tetiiv was destroyed, and between three and five thousand Jews were murdered.²⁹

White Russians and Ukrainian nationalists were not the only ones who committed pogroms. When the Red Army was first organizing itself, to fill its ranks and gain the upper hand, the Bolsheviks employed Cossack troops and Ukrainian peasants who had committed pogroms. Many of them continued to commit such atrocities while under the banner of the Red Army. The Red Cavalry also looted Jewish homes and assaulted Jewish women.³⁰ In their wake, shtetls were destroyed and the Jewish population in towns and cities such as Cherkasy was decimated.³¹ Poles also engaged in pogroms with equal savagery, such as when they entered Lviv, which was being contested between Polish and Ukrainian nationalists, and captured it for Poland. There were anti-Jewish riots in Galicia and throughout Poland.³² When the Red Army captured Ukrainian towns such as Slovechno, they found bodies with their skulls smashed in, old women raped and eviscerated, live babies with missing fingers, and a population robbed of everything. When the Bolsheviks finally took

control of an area, they urged peasants to redeem themselves by joining the Red Army, which they urged surviving Jews to do as well.³³ During the revolutionary tribunals that took place following the pogroms, after the Bolsheviks took control of an area, Jewish officials wanted justice and called for the perpetrators to be executed, while Slavic officials wanted to spare them.³⁴ The difference in approach would be remembered decades later when the Soviet Union again lost the region to the Nazis, who mobilized Ukrainian collaborators to participate in the Holocaust.³⁵

The oldest justification for the violence was the antisemitic claim that Jews were a threat to Christianity. In addition, rumors spread that Jews stole land, threatened to take over the churches and turn them into synagogues, and control the country.³⁶ After the October Revolution, Jews were accused of being Bolsheviks, even though they were simultaneously being called bourgeois exploiters of the peasants.³⁷ In fact, Jews were an “underclass.” Within the “Pale of Settlement,” on the western border of the Russian Empire, they were restricted in particular to an area comprising modern-day Ukraine and Poland. They were confined to living in cities, small towns, and shtetls, where they served as artisans and petty merchants. Yet they were accused of being domineering and treasonous and of threatening to destroy the Russian Empire and plotting world domination. These accusations were published and distributed in the first decade of the twentieth century in Russia in the form of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.³⁸ As evident from statements by Ukrainian officers during the Proskuriv pogrom, Jews were not considered Ukrainian and therefore needed to be sent back to Jerusalem or exterminated.³⁹ In fact, there were repeated calls for their extermination by both Ukrainian and Polish nationalists, White Russians, Cossacks, and other armed groups that even committed pogroms under the banner of the Red Army.⁴⁰ Jews were accused of being communists and capitalists at the same time.⁴¹ These antisemitic conspiracies were used by Ukrainian militias to mobilize peasants, because it was easier and more popular to rally them against the Jews than to mobilize them against Bolshevism.⁴²

It was true that some Bolsheviks were Jewish and that some were Cheka commanders. Warlords used this to discredit the Red Army and

mobilize peasants against it.⁴³ When anti-Bolshevik militias retook a territory, the local Jewish population tried to explain to them that they had suffered under Bolshevik rule and were expropriated and impoverished. They were still massacred. The violence reached a crescendo when the White Russian Army temporarily took over regions in southern and eastern Ukraine in the spring and summer of 1919.⁴⁴ Antisemitism became a fixation of the White Army, and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was incorporated into White Russian propaganda, with the addition that the Bolshevik Revolution itself was a Jewish plot against Russia.⁴⁵ The Red Army eventually prevailed, and with the incorporation of Ukraine into the Soviet Union and the flight of the White Russians and Ukrainian nationalists to Germany and the West, this antisemitic propaganda, particularly the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, spread around the world, including to the United States and the Arab and Muslim World, with a lingering and lethal impact.⁴⁶

American Reactions to the Pogroms

The pogroms had an impact on the United States at a time when antisemitism was increasing and anti-immigration forces were gaining strength. In addition, at the end of the nineteenth century, with the growing popularity of scientific racism, racialized antisemitism was overlaid upon traditional religious prejudice.⁴⁷ Today these ideologies are associated with the far-right, but they were also popular in the Progressive Era, when racial antisemitism became more pronounced and Jews were maligned “by the nation’s most reputable journalists and scholars,” according to Dinnerstein, the author of *Antisemitism in America*.⁴⁸ Decades earlier, in the late nineteenth century, populists such as Mary Lease and Sarah E. Emery spread conspiracies claiming Jews controlled the world’s economy and banking system and were responsible for the misfortune of the farmers.⁴⁹ Jewish immigrants were seen as the most undesirable and unassimilable of all migrations coming to the United States. American nativists and physical anthropologists saw them as “Asiatics” and not as Europeans. Russian and Polish immigrants, especially those who came after the Bolshevik Revolution,

agreed.⁵⁰ In the 1920s, the charge of Bolshevik was added.⁵¹ At this point, antisemitism became associated with the right and with anti-communism. In 1919, the Senate Judiciary Committee convened a hearing on “Soviet Propaganda” in which a number of invited witnesses charged that the majority of the Bolshevik leadership was Jewish.⁵² One of the principal testimonies was provided by Rev. George Albert Simons, who had been working as an American missionary in Russia.⁵³ He claimed that the vast majority of Bolshevik leaders in Petrograd were Jews, that the Revolution would not have been possible without the help of Jews from the Lower East Side of New York, and that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was authentic and reflected the existence of a real organization. In his testimony, Simons mentioned the pogroms, expressing abhorrence without giving any details about the massacres, but made the same accusations as the perpetrators, blaming the Russian Revolution on the Jews.⁵⁴ At the time of this Senate hearing, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* had not yet been published in the United States, but it was known and invoked by the perpetrators of the pogroms and their sympathizers.

Once it was brought to the United States and translated, Henry Ford played a crucial role in popularizing it through a series of articles published in *The Dearborn Independent*, which were subsequently collected and published in book form as *The International Jew*.⁵⁵ Using the English translation of the *Protocols* as his source and quoting from it at length, Ford wove a plot of Jewish domination and imperialism whose origins are ancient.⁵⁶ He claimed Jews were responsible for both capitalism and communism and that the Soviet Union was in fact a “Soviet-Kahal” (using the Hebrew word for congregation).⁵⁷ His references to pogroms in Eastern Europe wavered between denial and justification based on the claim that Jews conspired to destroy Russia and the “small East European independencies.”⁵⁸ He accused Jews of engaging in speculation and controlling the trade in agricultural products in both Eastern Europe and the United States and of aiming to exploit and destroy Polish peasants and American farmers.⁵⁹ He claimed Jews controlled the “World Press.”⁶⁰ Ford did not discuss the massacres that took place during the pogroms in Ukraine in 1919.

