From Sacha Wigdorovits

An eventful week comes to an end for Israel. Tuesday marked the second anniversary of the massacre on October 7, 2023, in which over 1,200 Israeli civilians, citizens of other states and members of the Israeli army and police were murdered by Palestinian terrorists and a further 251 were kidnapped as hostages.

Just two days later, on Thursday, October 9, came the redemptive news that until recently had been considered impossible: Israel and Hamas had reached an agreement on the first phase of the 20-point peace plan for Gaza proposed by US President Donald Trump. The war will end.

This means that all 48 of the hostages held by Hamas on October 7 will return to Israel in the next few days. 20 of them are said to still be alive.

Both events – the anniversary of the largest pogrom in post-war history and the news of the imminent return of the last hostages kidnapped by Hamas – were marked by emotions, but it is also time to reflect on what lessons we can learn from the last two years. For example, the following:

1. Arrogance is deadly. It has not yet been conclusively clarified how a massacre of this magnitude could have occurred in southern Israel on October 7, 2023. But it can already be said today that the Israeli government – and with it the military leadership and the heads of the intelligence services – has failed.

   The government had neglected security on the southern border in favor of the settlements in the West Bank. 900,000 Israelis live there, who are among the most loyal voters of the current right-wing government. With regard to Hamas, which rules Gaza, the government was lulled into a false sense of security because it had allowed Qatar to finance the terrorist organization for years.

This was probably one of the reasons why the government ignored warnings from soldiers stationed on the border and from the intelligence services about unusual activities in Gaza in the days leading up to October 7.

For their part, the army leadership and the secret services must be reproached for considering Hamas incapable of planning and carrying out an operation of this magnitude with a general staff.

This failure cost not only 1,200 lives on October 7, but also the trust in the Israeli army IDF and especially in the previously highly respected Israeli secret services.

Later, they then eliminated the most important leaders of Hamas, the Lebanese terrorist militia Hezbollah and the heads of the army, Revolutionary Guards and nuclear program in Iran, as well as those of the Houthi terrorist militia operating in Yemen, in a series of sensational actions.

The army and intelligence services have thus largely rehabilitated their reputation, which was badly damaged on October 7, 2023. But the 1,200 victims of Hamas’ miscalculation at the time will not be brought back to life and the suffering of their relatives will not be alleviated.

2. Wars take longer and are more expensive than expected. In the end, Israel won on all fronts on which it had to fight because of the terrorist attack on October 7. However, this cannot hide the fact that the war in Gaza lasted much longer and claimed far greater victims than initially announced.

   If the other points of the Trump peace plan are also implemented in the coming months and the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis is finally resolved, these sacrifices will at least not have been in vain.

3. Political change in the Middle East cannot be achieved without military force. “In contrast to Europe, we know that diplomacy alone cannot always achieve the goals.” This is what the new Israeli ambassador to Switzerland, Tibor Schlosser, said in an interview with FokusIsrael.ch shortly after taking office.

   The latest developments confirm this realization. Only because the Israeli government continued the military offensive against Hamas and did not give in to international and internal Israeli pressure is the terrorist organization now prepared to negotiate a peace plan that will lead to its disarmament and disempowerment.

   This concession is not so much the result of their own conviction,

but primarily due to pressure from Qatar, Turkey and other Muslim countries. What is completely irrelevant in this process – as in the entire conflict – is the UN and those Western governments that wanted to exert pressure on Israel by prematurely recognizing the non-existent state of Palestine.

4. International law must be adapted. In its fight against Hamas, Israel was repeatedly accused of disregarding international law and even committing genocide against the Palestinian population. On the one hand because of the attacks on civilian facilities, on the other because it temporarily banned aid deliveries.

   However, the Geneva Conventions allow both under certain circumstances – and precisely in those cases in which Israel did so. Therefore, these accusations against Israel are unfounded.

   The accusation of genocide, which has been repeatedly made here on the left of the political spectrum, is also completely unjustified. Never before has a belligerent power taken such comprehensive measures to protect the enemy civilian population as the Israeli army IDF did in Gaza.

   Nevertheless, the international law established after the Second World War needs to be adapted. This was made clear by Israel’s

war with Iran.

The mullahs in Tehran have always declared the destruction of the Jewish state to be the raison d’être of the state and have pushed ahead with the development of a nuclear bomb for this reason.

Despite this clear announcement and threat of annihilation, various international law experts declared that Israel should not have carried out its pre-emptive strike against Iran’s nuclear weapons program. According to the international law experts in question, this would only have been permitted immediately before an Iranian nuclear attack.

In other words: Israel would have had to wait with the attack until it could hardly have prevented its own destruction.

A law that demands such self-destructive behavior from a state and people urgently needs to be adapted.

5. Social and traditional media are an instrument of hybrid warfare, andthe conflict in Gaza was also a propaganda war. Social media in particular played a decisive role in this. They strengthened Hamas and weakened Israel.

The terrorist organization continuously circulated unverified information as proof of the alleged inhumanity of its opponent. Above all, unverifiable casualty figures and images taken out of context, taken by their own photographers or falsified with the help of artificial intelligence. These were circulated millions of times within minutes on channels such as Facebook, Tiktok, Telegram, X and Instagram.

