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HAMAS & GAZA (HTTPS://FACTSIGNAL.ORG/CATEGORY/HAMAS-GAZA)

October 7 Was Never About Liberation: Hamas's Own Words Expose a War Against the Jews

PUBLISHED NOVEMBER 22, 2026 UPDATED NOVEMBER 22, 2026



(https://factsignal.org/author/msginsberg) BY MARK GINSBERG (https://factsignal.org/author/msginsberg)

The massacre of October 7 (https://factsignal.org/verified-evidence-documentation/examining-global-antisemitism-trends-after-october-7-2023), 2023, was not simply another eruption of violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, nor was it an improvised response to a sudden political crisis. It was a carefully planned military assault accompanied by an ideological vision that went far beyond territorial demands, Palestinian statehood or the grievances traditionally invoked to explain the conflict. Hamas's own operational materials, as presented in footage subsequently broadcast to an international audience, reveal the depth of the organization's hostility toward Jews and the religious language through which its leaders sought to justify their actions. Among the most disturbing elements is a passage attributed to Mohammed Deif, the commander of Hamas's military wing, in an operational order dated October 5, 2023, invoking the humiliation and destruction of Jews. If accurately authenticated and translated, the document is extraordinarily significant because it connects the planning of the October 7 attack to explicitly antisemitic objectives rather than merely to the political arguments Hamas later used to defend its actions.

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The importance of this evidence cannot be overstated. For more than three years, international discussions of October 7 and its aftermath have frequently revolved around competing narratives (https://factsignal.org/disinformation-media-analysis/navigating-competing-narratives-finding-truth-about-israel) of occupation, resistance, self-defense and humanitarian suffering. These are subjects that deserve serious consideration, but they cannot replace an examination of what Hamas's leaders actually said, what they planned and what their forces did when they crossed into Israel. The attack resulted in the murder of approximately 1,200 people and the abduction of 251 hostages, including civilians seized from their homes and communities. Hamas-led attackers assaulted kibbutzim, towns and a music festival, killing families, elderly people and young adults. The deliberate targeting of civilians and hostage-taking were not incidental details of the attack. They were central features of the atrocities that made October 7 the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust.

The attempt to reinterpret these events as an exclusively military operation against Israeli security installations is contradicted by the documented assault on civilian communities. Although Hamas also attacked military bases (https://factsignal.org/verified-evidence-documentation/hezbollah-turned-lebanese-villages-into-military-bases-and-put-its-own-people-in-the-firing-line) and security positions, the existence of military targets does not explain or justify the murder of unarmed civilians, the taking of children and elderly people as hostages or the violence inflicted upon families in their homes. These acts must be confronted directly, without allowing the political vocabulary of resistance to obscure their nature. The crucial distinction is between a people's legitimate aspirations for political rights and an armed organization's deliberate decision to massacre civilians while invoking religious language about the destruction of Jews. Recognizing that distinction is essential both to understanding Hamas and to protecting the possibility of a future in which Israelis and Palestinians can live without terrorism and perpetual war.

The evidence surrounding October 7 also raises a broader question about the role of international media in shaping public understanding of terrorism. When an armed organization is given the opportunity to present its operations through carefully selected footage, interviews with commanders and a narrative designed to portray its fighters as disciplined and heroic, audiences may encounter a version of events that excludes the most incriminating evidence. This is particularly dangerous when the organization seeks to redefine a massacre as a defensive operation and shift attention away from the deliberate killing of civilians. Journalism has a responsibility

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to investigate the claims of armed groups, not merely reproduce their preferred accounts. The fact that a presentation includes operational footage or interviews with participants does not make its interpretation reliable.

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 An operational order[1] attributed to Hamas military commander Mohammed Deif, dated October 5, 2023, reportedly invoked the humiliation and destruction of Jews in connection with the planned October 7 attack.

2 The reported language[2] is significant because it frames the operation through an explicitly antisemitic religious objective rather than solely through Palestinian territorial or political demands.