The mainstream American press did cover these pogroms, albeit inconsistently. In some instances, there was just one paragraph, often buried in inner pages, that announced hundreds or even tens of thousands of casualties, indicating a treatment inconsistent with the gravity of the events.⁶¹ Even when more space was devoted to them and some details of the massacres were given, these items were not on the front page.⁶² Newspapers in cities with significant Jewish populations devoted more coverage, although vary rarely on the first page.⁶³ Occasionally, allegations and justifications that the Jews were Bolsheviks were repeated in the press. Some articles tried to deny that pogroms had taken place or to justify them, particularly in the case of those taking place in Poland.⁶⁴ Some newspapers published statements by members of the Jewish community and their supporters denying that all Jews were Bolsheviks and responsible for the Revolution.⁶⁵ A few other newspapers reported these allegations, alongside accounts of the massacres and fears of further violence.⁶⁶ Most of the attention was focused on the victims and not the perpetrators. At least one reporter from *The Washington Times* dismissed Ford, who played a significant role in spreading these accusations, as imbecilic.⁶⁷

Despite this dismissal, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* had an illustrious career in the highest echelons of government and branches of the military.⁶⁸ This was largely thanks to the efforts of White Russian exiles living in the United States, who translated and circulated it in Washington DC among military intelligence officials and in the office of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer.⁶⁹ Boris Brasol, a White Russian exile and former official in the Czarist government, provided copies of the *Protocols* to the Senate Judiciary Committee and to Henry Ford.⁷⁰ Other Eastern European aristocrats, such as Princess Catherine Radziwiłł, the author of a number of works including *Rasputin and the Russian Revolution* (1918), spread propaganda that the Bolshevik leaders were Jews and dominated the Soviet Union.⁷¹ These canards were used as justifications for the pogroms and in later decades for subsequent waves of anti-semitic violence by the Nazis and by Hamas.⁷²

Given that reports on the pogroms in the US press varied widely, with some including accusations against the Jews, this coverage did not improve

Jewish refugees' and survivors' chances of receiving asylum, in contrast to previous generations who had escaped persecution in Eastern Europe and Russia.⁷³ This was not the only reason for the restrictions on immigration. There was a general reactionary atmosphere and withdrawal from global engagements after World War I, but it was a contributing factor. Immigration was restricted in 1921 and even more so in 1924, when the anti-immigration lobbyists finally got their wish. After the passage of these laws, Jewish immigration was reduced to less than 7% of what it had been during its peak in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁷⁴ While the laws themselves do not mention Jews explicitly, the Senate Immigration Commission report of 1911 did, as did the *Dictionary of Races or Peoples*, which was published that same year.⁷⁵ The negative image of Jews in the print media was a contributing factor.⁷⁶

In this period, physical violence against Jews also increased, with the Christian Front, inspired by Father Coughlin's preaching and radio broadcasts, and the reconstituted KKK inciting hate. Jewish youth were attacked in the streets in cities like Boston, New York, and other places.⁷⁷ Jewish students were restricted from attending East Coast universities by quotas. There was widespread discrimination against Jews in white collar professions, civic organizations, and law firms, and very few Jewish physicians were employed by the nation's hospitals.⁷⁸ Universities and colleges such as Cornell, Harvard, Tufts, Vassar, and others had administrators and professors spreading antisemitic stereotypes in their publications and curricula in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their graduates, such as Robert DeCourcy Ward, founded anti-semitic and anti-immigrant organizations, including the Immigration Restriction League.⁷⁹ These trends continued into the 1930s, at a time when persecution was increasing abroad. Father Coughlin broadcasted antisemitic diatribes over the radio waves and supported the Nazis, as did the German American Bund.⁸⁰ In the 1940s, the gates to the United States remained closed. This helped seal the fate of Jews trying to escape the Holocaust. Blatant antisemitism slowly began to wane in the mainstream media in the post-World War II period as Americans wanted to distinguish themselves from the Nazis they had defeated. It would resurface decades later and reach alarming rates after October 7, 2023.

The October 7 Massacre

On October 7, 2023, Hamas fighters and their supporters invaded Israel from Gaza and massacred 1,200 people, including 38 children. Hamas leaders named the invasion the “al-Aqsa Flood” after the al-Aqsa Mosque located on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Over 5,000 people were wounded and 251 were taken hostage, most of them civilians, including 42 children and many elderly persons.⁸¹ The victims were from over a dozen countries.⁸² Twenty-one Israeli Bedouin Muslims were killed, including a mother of nine children, and six were taken hostage.⁸³ However, most of the Israeli victims were Jews. Whole families were slaughtered. One kibbutz, Nir Oz, lost 25% of its members.⁸⁴ The attack started with massive rocket fire from Gaza that overwhelmed the Iron Dome missile defenses and destroyed communication systems, impeding the ability of the security forces to see what was happening in real time.⁸⁵ Six thousand Gazans, among them 3,800 trained terrorists, broke through the border in 119 locations and split into teams to attack Israeli communities and IDF bases on the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah. They used paragliders, Toyota trucks, motorcycles, and boats and carried anti-tank missile launchers, RPGs, hand grenades, and machine guns. The orders were to massacre, mutilate, behead, rape, and take hostages.⁸⁶ When the perpetrators got to their targets, they began shooting, pillaging, slaughtering, capturing, tying up, and burning alive whole families, including babies and the elderly.⁸⁷ During the attacks, they posted their actions on social media and broadcasted them on Al Jazeera.⁸⁸ Communities throughout the Western Negev were targeted, including kibbutzim, moshavim, and towns such as Netivot and Sderot. A large music festival was taking place in the area at the time of the attack. The Nova Music Festival, which gathered three thousand young people in a nature preserve, became the single largest massacre site.

When first responders finally arrived on the scene after hours and in some cases days of fighting to recapture territory from the terrorists, they were shocked by the brutality the victims had suffered. Dr. Chen Kugel, director of the Abu Kabir Forensic Medical Institute, described seeing the bodies of burned and decapitated children.⁸⁹ Reuven Reuven,

the logistics coordinator of the non-profit Zaka search, rescue, and recovery organization, stated, “I saw smashed heads and amputated body parts, people who were tied up and burned. A seventy-five-year-old man who had his limbs cut off ... a foreign worker who had her head torn off by stepping on it with a foot... From the age of zero to the age of one hundred. There is no age here. We met all ages. Babies, toddlers, children, adults, the elderly. They spared no one. Anyone they couldn’t kidnap or didn’t interest them, they simply murdered... There is not one house they did not burn.”⁹⁰ A Muslim Zaka rescuer named Jamal Waraqui described what he found, “I saw a father and mom with three kids, they were tied hands up, hands back ... they were put on their knees in front of each other, then they got shot in the head.... When you see such a thing... you just start imagining what happened in there, what, how did they react, who got killed first, the kids or the parents?” He added, “Our religion, as a proud Arabic Muslim Israeli guy, I’m saying that has nothing to do with our religion.”⁹¹ Ephraim Greidinger, another Zaka volunteer stated, “[T]he greatest horrors I have witnessed took place in the kibbutzim. The terrorists tortured those who left the shelters... There were axes there. At first, I thought they belonged to the residents who tried to defend themselves. But very quickly, I understood the situation. The terrorists just took an ax and cut a child... A three-month-old or half-year-old baby that they cut with an ax in the neck and beheaded, that’s after they hit him in the head. His hands were also cut off. It is unclear whether they first cut off his hands and then beheaded him with the ax or beheaded him and then mutilated his body... What is certain is that during the torture, the amputations, and the blows, the baby was alive and felt everything since there were no gunshot marks.”⁹² Dr. Kugel described receiving the remains of the murder victims, “We started working around the clock. I saw both corpses and corpse parts. In one case, we received a black lump of coal. Only after we took an X-ray could we understand that the same lump of coal was actually two different people. An older woman and a younger woman who were hugging. Their condition was such that they hugged while they were being burned, and around them was a metal wire that tied them together. We know that they were burned alive because they have soot in their tra-

cheas.”⁹³ Dr. Qanta Ahmed, who examined remains of victims at Abu Kabir’s Medical and Forensic Institute, wrote an article denouncing the Jordanian Queen’s failure to condemn Hamas’s attack on Israelis. She described what she saw. “I examined the cadavers of the murdered and defiled, the corpses of the decapitated and immolated. I spoke with the victims of Hamas, including a former hostage—a Muslim physician—and numerous witnesses to Hamas’ express barbarity against women, children, girls, and infants, brutally violated in life, in utero and in death. ... In Abu Kabir I examined incinerated remnants of teeth and bones; charred remains of children I read CT scans of children and adults bound together and burned alive...”⁹⁴ In January 2025, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on UK-Israel issued a 315-page report on the massacre containing details and photos of massacre victims, including burnt bodies and the bloodied remains of a baby.⁹⁵ The impetus for the report came from the widespread denial that these atrocities were committed, as stated in the report. The report contains descriptions of beheadings and the difficulty this poses for identifying individuals, due to a “lack of public information from attempts to protect families and the priority being placed on expedited funerals.”⁹⁶