This cynical appeal to the pity and indignation of the uniformed public was all the more effective because it also “infected” many journalists. The result was reporting on the Gaza conflict that was characterized by emotions instead of the usual technical principles of journalism.

This paved the way for mass protests against the Jewish state in the Western world in the social and numerous traditional media.

Israel did try to counter the misleading Hamas propaganda with clarification and fact-based information. But it failed. Because in the battle between emotions and sober facts, emotions always win.

On the other hand, Israel, as a democratic constitutional state, could not afford to engage in similar lie-based propaganda as the Palestinian terrorist organization. Western democratic

governments would do well to learn their lessons for their own conflicts and their vulnerability in the social media.

6. Europe bows to pressure from the street. Shortly after October 7, 2023, European governments were practically shaking hands during their solidarity visits to Israel.

   Not much has remained of this. The longer the war lasted, the higher the casualty figures rose and the associated disinformation by Hamas, the UN and UN-affiliated NGOs increased, the larger the protest marches on the streets of the major European cities became. And the more European governments and other institutions distanced themselves from the Jewish state and threatened it with sanctions.

   For Israel itself, this is largely irrelevant politically and militarily. But it has probably confirmed to the country that it cannot rely on Europe.

7. Europe still fails to recognize the danger of radical Islam. The anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic mass protests on the streets of Europe were mostly organized by activists from the left and far-left spectrum.

But these rallies owed their militant and anti-Semitic character primarily to radical Islamists who have gained a foothold in Europe in recent decades with the support of the Muslim Brotherhood and money from the Qatari state. This is particularly the case in France, the UK and Germany, but also in Switzerland.

Since October 7, these religious fanatics have not only openly acted out their potential for violence against Jews (and the police), but they have also made no secret of their fundamentalist Islamist agenda.

Nevertheless, their medium and long-term threat to our Western democratic society is not taken seriously by the established parties and governments in Europe. On the contrary: anyone who warns against it is labeled as “Islamophobic”.

This is unforgivable. Because the erosion of our democracy, which these Islamist fanatics are allowed to pursue almost unhindered, is not just directed against Jews and other minorities. It affects us all – especially women, who are second-class citizens in the eyes of the Islamists.

8. Violent anti-Semitism is deeply rooted in the West. The Islamists who have been marching on our streets for the past two years

have broken down open doors in our society with their protest against the “Zionists” – in other words, against the Jews.

This is illustrated by the increased number of physical attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions. It can be seen at universities, where left-wing extremist students enthusiastically shout anti-Semitic slogans and harass and ostracize fellow Jewish students. And it is visible on social media and even in our own private lives.

In this respect, October 7 was a good thing: it made it clear that anti-Semitism has not died out in our society and that it only takes a little for it to be acted out openly and violently again.

9. Israel can only trust itself. The behavior of the international community over the past two years has made it clear that Israel can only trust itself. This is particularly true with regard to Europe. However, from Israel’s perspective, further strengthening its own independence is also a strategic imperative with regard to the USA.

   It is true that the current peace plan, which also takes account of Israel’s concerns and fears, is thanks to the US government. But only because the American president is called Donald Trump. If he were replaced in the White House by Democrat Kamala Harris, there would be no 20-point peace plan on the table that would be

acceptable to the Jewish state.

10. Israel is at a crossroads. However, the conflict with Hamas has not only shown the vulnerability of the Jewish state to terror, hybrid warfare, opportunistic Western governments and the outcome of elections in the USA.

    The last two years have also intensified Israel’s internal divisions. The deep rift runs right through the heart of Israeli society in two ways.

    On the one hand, it divides the politically moderate sections of the population from the right-wing to extreme right-wing Israelis, who dream of a “Greater Israel” including the West Bank and Gaza. A dream that is incompatible with President Trump’s Gaza peace plan and which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu clearly rejected in Washington these days.

    On the other hand, the secular parts of society and the ultra-orthodox Jews are opposed to each other. Just how fundamental this contrast is can be seen in the debate about compulsory military service. According to a ruling by the Supreme Court, this also applies to the ultra-Orthodox. But most of them – not all! – refuse to answer the call to join the army.

This refusal rightly embittered the large secular majority of the population and the national-religious Israelis who, unlike most of the ultra-Orthodox, perform military service. This is because they have had to make enormous sacrifices as members of the army over the last two years.

The ultra-nationalist and ultra-orthodox parties only have a limited voter potential in Israel. For example, the two parties of the two far-right ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich did not even receive 11% of the vote in the last elections with their combined lists.

Even if the other ultra-religious and far-right parties represented in the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, are included, the total share of these voter groups is only just under 30% – comparable with the right-wing populists in numerous European countries.

However, due to the strong fragmentation of the Knesset, micro-parties can often exert a disproportionate influence on government formation and policy by tipping the scales.

Elections are due to take place in Israel in a year’s time at the latest, in October 2026. It will then become clear whether the Jewish state can free itself from the stranglehold of these radical

right-wing and ultra-religious groups. Otherwise, the greatest threat to it will not come from outside, but from within.

This report also appeared on [nebelspalter.ch]

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