3 Hamas's[3] October 7 assault was prepared through extensive intelligence collection, training, coordination and operational deception, contradicting attempts to portray it as a spontaneous reaction to an immediate threat.

4 Hamas's own accounts describe preparations involving thousands of armed personnel, attacks against Israeli military positions and efforts to delay the Israeli Air Force's

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5 The deliberate murder (https://factsignal.org/hamas-gaza/the-gaza-narrative-is-unravelling-hamass-own-figures-challenge-the-accusations-against-israel)of civilians and the taking of hostages contradict claims that the attackers confined themselves to legitimate military targets.

6 Hamas sought to exploit Israeli political divisions, perceptions of military weakness and regional tensions in deciding when to launch its attack.

7 Accounts of Hamas's preparations (https://factsignal.org/hamas-gaza/hamass-message-is-clear-october-7-was-not-the-end)indicate that economic concessions and apparent periods of calm did not necessarily reflect an abandonment of plans for armed confrontation.

8 Media presentations of terrorist operations must be examined critically, particularly when they omit atrocities or portray perpetrators exclusively as heroic combatants.

9 Israel's security response must address the military capabilities of Hamas, while international efforts toward peace must also confront the ideology that legitimizes attacks against Jewish civilians (https://factsignal.org/hamas-gaza/the-murdered-on-october-7-cannot-testify-but-their-bodies-can).

Hamas's Operational Language Reveals the Ideology Behind the Attack

The reported October 5 operational order is particularly important because it was allegedly issued immediately before the attack by the commander responsible for Hamas's military operations. According to the published Hebrew (https://factsignal.org/disinformation-media-analysis/finding-reliable-information-about-the-gaza-war) translation of the document, Deif invoked a divine promise concerning the humiliation and destruction of Jews while expressing confidence in the eventual liberation of Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque. The wording matters because it does not merely refer to Israeli soldiers, military installations or government policies. It invokes Jews as a religious and collective category, placing the operation within an ideological framework that reaches beyond the conventional boundaries of a territorial conflict. The document's provenance and translation

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should be independently assessed, but the passage as reported is consistent with longstanding antisemitic elements in Hamas's ideological history, including the explicit anti-Jewish conspiracy theories contained in its 1988 founding charter.

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This distinction between opposition to Israeli policies (https://factsignal.org/disinformation-media-analysis/israeli-policies-vs-systemic-racism-a-comprehensive-analysis) and hostility toward Jews is essential. Criticism of a government, disagreement over borders or advocacy for Palestinian national rights can be expressed without antisemitism. The deliberate invocation of the humiliation or destruction of Jews, however, is fundamentally different. It targets a people because of their religious or ethnic identity and presents their destruction as a desirable objective. When such language appears in the context of an operation that subsequently involved the mass murder of Jewish civilians, it becomes relevant to understanding the perpetrators' ideology and the meaning they attached to their actions. It does not establish the intentions of every individual participant, but it provides potentially important evidence concerning the leadership's ideological framing.

Hamas's later attempts to portray October 7 as an operation governed by strict instructions to avoid civilian casualties must be measured against what happened. The attack was extensively documented through security footage, recordings, eyewitness testimony and material filmed by perpetrators themselves. These records show that civilians were deliberately attacked in their homes and communities, while hostages were taken into Gaza. The reality of those actions cannot be erased through subsequent statements about intended rules of engagement. An organization cannot credibly claim that its operation was directed only against military targets when the documented conduct of its attackers included the deliberate killing and abduction of noncombatants.

October 7 Was the Product of Extensive Planning, Not a Sudden Reaction

The evidence concerning the preparations for October 7 demonstrates the sophistication and duration of Hamas's planning. Accounts attributed to participants describe senior military commanders meeting continuously in the days immediately preceding the attack, the activation of command-and-control arrangements and the concentration of armed personnel and equipment before the operation began. Hamas also carried out systematic reconnaissance of Israeli positions along the Gaza border, examining defensive barriers, observation systems and other security infrastructure. Footage reportedly showed personnel measuring physical barriers

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and collecting information that could assist in breaching them. Such activities are characteristic of a complex military operation developed through intelligence collection and repeated preparation, not an improvised response to an unexpected event.