Descriptions of the massacre are particularly sensitive when it comes to gender violence, which occurred on a massive scale at one of the worst-hit sites of October 7, the Nova Music Festival near Kibbutz Re’im, where 364 attendees were murdered along with 15 police officers, and 44 people were abducted to Gaza.⁹⁷ The attack there started with rocket fire. Then hundreds of terrorists with automatic weapons, RPGs, and grenades entered the area and began shooting in all directions trying to kill as many people as possible. They blocked the roads going north and trapped thousands of people in what became a killing field. The attack included many instances of gang rape. Rami Davidian, a farmer from Moshav Patish who saved hundreds from the massacre, also encountered sites where people had been murdered, including a grove where 30 young women had been tied to trees and stripped. They had iron rods and other objects protruding from between their spread legs. In the first weeks after October 7, doubt was cast on the widespread occurrence of rape despite ample evidence to the contrary. It took

months of investigations to prepare the relevant reports, which are discussed below. Simha Greiniman, another Zaka volunteer, saw women's body parts, including amputated breasts, with nails and other metal objects stuck in them. An eye-witness survivor of the Nova massacre reported seeing a woman being gang-raped and having her breast cut off and thrown around and played with on the street.⁹⁸ On September 3, 2024, the US Attorney for the Southern District of New York announced charges against senior Hamas officials for the brutal murder of over a thousand innocent civilians, and "weaponized sexual violence against Israeli women, including through rape and genital mutilation."⁹⁹ Female hostages who returned to Israel also reported being raped, and there were fears that hostages still held in Gaza suffered the same fate.¹⁰⁰ Family members, investigators, and the media were directed to not ask returning hostages about this and instead to wait for them to volunteer such information so as not to further traumatize them.

In addition to reports from first responders, the victims themselves recorded what was happening on their cell phones. One was a reporter with Kan News, twenty-two-year-old Ayelet Arnin, who attended the Nova Festival and took shelter in a mini-bunker that became known as the "shelter of death" (*megunit ha-mavet*) after Hamas terrorists threw grenades inside it and shot at those hiding there.¹⁰¹ The goal was to kill as many people as possible and for the survivors to come out and be taken hostage. Sixteen young people were killed, including Arnin, and four were abducted, including American-Israeli Hersh Goldberg-Polin. Goldberg-Polin was later murdered in a Gaza tunnel along with five other hostages after surviving horrific conditions, with almost no food, foul air, and no sanitation facilities, for almost a year. Seven others survived the incident in the shelter by playing dead and hiding under the pile of dead bodies, including Israel's 2025 Eurovision song contest representative Yuval Raphael.¹⁰² Others ran from the shooting into wooded areas and ditches, trying to hide in the underbrush. Some succeeded in hiding for hours with the threat of death hanging over them the entire time, while hearing the torture, rape and murder taking place all around them.¹⁰³

One of the most devastated communities was Kibbutz Nir Oz, where 41 residents and a further six people who fled the attack on the Nova

Festival were killed on October 7. In addition, nine hostages were killed on the day of the abduction, and a further thirteen were later killed in Gaza. This brings the total death toll among the kibbutz's residents to 63 out of a total population of less than 400. One young victim was two-and-a-half-year-old Omer Siman-Tov, who was murdered with her entire family.¹⁰⁴ Seventy-six people were kidnapped from the kibbutz, including a nine-month-old baby, Kfir Bibas, along with his mother and four-year-old brother. They were later murdered in cold blood and their bodies were mutilated to make it look like they were killed by Israeli airstrikes. Their father was also kidnapped and was subsequently released after 484 days in captivity. Many hostages were ultimately released, but at the time of writing twenty living hostages are still being held in Gaza, along with the remains of another 30.¹⁰⁵ One of the oldest hostages was Shlomo Mansour, 86, an Iraqi Jew who survived the Farhud pogrom in Baghdad in 1941 and was murdered in Gaza. He was a resident of Kibbutz Kissufim, where 28 people were murdered on October 7, including 90-year-old Gina Semiatich.¹⁰⁶ Over 60% of the kibbutz was destroyed. Hundreds of terrorists invaded it with assault rifles, RPGs, grenades, and detailed intelligence on the kibbutz and its members. They threatened to blow up and burn the safe rooms where families were hiding.¹⁰⁷ On the kibbutz WhatsApp, members texted each other as they were being attacked, choked, burned, and murdered, asking for help and saying their final goodbyes.¹⁰⁸ Ordinary Gazans also infiltrated, looted, and murdered residents.¹⁰⁹ The kibbutz is still evacuated, and its future is uncertain, although some members are promising to rebuild.¹¹⁰ The attackers murdered 74-year-old Bracha Levinson and posted it on her Facebook page to show her children and grandchildren the horror. Then they burned her house down.¹¹¹ Another kibbutz that was attacked was Be'eri, where 90 armed terrorists spread throughout the community on motorcycles and brutally massacred 101 civilians and 31 security personnel, burning and butchering whole families and decapitating their victims. The attack lasted for 18 hours until security forces arrived. A survivor reported seeing a baby and children shot in front of their mother.¹¹² Nira Sharabi reported that Hamas terrorists shouted "Itbah al-Yahud" (butcher the Jews) as they entered her home. Her brother-in-

law, Eli Sharabi was taken hostage, tortured, and starved for 491 days. His wife and two daughters, as well as his brother, Nira's husband, were murdered.¹¹³ Terrorists also kidnapped 37 people from the kibbutz, murdering thirteen of them. Five hostages from Be'eri are still being held in Gaza, along with 45 others. Another kibbutz that was decimated was Kfar Aza, where dozens of terrorists armed with grenades, machine guns, and RPGs entered the kibbutz, overwhelmed the local defense committee, and massacred 64 residents and 18 security personnel, while taking 19 civilians hostage to Gaza where three are still being held.¹¹⁴ Here too, whole families were slaughtered, including toddlers.¹¹⁵ In addition to terrorists, masses of ordinary Gazans entered the kibbutz and participated in the massacre. Terrorists set saferooms on fire and families were burned alive or choked to death.¹¹⁶ The kibbutzim were looted, and vehicles and other property were taken to Gaza.¹¹⁷ In addition to kibbutzim, other communities, such as the towns of Sderot, Netivot, and Ofakim were attacked. In Sderot, dozens of terrorists entered the city and massacred 30 civilians on the streets. They also took over the local police station and battled Israeli security forces for two days until the latter rescued those trapped inside via the roof and then blew up the station. In addition, thirteen Holocaust survivors who were passing through the town on their way to a vacation at the Dead Sea were murdered.¹¹⁸ The town of Ofakim was also invaded by terrorists, who murdered 39 residents in one neighborhood alone.¹¹⁹ Even more would have been killed if police and ordinary civilians had not stopped them.¹²⁰ Massacres occurred in over thirty sites throughout the Western Negev, and Hamas even had plans to expand its attacks beyond this region.¹²¹

October 7 and the Pogroms

The differences between the massacre of October 7 in Israel and the 1919 pogroms in Ukraine are obvious. Unlike in Israel, the Jews were an oppressed minority that was repeatedly subjected to violent pogroms that had started decades—even centuries—before. In 1919, these pogroms reached a level of violence that was unprecedented up to that point and continued into 1921. Ukraine's Jews were unable to form effective self-

defense units. Most communities were repeatedly attacked, and traditional rural Jewish communities did not survive. In terms of overall numbers, the differences between October 7 and the Ukrainian pogroms are also staggering. Up to 100,000 Jews died in the Ukrainian pogroms between 1918 and 1921.

In terms of the level of violence and brutality, however, the similarities are numerous. In both cases, whole families were murdered, and children, babies, and the elderly were not spared. Victims were tortured, mutilated, decapitated, and burned alive, and their homes were set on fire.¹²² Survivors saw and heard their families being killed right in front of them or as they hid in their homes or in ditches for hours, praying they would not be discovered and killed as well.¹²³ In both cases, victims were shot on the street, in their homes, and anywhere else they could be found. In both cases, communities and homes were looted.¹²⁴ In both cases, Jews were paraded in the streets and subjected to ridicule, abuse, and death threats from crowds who saw them as subhuman enemies. In Ukraine, Jews who were subjected to such ordeals were then killed. On October 7, in addition to above-mentioned atrocities, live, wounded, and dead hostages were paraded through the streets of Gaza amid jeering, violent crowds before being taken to hiding places and tunnels where the living hostages were held in appalling conditions, with only seawater to drink, stale pieces of pita bread to eat, and minimal or no access to sanitation. Upon being released from confinement, they were subjected to threatening crowds and staged performances of humiliation.¹²⁵

In both cases, the attacks were celebrated by large crowds of supporters.¹²⁶ In both cases, large numbers of civilians took part in the violence and looting. In both cases, Jews were tortured and killed in hospitals.¹²⁷ In both cases, massacres were also perpetrated by forces officially aligned with the “left.” In Ukraine, forces officially affiliated with the Red Army committed pogroms. On October 7, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a self-declared Marxist-Leninist terrorist organization that was part of the PLO and was previously supported by the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China, participated in the massacre.¹²⁸ In both cases, women and girls were subjected to torture and rape, includ-

ing gang-rape and sexual mutilation.¹²⁹ In both cases, the goal of these rapes was to degrade, humiliate, and destroy not just the victims but the entire Jewish population. In 1919, the perpetrators' goal was to annihilate all the Jews of Ukraine; in the case of Hamas, the goal was—and remains—to destroy the State of Israel and annihilate its inhabitants.¹³⁰ In both cases, rape was used as a weapon of war. In Ukraine, it was used to “ensure the social death along with the physical extermination of the targeted community. Among the dehumanizing pogrom practices, the genocidal rape ... inflicts maximum harm onto a community ... and continues to function almost indefinitely, as the traumatic effect is passed from generation to generation.”¹³¹ On October 7, “the acts left the victims exposed in a sexually degrading and humiliating manner in front of other community members ... aiming to harm not only the victims but also the community as a whole, trying to assert the perpetrators' control over their enemy, namely Israel.”¹³² In both cases, the goal was to dominate, humiliate, and destroy the victims, their communities, and the Jewish nation.

While the goals of the violence and destruction were the same, the results were different. In Ukraine, the shtetls and many of the Jewish quarters in the small towns were destroyed.¹³³ In contrast, while a couple of kibbutzim may not be rebuilt, most will. Sderot and Netivot have added new residents since October 7, and other communities are rebuilding despite everything.¹³⁴ The failure of Israeli security forces was colossal, but eventually they arrived to recapture the affected communities, and local security committees fought bravely. Both rescued and saved communities such as Kibbutz Yad Mordechai and Kerem Shalom and prevented Hamas and its supporters from realizing their plan to capture more territory, including cities in the center of the country.¹³⁵ This stands in stark contrast to Ukraine, where all armed militias—Ukrainian, Polish, White Army, and even Cossacks under the banner of the Red Army—committed pogroms. In addition, nurses and many other local officials participated in the pogroms against their Jewish neighbors.¹³⁶ In Israel, members of all religious and ethnic communities were attacked by Hamas and its supporters from Gaza. They rallied to rescue people from the massacre sites and fought back against the terrorists.¹³⁷ The

bodies of the dead were also treated differently. In Ukraine, the surviving Jews were left to bury their dead, although a few individual non-Jews, including priests, helped them with this task. Many bodies were left out in the open and eaten by animals.¹³⁸ In Israel, Jewish and Muslim volunteers from the non-profit ZAKA search, rescue, and recovery organization, took the upmost care to gather the remains of the victims and bring them to the forensic institute in Abu Kabir for identification and religious burial.¹³⁹ Druze and Bedouin Muslims rescued survivors and fought off terrorists, including the late IDF Lieutenant Colonel Salman Habaka and Youssef Ziadna, who saved thirty Israelis from the Nova Festival.¹⁴⁰

The survivors were also treated differently. In Ukraine, the Jews stood alone and had difficulty getting permission from the local authorities and the US Embassy to organize aid and support for the survivors.¹⁴¹ In Israel, first responders provided medical assistance and support as soon as it was safe to enter the massacre sites and took care of the evacuated and injured. How the victims were remembered is also radically different. In the case of Ukraine, the local Jewish community and Jewish communities abroad mobilized to document and preserve records of the pogroms.¹⁴² However, two decades later after an even greater tragedy, in the form of the Holocaust, eclipsed the devastation of the pogroms of 1919. In the case of the October 7 massacre, the Israeli news media began reporting on what was happening almost immediately and continues to investigate and report on the events of that day. The news division of the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation (Kan News) has built a website documenting what happened on October 7 that also serves as a memorial for the victims and a clarion call to not forget and redeem the hostages.¹⁴³ Other efforts were made by Jewish community associations outside Israel and by the USC Shoah Foundation, which gathered testimonies from survivors.¹⁴⁴ The most important difference is that, unlike in Ukraine, the whole of society, including the civil and security services, mobilized to prevent the massacre from spreading to more communities, defeat the terrorists, rescue the survivors, and gather the remains of the victims. In addition, the Israeli news media and civil society are supporting victims' families by creating dozens of memorial projects to

ensure their loved ones are not forgotten. Several documentaries have been produced, including *We Will Dance Again*, which is devoted to the victims and survivors of the Nova Festival massacre and won an Emmy in 2025. Despite Israel's ability to overcome this catastrophe and protect and rehabilitate Israeli society, including the Western Negev, it needs to be mentioned that, as of this writing, there are still 50 hostages in Gaza, including twenty live hostages who continue to be subjected to the most inhumane conditions imaginable.¹⁴⁵

Another significant difference between the 1919 pogroms and the October 7 massacre is how the two events were reported and documented. In the case of the pogroms, it took weeks, if not months, for the reports to reach the West, and at first there were doubts and attempts to deny the extent of the violence.¹⁴⁶ While leaders of the Jewish community in Ukraine gathered evidence shortly after the violent episodes had taken place, comprehensive reports were suppressed by the Soviet Union and had to be rescued by Elye Tsherikover, who brought them to Berlin in 1921 and New York in 1940. These reports, which were written by members of the Ukrainian Jewish community, focused on the victims more than the perpetrators and their motivations. The pogromists did not record their deeds, although they committed them in broad daylight in a “carnival of butchery” as reported by *The New York Times*.¹⁴⁷ In both cases, the perpetrators justified their violence and incited hate against their victims. In the case of October 7, there are actual video recordings of the massacre because the perpetrators live-streamed their actions on social media. In addition, Al Jazeera reported the initial invasion, and Israeli security cameras captured scenes of the invasion and massacre. Like the pogromists, the attackers on October 7 referred to their victims as Jews, not Israelis or Zionists. One of the perpetrators called his parents and bragged, “Your son murdered 10 Jews.” In various videos, one can hear the attackers repeating religious phrases along with references to “settlers” and cries of “Itbah al-Yahud” (butcher the Jews.)¹⁴⁸ Initially, there was a backlash on Arabic social media and news outlets against the images of children and elderly being slaughtered and girls being raped. In response, Hamas officials claimed that its fighters had only killed soldiers and that it was Gazan civilians who had committed these atrocities.