Hamas's own descriptions of the assault included attacks on Israeli military bases and efforts to delay the arrival of reinforcements. One account claimed that thousands of rockets and mortar rounds were launched during the opening stages, including strikes intended to interfere with Israeli air operations. These figures and operational claims should be treated as statements by Hamas participants rather than independently established totals, particularly because armed organizations have incentives to exaggerate their capabilities and accomplishments. Nevertheless, the broader picture is clear: the attack involved coordinated ground incursions, rocket fire, efforts to disable border defenses and the deployment of substantial numbers of armed personnel.

The extent of these preparations is significant because Hamas later advanced the argument that October 7 was a preemptive response to an imminent Israeli military offensive. Such a claim requires credible evidence of the alleged imminent threat and an explanation of how it relates to an operation that had been developed over an extended period. The existence of long-term planning does not, by itself, prove that Hamas had no immediate concerns about Israeli actions, but it substantially weakens any account that presents the massacre as a sudden defensive necessity. The evidence instead indicates that Hamas had been preparing a major assault and was assessing when political, military and regional circumstances might provide the most favorable opportunity.

Hamas Saw Israel's Internal Divisions as an Opportunity

The months preceding October 7 were marked by intense political disagreements within Israel, including mass demonstrations, disputes over judicial reform and public concerns about national unity. Hamas leaders publicly discussed these divisions and portrayed them as evidence that Israel was becoming weaker and more vulnerable. In a June 2023 interview, senior Hamas official Saleh al-Arouri described Israel's domestic divisions and strained international relationships as creating opportunities for confrontation. His remarks suggested that Hamas viewed the political environment not simply as an internal Israeli dispute but as a potential strategic advantage that could be exploited through armed action.

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This assessment is important because it reveals how Hamas interpreted Israeli democratic disagreements. Political debate, public protest and disputes over government policy are normal features of an open society, and Israelis have the right to engage in them without being held responsible for the decisions of terrorist organizations. Yet Hamas's leadership appears to have viewed these disagreements through the lens of military opportunity, believing that domestic tensions could weaken Israeli deterrence and reduce the country's ability to respond effectively to an attack. The lesson is not that democratic debate should be suppressed or that national unity requires political conformity. It is that hostile organizations may interpret visible divisions as opportunities to test a country's defenses.

The same period also involved regional developments that Hamas leaders regarded as favorable to their objectives, including tensions involving Iran and its network of armed partners. Hamas's strategic calculations were shaped by its perception of Israel's military readiness, diplomatic relationships and the possibility of broader regional confrontation. These factors reinforce the conclusion that October 7 emerged from a deliberate assessment of strategic circumstances rather than a single immediate provocation. The attack was intended to alter the regional and political environment through violence, and its planners understood that the consequences would extend far beyond the military positions initially targeted.

The Deception That Helped Make October 7 Possible

One of the most consequential aspects of Hamas's preparations was its apparent effort to convince Israel that the organization was increasingly interested in economic stability and governing Gaza rather than initiating another major confrontation. In the period preceding October 7, Israel permitted thousands of Gazans to work inside its territory and supported arrangements intended to improve economic conditions and reduce incentives for violence. These measures were based partly upon the assumption that Hamas had an interest in preserving relative calm because another major war would threaten its governing position and the welfare of Gaza's population. Yet accounts attributed to Hamas military personnel indicate that the organization was simultaneously developing plans for a large-scale assault. The contrast between apparent pragmatism and continuing military preparations illustrates the dangers of assuming that economic incentives alone can overcome an armed movement's ideological commitments.