In contrast, when Israel shared Hamas's manuals on how to rape, kidnap, and murder civilians, including children, Hamas officials insisted that they would repeat October 7 again until Israel was destroyed, declaring themselves to be the victims and that this entitled them to do anything.¹⁴⁹

Justifications

Claims are being made in the West, particularly on the left, that on October 7 Palestinians fighters were attacking Israelis, whom they regard as settlers, and not Jews as Jews, suggesting that they are anti-Zionist rather than antisemitic. However, Hamas's broadcast media, educational programs, and 1988 Charter are all replete with antisemitic content. Hamas's Al-Aqsa TV channel broadcasts programs that demonize Jews and call for their annihilation, with some of this content directed at children.¹⁵⁰ These messages are also incorporated into the education curriculum, which is not surprising given that many of Gaza's educational personnel are members of Hamas.¹⁵¹ According to Meir Litvak, antisemitism is a major pillar of Hamas's ideology.¹⁵² In its worldview, the conflict with Israel is seen as a religious war between Islam and Judaism, and the struggle against Israel is regarded as a jihad and a religious obligation. Jews are depicted as archenemies of Islam from the time of the Prophet. Derogatory images of them are taken from certain Quranic verses and hadiths (Sayings of the Prophet), along with conspiracy theories from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Hamas's Charter makes extensive use of these sources to justify its antisemitism, including a hadith calling on Muslims to kill Jews on the Day of Judgement. In the Charter's introduction, Hamas declares that its struggle is against the Jews. It does not make any distinction between Jews, Judaism, and Israel. In Article 28, it declares, "Israel, Judaism and Jews challenge Islam and the Moslem people. May the cowards never sleep." In Article 11, it declares that Palestine is an Islamic Waqf and that it will remain so until the Day of Judgement. Article 31 declares that peace and quiet for the other religions will only exist under "the wing of Islam. ... It is the duty of the followers of other religions to stop disputing the sovereignty of Islam in this region." The Charter also refers to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, explicitly in Article 32 and implicitly in Article 22, where Jews are accused of being responsible for the French and Russian Revolutions, for the Rotary Club, and for sabotaging societies through their

supposed control of global media.¹⁵³

In 2017, possibly in response to Western criticism, Hamas revised its official policy with its “Document of General Principles and Policies,” which stated that its fight was with Zionism and Israel and not with Jews and Judaism.¹⁵⁴ Despite this declaration, Hamas continued its anti-semitic defamation in its broadcasts and education curriculum. On April 10, 2021, Hamas official Mahmoud Al-Zahar declared that European countries had historically deported, burned, and killed Jews because they spread corruption and collaborated with the enemy.¹⁵⁵ In 2020, Mustafa Al-Lidawi, a former Hamas official in Iran, spoke on Iranian TV where he repeated the blood libel that Jews killed Christian children to use their blood to make matzo.¹⁵⁶ On July 23, 2023, Hamas’s Al-Aqsa TV channel broadcast a statement by Hussein Qasem, a member of the Palestine Islamic Scholars Association, stating that Jews were the enemies of humanity and that “we thirst for their blood.”¹⁵⁷ These are just three examples of dozens of antisemitic statements broadcast on Al-Aqsa TV following Hamas’s 2017 declaration, as documented by the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI).¹⁵⁸ Schools in Gaza continued to spread antisemitism and incite violence well after the 2017 declaration.¹⁵⁹ In fact, as pointed out by Jeffrey Herf and as apparent from a close reading the 2017 declaration, Hamas did not relinquish its right to all of Palestine and continues to reject any recognition of Israel.¹⁶⁰ Shaul Bartal, who has analyzed Hamas’s social media and cartoons, along with its official documents and statements by its leaders, has come to the conclusion that, while Hamas and its supporters in the West claim it is an anti-colonial movement fighting Israel and Zionism, antisemitism is central to its ideology. Both Herf and Bartal point to its ideological roots in the Muslim Brotherhood and the writings of Sayyid Qutb, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, and the former Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, the leader of the Palestinian national movement during the British Mandate period and supporter of the Nazis. In fact, copies of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* have been found in Gaza, and Hamas officials have regularly engaged in Holocaust denial.¹⁶¹

Given the messages that were being spread through Hamas’s media outlets and the antisemitism and incitement to terrorism inculcated in

its schools, the violence of October 7, 2023, should not come as a surprise, despite its shockingly gruesome cruelty.¹⁶² During the massacre, Al Jazeera, in addition to broadcasting from the invasion and massacre sites, aired Hamas spokesman Ismail Haniyeh's call for Palestinians in the West Bank and in Israel to join the attack, stating "to the enemy I say—Get out of our land!" Hamas leaders saw this attack as the first stage of the final offensive against Israel. Khaled Mashal called on Muslims worldwide to take to the streets and join the battle to liberate Palestine. Another Hamas official, Ghazi Hamad, declared that Hamas would repeat October 7 until Israel is annihilated.¹⁶³ Hamas official Osama Hamdan made several statements regarding Hamas's plans and declared that Israel was a neo-Nazi racist entity and a threat to humanity, that it would not exist in another ten years, and that Hamas would help Israelis return to the countries they came from, given that they all had passports for those countries.¹⁶⁴ In fact, according to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 79% of the Jewish population was born in Israel, and it is reasonable to assume that the majority of them do not have foreign passports. Most of the Israeli hostages who were or continue to be held by Hamas do not have foreign passports.¹⁶⁵ However, the idea that "foreign" Jews stole the property and land of the Palestinians is one of Hamas's basic premises. When Israelis or "filthy Jews" hire Palestinians and provide them with work, they are not doing them any favors because they stole everything and "suck the blood out of our resources."¹⁶⁶

There are some basic similarities between Hamas's justification for the October 7 massacre and the justifications for the pogroms in Ukraine. In both cases, Jews were regarded as foreigners who don't belong. In Ukraine, Jews were told to go back to Jerusalem, while Hamas demands that they go back to Europe. In both cases, Jews are seen as corrupt, as responsible for all calamities and disasters, and as threats to humanity that need to be annihilated. In both cases, the perpetrators invoke the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and conspiracy theories about Jewish money and power. In both cases, Jews are seen as a religious threat—in the case of Ukraine to the Church and in the case of Hamas to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Islamic Waqf. The claim that Jews were threatening Al-Aqsa dates back to the Mufti's incitement to violence against res-

idents of Jerusalem's Jewish Quarter in 1920.¹⁶⁷ Hamas named the October 2023 massacre "the Al-Aqsa flood," and called on "our people" in Jerusalem and "in the interior" (i.e. in Israel) to "turn the land into flames beneath the occupiers" and for "our brothers ... in all Arab and Islamic countries ... to breach the borders and barriers" to "end the occupation."¹⁶⁸ Yet a majority of the people who were murdered on October 7 were secular Jews attending the Nova music festival and residents of the Western Negev, which is located within Israel's internationally recognized borders. Muslims were also murdered. Some of the murder victims were peace activists who had accompanied Gazan children entering Israel for medical treatment at Israeli hospitals. But this did not matter to Hamas. Ukrainian pogromists and Palestinian terrorists both sought to eliminate Jews from the land. In 1919, Jews were not seen as Ukrainian and were subjected to genocidal pogroms. In the case of Hamas, there is no place for any Jews in the Palestinian Islamic Waqf, except as subordinate subjects, and given that they are all seen as soldiers, no matter their age, their fate is to be annihilated.¹⁶⁹ We saw this plan put into action on October 7, when over 1,200 people of all ages were killed and 251 were taken hostage. Hamas terrorists from the Qassam Brigades threatened to execute hostages and broadcast their killing.¹⁷⁰ Hamas murdered hostages, including Americans, and forced the remainder to try to survive under brutal conditions inside tunnels located up to 40 meters underground, with very little air and no sanitation facilities.¹⁷¹ In the past, Ukrainian justifications were embraced by the extreme right; today, it is the left that is accepting Hamas's claims without considering their similarities to and origins in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, anti-semitism, and religious fundamentalism.

Despite its unprecedented brutality, Hamas has managed to attract ample support around the world, including on American college campuses, where its slogans have been readily adopted. Examples include "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free", "Globalize the intifada," and "Resistance is justified when people are occupied." Hamas officials have praised the movement's supporters, calling on them to engage in a "student flood" and join the jihad.¹⁷²

American Reactions to October 7

Unlike in 1919, when it was difficult to get accurate information about what was happening in Ukraine, videos of the massacre in Israel were being posted on social media by the perpetrators and Israeli news outlets were getting phone calls from the victims and their relatives in real time. There were CNN and other American news reporters on the ground on October 7. Jake Tapper of CNN spoke with a mother of kidnapped children and broadcast this on air.¹⁷³ American elected officials were giving statements condemning the terrorist attacks and reacting to the “shocking images”—in their words— coming out of Israel. At the same time, several media outlets referred to the communities in the Western Negev that were under attack as “settlements,” including Deutsche Presse-Agentur correspondents and reporters linked to ABC’s *Good Morning America*, including Martha Raddatz, Lama Hasan and Bruno Nota, using the same terminology used by Hamas both in general and on the day of the attack.¹⁷⁴ The perpetrators also referred to their victims as Jews, something none of the American news media reported. A few were even giving one-sided “timelines” of the conflict that failed to mention any instances of Palestinian terrorism between 1920 and October 7, 2023. This news item was broadcast on local news stations in Atlanta, Georgia, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.¹⁷⁵ During the first 48 hours of the attack, virtually all American news media outlets refused to refer to Hamas as a terrorist organization or to the perpetrators of the attack as terrorists, instead calling them “militant fighters.”¹⁷⁶ Only a few mentioned that Hamas is an officially designated terrorist organization. The Associated Press (AP) was not one of them. Its articles are distributed to newspapers throughout the United States, and it provided them with the main reporting on the attacks. Unlike CNN, AP did not send its reporters to the massacre sites and provided very little detailed information about what took place, despite the availability of videos posted by the perpetrators on October 7. This stands in contrast to CNN and *The New York Post*, both of which described videos of Israelis being kidnapped and killed.¹⁷⁷ Some of AP’s Gaza-based freelance reporters were found to be closely connected to Hamas, raising serious ethical questions regarding

their possible collaboration with the attack and biased reporting.¹⁷⁸ However, not all CNN reports provided details of the massacre. CNN's Richard Quest's report did not, although he asked why Hamas "did it," ignoring its repeated declarations of intent to destroy Israel and kill Jews.¹⁷⁹ None of the other news outlets discussed Hamas's ideology and antisemitism, only offering short quotes from Hamas officials justifying the attack and avoiding their most inflammatory statements.¹⁸⁰

Only *The New York Post* and Fox News referred to the perpetrators as terrorists and shared details from their posted videos showing the kidnapping and killing of Israeli civilians and soldiers, although in the case of Fox News this was not necessarily true of all local affiliates.¹⁸¹ These two news outlets are generally aligned with and promote Republican politics. There were also reports in which Republicans blamed the Biden administration for releasing frozen funds to the Iranian regime prior to the attack, in exchange for Iran's releasing American hostages.¹⁸² How these funds were used and whether or not they facilitated the October 7 massacre became a partisan controversy. Increasingly, support for Israel and its right to defend its citizens is also becoming a partisan issue, with many but not all Republicans supporting Israel and progressive Democrats, and the Democratic Party in general, growing more hostile.¹⁸³

This is having an impact on news media coverage. One can see this in the coverage of *The New York Times* and NPR. *The New York Times* mentioned that Hamas had posted videos of the violence but devoted more attention to the "suffocating ... blockade" and "deteriorating living conditions" in Gaza.¹⁸⁴ When reporting casualties on the Israeli side, it always juxtaposes this with the higher number of casualties in Gaza using figures published by the Gazan Ministry of Health, without stating that it is run by Hamas. It has also repeated Hamas's justification of the attack as a response to the "occupation," without clarifying what occupation Hamas is referring to or noting that the communities that were attacked on October 7 are located within Israel's internationally recognized borders.¹⁸⁵ It has repeated Hamas's claims of 313 killed and 1,990 injured, which were made on October 7 and were higher than the initial reports coming out of Israel at a time when the extent of the damage was not clear and the Israeli authorities were not aware of the scope of the

massive infiltration.¹⁸⁶ Hamas's own casualty figures fail to differentiate between civilians and combatants and have been called into question, forcing it to lower its numbers on several occasions.¹⁸⁷ In a similar vein, NPR's reporting referenced Israeli news media sources but did not provide details of the attacks or the Hamas videos that were available and reported on by Fox News and CNN. NPR quoted Muhammad Deif's speech without providing details of his call on all Palestinians—and Arabs and Muslims in general—to end “the occupation” and stop “the enemies of the Prophet's Path.” This despite the fact that the speech was available online in translation on October 7.¹⁸⁸ Deif's statement is consistent with Hamas's Charter, with the ideology that defines Palestine as an Islamic waqf (endowment), and with the notion that it is the duty of every individual Muslim to join the jihad to liberate it.¹⁸⁹ The NPR report also quoted a Gazan “humanitarian worker” from the Norwegian Refugee Council, without mentioning that this organization has connections to Palestinian terrorist organizations such as the PFLP and Hamas.¹⁹⁰ In general, the mainstream liberal media declined to provide details of the October 7 massacre that were available from the perpetrators and Israeli news media sources, and which other news outlets covered at length. They also declined to refer to the perpetrators as terrorists, instead referring to them as “militants” or “fighters.” They also scrupulously avoided discussing their ideology and antisemitism. This is not unique to American news media. Robert Wistrich has identified a similar pattern in British news outlets.¹⁹¹