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The reported deception involved more than public statements. Hamas and affiliated groups engaged in activities that may have contributed to Israeli assessments of their intentions, while the organization's military wing continued training, gathering intelligence and refining operational plans. A Hamas-affiliated commentator subsequently described the attack as the product of prolonged force-building and strategic deception. These accounts should be assessed critically, because participants may exaggerate the sophistication of their planning after an operation, but they are consistent with the broader evidence that Israel underestimated Hamas's intentions and capabilities. The failure was not simply one of intelligence collection. It also involved assumptions about the relationship between economic incentives, political interests and ideological objectives.

The wider lesson is that an organization committed to destroying an adversary may accept temporary economic arrangements without abandoning its longer-term ambitions. Improving living conditions and creating economic opportunities remain important goals, and they should not be dismissed because Hamas exploited a period of relative calm. However, economic engagement must be accompanied by credible security assessments, careful monitoring of military capabilities and an understanding of the ideological commitments of the organizations involved. The belief that material incentives will necessarily produce moderation can become dangerous when it is not supported by changes in conduct, institutions and political objectives.

The Attempt to Rewrite the Massacre as a Military Victory

The struggle over the meaning of October 7 did not end when the fighting began. Hamas has continued attempting to shape international perceptions of the attack, emphasizing its military planning, the supposed professionalism of its fighters and its claimed achievements against Israeli security forces. Presentations of the operation have highlighted attacks on military installations, intelligence gathering and the breaching of defensive barriers, while seeking to minimize or dispute responsibility for the atrocities committed against civilians. This effort reflects a broader strategy in which military violence is accompanied by a battle over public memory. If Hamas can persuade international audiences that October 7 was primarily a successful military operation against legitimate targets, it can attempt to weaken the moral significance of the massacre and portray its perpetrators as heroic figures rather than participants in atrocities.

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The problem with this narrative is that it requires the exclusion or reinterpretation of overwhelming evidence. Hamas-led attackers entered civilian communities, murdered residents, abducted hostages and committed acts of violence that cannot be reconciled with the claim that the operation was restricted to military targets. The massacre at the Nova music festival, the killings in kibbutzim and the abduction of families and individuals from their homes were not incidental to the international understanding of October 7. They were central to the nature of the attack. Attempts to explain away these atrocities by attributing the deaths broadly to Israeli fire, without sufficient evidence for such sweeping claims, distort the historical record. The fact that some Israelis may have been killed during Israeli military responses does not erase the extensive documented evidence of deliberate killings by Hamas-led attackers.

This distinction matters because propaganda does not always depend upon inventing events. It can operate by selecting certain facts, excluding others and presenting a carefully constructed sequence that leads audiences toward a predetermined conclusion. Footage of military planning may be authentic while the surrounding narrative remains misleading. Interviews with participants may provide useful information while also containing self-serving claims. The responsibility of journalists, researchers and international institutions is to distinguish between the evidentiary value of material and the interpretation promoted by those presenting it. An armed organization should not be permitted to establish the historical meaning of its own atrocities simply because it controls access to selected footage or participants.

The Danger of Turning Antisemitic Violence Into a Symbol of Resistance

The international response to October 7 exposed a troubling willingness in some political environments to interpret the deliberate killing of Israeli civilians through a framework that minimizes the agency and responsibility of the perpetrators. Expressions of solidarity with Palestinians, criticism of Israeli policies and advocacy for Palestinian national rights are legitimate forms of political activity. However, those positions do not require defending Hamas, celebrating the massacre or treating violence against Jewish civilians as an acceptable instrument of political change. When the deliberate murder of families is described as liberation, or the abduction of civilians is presented as an understandable political tactic, the distinction between legitimate national aspirations and terrorism is dangerously eroded.

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The explicitly anti-Jewish language attributed to Hamas's operational leadership makes this distinction even more important. If the reported document is authentic, it provides evidence that the operation's ideological framing included hostility toward Jews as Jews, not merely opposition to the Israeli government. That matters because antisemitism has historically been able to adapt itself to different political environments, adopting the vocabulary of religion, nationalism, race or revolutionary struggle while preserving the underlying idea that Jews constitute a collective enemy. The appearance of such language in connection with an attack that involved the mass murder of Jewish civilians demands serious attention from anyone committed to opposing antisemitism.