Comparing this reporting to American news media reporting on the pogroms is a more complicated matter. The extent to which there was partisanship in the American news media a century ago is beyond the scope of this paper. As to whether politics impacted reporting on the pogroms, there does not appear to have been a clear pattern, except in Henry Ford's antisemitic, right-wing *Dearborn Independent*. A few newspapers repeated Polish denials of pogroms and some repeated the accusation that the Jews were Bolsheviks, but many of them also reported on the pogroms with details of the massacres and overall casualty figures. Some newspapers printed rebuttals to these accusations, and at least one rejected Henry Ford's editorial stance. The perpetrators were

not given much attention in these reports, which focused mostly on the victims. Today, the American news media appear to be increasingly aligned politically, and this has had an impact on how the October 7 massacre has been reported, as well as on attitudes toward Israel in general. Unlike during the last century, when the right blamed the Jews for their own misfortune, the tendency to blame the victims of the violence is currently coming from the left. *The Nation* did refer to Hamas as a terrorist organization, in a quote from President Biden, but then blamed Israel's existence on Palestinian "dispossession," without mentioning the circumstances in which this occurred. It did not provide details about the massacre despite the fact that they were available. The hostages were not discussed in the main article, but were only mentioned in passing in a "comment" that focused on Gazan casualties, presumably those resulting from Israel's targeting of Hamas.¹⁹² In January 2024, *The Nation* published another article that compared Hamas to the Vietcong.¹⁹³ No mention was made of Hamas's antisemitism or Islamist ideology. *In These Times* and *Mother Jones* followed the same pattern.¹⁹⁴ *The Nation* did publish an article by Maurice Isserman denouncing the response of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) to the October 7 massacre. Isserman stated that the DSA's response to Hamas's "anti-Jewish pogrom" was "politically and morally bankrupt."¹⁹⁵ On October 7, 2023, the DSA published a statement to the effect that "today's events" were a direct result of Israel's apartheid occupation. It did not specify what events it was referring to and did not delineate what territories it considered occupied, while noting that the Palestinians had been oppressed for "over 60 years" and called to "free Palestine."¹⁹⁶ On October 8, 2023, the DSA held a rally in New York City justifying the massacre. The rally was condemned by New York Governor Kathy Hochul and Congressional Representative Ritchie Torres. Representative Shri Thanedar of Michigan resigned from the DSA over its "hate-filled and antisemitic rally."¹⁹⁷

Rallies justifying the massacre were held on college campuses across the United States. In response to the call of National Students for Justice in Palestine (NSJP) for a "Day of Resistance" on October 12, 2023, student protests in support of Hamas took place on numerous campuses across the United States, including at Columbia University. NSJP pro-

vided a toolkit with logos of paragliders—a reference to Hamas’s terrorist attacks—setting out the goals of the rallies, which included “normaliz[ing] the resistance” and spreading the message that the “existence of Israel is not peaceful” and that “75 years of settler colonialism” should be ended.¹⁹⁸ Over the course of the academic year, under the direction of NSJP, campus rallies became increasingly violent in their rhetoric, blatant in their support for Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran, and tolerant of calls for violence against pro-Israel students.¹⁹⁹ NSJP’s supporters have refused to acknowledge the extreme cruelty and violence perpetrated against Israeli civilians despite evidence from the perpetrators’ own social media accounts and despite reports published by mainstream broadcast media outlets, particularly after October 16, 2023, when Israel shared with journalists videos compiled from footage recorded on the perpetrators’ body cameras, Israeli security cameras, and victims’ cell phones.²⁰⁰ Since October 7, 2023, over 80% of Jewish students claim to have encountered antisemitism on their campuses. This includes a Cornell University student’s call to rape and murder Jews and behead Jewish babies and a Columbia University student’s murderous threat against Zionists.²⁰¹ Jewish students endured assaults, harassment, intimidation, disruption of classes, and expulsion from campus organizations, along with demonstrations calling for the murder of Jews and the destruction of Israel. In response, some students have sued Harvard and Columbia for violating their civil rights.²⁰²

The support for Hamas’s murderous rampage was not confined to students. University faculty also issued statements of support, including over 100 faculty members at Columbia University and over 200 at CUNY. Their statements “regarding the effects of October 7” referred to the massacre as legitimate “resistance to occupation,” without providing details of what actually happened.²⁰³ Columbia University professor Joseph Massad expressed “jubilation and awe” that “thousands of Israelis were fleeing through the desert on foot to escape the rockets and gunfire,” that they were hiding in “settlements,” and that the Palestinian “resistance” was taking over “settler colonies” kilometers away from Gaza.²⁰⁴ Mas-sad’s statement appeared on the Palestine Chronicle’s website on October 7, 2023. The organization behind this site is being investigated for

links to Hamas and complicity in kidnapping of Israeli hostages.²⁰⁵ Cornell University professor Russell Rickford called the massacre “exhilarating.”²⁰⁶ Faculty at Georgetown University also referred to Israelis as “settler colonialists” and invited Palestinian activist Mohammad El-Kurd to speak at the GU Law Center. When asked about Hamas’s attacks, including against Israeli children, he refused to respond to such “ridiculous claims,” yet he has often accused Israel of harvesting Palestinian organs, reviving a centuries-old antisemitic blood libel.²⁰⁷ Universities such as Columbia and Georgetown have received billions of dollars in undeclared donations from Qatar, whose government supports the Muslim Brotherhood.²⁰⁸ The Congressional Oversight and Accountability Committee is currently investigating NSJP for illegal activities and for supporting Hamas-backed charities and propaganda.²⁰⁹ The organization is also being sued for collaborating with Hamas in the October 7 massacre.²¹⁰ The US Director of National Intelligence under the Biden administration previously investigated Iranian involvement in the campus protests.²¹¹ Threats to American Jews have increased exponentially since October 7. An even more worrisome trend is the rise in incidents of antisemitism in American medical schools and hospitals.²¹² The FBI and the Department of Homeland Security have also warned about growing threats to the American Jewish community from radicalized perpetrators within US and foreign terrorist organizations.²¹³

This increase in antisemitism is unprecedented in the post-Holocaust period. However, prior to World War II, antisemitism was an acceptable prejudice at all levels of society. In the late 19th and early 20th century, populists and progressives believed in antisemitic conspiracy theories and scientific racism that classified the Jews as an inferior race. After the Holocaust, these beliefs lost acceptance in mainstream public opinion but continued to be spread on the extreme right. After the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was brought to the United States and by White Russian exiles, it began influencing the US government. Henry Ford mass produced this notorious antisemitic forgery, after which it became popular on the right, the far left, and among certain black nationalists.²¹⁴ Today antisemitism is rising on both the right and the left. Since the establishment of the State of Israel, it encompasses anti-Zionism, the justification

of attacks against Israel and its citizens, and the denial of Israel's right to defend itself. At the turn of the last century, antisemitic stereotypes and conspiracy theories included claims that Jews were foreigners who should not enjoy equal citizenship rights. In Ukraine, they were not seen as Ukrainians, and in the United States they were not regarded as Americans and deemed unassimilable. In both cases, they were labeled as non-white Asiatics. Today, Hamas and its supporters in the United States regard Israelis as white European colonialists and Jews as white oppressors.²¹⁵ In the United States, there are imams who have repeated Hamas's antisemitic statements about Jews.²¹⁶ Many supported Hamas's attack.²¹⁷ The perpetrators of the Ukrainian pogroms and the October 7 massacre have both labeled their victims as foreign exploiters. To the pogromists they were not white Europeans, yet to Hamas they are. To both, they are Jews, and their supporters in the United States echo these accusations.²¹⁸

When examining American support for the perpetrators of both atrocities, it is clear that a significant role is played by immigrants from regions where anti-Jewish violence has taken place or adjacent regions that have experienced war and regime change—Ukrainian nationalists and White Russian exiles in the case of the 1919 pogroms and Palestinian and Muslim immigrants today.²¹⁹ In both cases, these immigrants come from regions with a history of antisemitism. In Ukraine, Jews were accused of stealing the land, threatening Christianity, and taking over the country. These attitudes were brought to the West by political exiles from Russia, Ukraine, and Poland, along with the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. From there, they have been disseminated around the world, including in the Middle East, and have become part of the rhetoric and belief system of Hamas and the Iranian regime. In addition, anti-Jewish Islamist beliefs were brought to the United States by immigrants from the Middle East.²²⁰

One significant difference between the two periods is the political identification of those spreading these ideas. In the wake of the pogroms and for much of the 20th century, antisemitism—including the charge that the Jews were Bolsheviks—was promoted by the right, especially the extreme right. Such charges were repeated by Saudi rulers such as King

Feisal, who regarded both Zionism and communism as part of the international Jewish conspiracy.²²¹ Today, these ideas are being championed by the left in solidarity with political Islamist movements such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis. Statements by the DSA and articles from left-leaning publications such as *The Nation* and *In These Times* seldom mention these groups by name but repeat their talking points and basic assumptions, namely that Israel is a Western colonial-apartheid state that has no right to exist and that it is legitimate to oppose it by any means necessary. If its citizens are hurt or killed, it is Israel's fault and not that of the perpetrators, who are seen as resisting oppression and colonial rule.²²²

Leading feminist organizations such as the National Organization for Women and the Feminist Majority Foundation said nothing about the mass rape and sexual mutilation of Israeli women.²²³ UN Women also equivocated, condemning Hamas and then deleting its post in November 2023.²²⁴ Code Pink said nothing about the rape of Israeli women and justified Palestinian resistance to Israeli "apartheid."²²⁵ Its co-founder, Jodie Evans, refused to call Hamas and Hezbollah terrorists organizations, erroneously claiming that Hezbollah was the Lebanese government.²²⁶ The embrace of these Islamists is spreading among "pro-Palestine" demonstrators, who do not refrain from showing open support for Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis.²²⁷ This combination of secular political ideology and religious prejudice is not new. In the past, it manifested as the combination of right wing politics and Christian fundamentalism.²²⁸ Today, it is the left that is pursuing an Islamist alliance.²²⁹ Despite the substantial differences in the circumstances of the Jewish victims of the Ukrainian pogroms and the Jewish victims of the October 7 attack on Israel, as well as the vast changes in the news media landscape over the last century, the similarity of the justifications for the pogroms/attack and the continuity and ubiquity of the underlying anti-semitic conspiracy theories are striking. Another disturbing similarity is that, when Jews are attacked, what follows is often not sympathy but indifference and even antipathy. A century ago, there was pervasive discrimination against American Jews and a closed-door policy toward asylum seekers who survived the pogroms and later tried to escape the

Holocaust. Today, we are witnessing an increase in and spread of anti-semitic animus and a rise in anti-Jewish violence in the wake of October 7. In the case of the Ukrainian pogroms and the October 7 massacre, attitudes toward the victims and survivors were not determined by any principled commitment to human rights but by political affiliation. A century ago, it was the liberal left that was more sympathetic to pogrom survivors and Jews in general. Today, it is the moderate right that is more sympathetic to the victims and survivors of the October 7 massacre and the hostages, including those still being tortured and starved in Gaza as of this writing.

Conclusion

Despite the obvious differences between the Ukrainian pogroms of 1919 and the October 7 massacre, particularly when it comes to the number of victims and the length of time over which they occurred, there are still striking similarities in the level of violence, in the systematic use of rape as a weapon of war, and in the goals of the perpetrators. In the case of Ukraine, the goal was to annihilate the Jewish community; in the case of Hamas and the other perpetrators, it was—and remains—to destroy Israel and annihilate Israelis. There are also similarities in the justifications. In Ukraine, Jews were told to go back to Palestine; today, Hamas and its supporters are telling Jews to go back to Europe. In the past, Jews were called “Asiatics” and non-Europeans; today, they are called white European colonialists. In both cases, the perpetrators drew inspiration from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and accused Jews of controlling the media, of exploitation, and of being foreigners. Today, Hamas is justifying the persecution of Jews in Europe, even while it demands they return there.

There is also a basis for drawing comparisons between past and current waves of antisemitism in the United States. Today, Jewish students are subjected to exclusion, harassment, threats of violence, and actual violence on college campuses. Today, professors champion and justify the atrocities committed against Israelis—and others—on October 7. In the past, Jewish students were subjected to discriminatory quotas and a

curriculum that vilified the Talmud and Judaism; today, they are subjected to a curriculum that describes Israelis as European “settler colonialists” and calls for their eradication. Such positions completely ignore both the demographic reality of Israeli Jewish society, which has a substantial non-European component, and the ancient and contemporary history of the Jewish presence in the land of Israel.²³⁰ There are similarities in other areas as well. In the past, Jewish doctors were not employed by American hospitals; today, antisemitism is on the rise in medical schools and hospitals across the country. In the past, Jews were routinely disparaged in leading American publications; today, left-wing and right-wing antisemitism is spread via social media, reaching a vast audience in minutes.²³¹

In the past, most American newspapers reported on the pogroms, although they did not do so extensively or on their front pages. At the same time, some American newspaper reports questioned whether the pogroms had actually taken place, particularly in Poland, and blamed the violence on the Jews, whom they accused of being Bolsheviks and bringing about the Russian Revolution. Similarly, while there was ample coverage of the October 7 massacre starting on the day, not all of it was empathetic toward the victims or properly described what had actually happened, even though the evidence was readily available. Almost none of the news outlets referred to the perpetrators as terrorists or discussed Hamas’s antisemitism, or its stated goal of annihilating Israel and the Jews.

Despite these similarities, there are also some important differences. The most important of these relate to what happened on the ground in Ukraine and in Israel. In Ukraine, the pogroms were committed by members of the armed forces. In some cases, medical workers also took part in the killing, and survivors languished in agony in hospitals until they died. The remains of the victims were left in the streets or buried in mass graves. When the survivors of the initial attacks tried to flee, they were killed. In Israel, while the security forces were responsible for a colossal failure in terms of anticipating the attack, they eventually overcame the perpetrators and put an end to the violence. Local security forces fought heroically, many giving their lives to end the attack and

save additional communities from assault. Israelis from all faiths and backgrounds mobilized to stop the attack, rescue survivors, and recover the remains of the victims. In Ukraine, Jews stood alone as a defenseless minority. On October 7, while most of the victims were Jews, anyone the terrorists were able to get their hands on was brutalized and killed. Both the victims and the rescuers came from all sectors of Israeli society. When Hamas called on Israel's Arab citizens to participate in the massacre, they did not heed the call but mobilized to help their neighbors. Jewish and Arab doctors of forensic medicine worked side-by-side to identify the badly mutilated victims, document what had happened to them, and return them to their loved ones for a dignified religious burial. The survivors, the family members of the victims, and Israeli civil society as a whole mobilized to preserve their memory. Medical staff took care of the survivors and returning hostages. All this stands in stark contrast to what happened in Ukraine. There, Jewish communities were simply wiped out. In Israel, the communities that were attacked are rebuilding and welcoming new residents. The difference is that Israel is a sovereign state and that all its citizens supported each other in their hour of need. Ultimately, this is what separates the outcome of the Ukrainian pogroms of 1919 from the outcome of the October 7 massacre.

About the Author

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