It is equally important not to confuse Hamas's ideology with the beliefs of Palestinians generally or Muslims as a whole. Palestinian society contains diverse political, religious and social perspectives, and many Palestinians have suffered profoundly under the consequences of Hamas's decisions and the ensuing war. The aspirations of Palestinians for security, dignity and political rights are not inherently incompatible with Israel's existence. The ideological problem lies with movements that reject coexistence and legitimize the killing of civilians as a means of achieving their objectives. Confronting that ideology is necessary not only for Israel's security but also for any political future in which Palestinian communities can develop without being drawn repeatedly into destructive conflict.

Israel's Right to Defend Itself Must Be Understood in Context

Israel's military response (https://factsignal.org/disinformation-media-analysis/israel-sets-the-record-straight-after-the-eu-made-false-claims-after-strikes-against-hezbollah) to October 7 cannot be understood without recognizing the nature of the attack and the threat posed by Hamas's armed capabilities. The organization had demonstrated its ability to conduct a coordinated assault across Israel's border, overwhelm security positions, murder civilians and abduct hostages. Its extensive tunnel network, weapons infrastructure and military command structures presented continuing security challenges. Israel therefore faced a legitimate and urgent need to protect its population, prevent further attacks and address the military capabilities of the organization responsible. The existence of these objectives is central to understanding why Israel launched a major military campaign following the massacre.

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At the same time, the legitimacy of Israel's security objectives does not eliminate its obligations under international humanitarian law. Civilian protections remain applicable during operations against terrorist organizations, including requirements concerning distinction, proportionality and feasible precautions. The suffering experienced by Palestinian civilians in Gaza has been immense, and allegations of unlawful conduct must be examined seriously. Recognizing these obligations does not weaken the argument that Hamas bears responsibility for initiating the October 7 attacks or for the conduct of its own forces. It strengthens the principle that responsibility must be assessed according to the actions of each party rather than assigned through political allegiance.

The broader strategic challenge is ensuring that Israel can protect its citizens while reducing the conditions that allow armed organizations committed to its destruction to rebuild. Military operations can degrade weapons systems, disrupt command structures and prevent immediate attacks, but they cannot alone eliminate the ideological commitments that inspire violence. Long-term security requires institutions that reject terrorism, educational environments that do not glorify attacks against civilians and political arrangements that provide alternatives to perpetual armed confrontation. Any international proposal for Gaza's future that ignores Hamas's ideology or treats its military capabilities as irrelevant risks recreating the circumstances that made October 7 possible.

The World Must Confront Hamas's Ideology, Not Only Its Weapons

The reported operational language attributed to Mohammed Deif raises a fundamental question about how the international community understands Hamas. If an armed organization's leadership invokes the destruction of Jews while planning an attack that subsequently involves the mass murder of Jewish civilians, its ideology cannot be treated as a secondary or irrelevant issue. Military capabilities explain how an organization can conduct attacks, but ideology helps explain why particular objectives are pursued and how violence is justified to participants and supporters. Understanding both dimensions is essential to developing an effective response.

For decades, international diplomacy has often emphasized economic development, political negotiation and institutional reform as pathways toward reducing conflict. These approaches remain important, but they cannot succeed if an influential armed organization continues teaching that the destruction of its adversary is a legitimate or sacred objective. Economic opportunities may improve living conditions, and

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political agreements may create incentives for stability, but durable peace requires a rejection of deliberate attacks against civilians and an acceptance that political disagreements must be resolved without the annihilation of the opposing community.

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This challenge is not unique to Israel. International efforts against ISIS and other extremist organizations have demonstrated that military pressure must be accompanied by efforts to counter recruitment, ideological indoctrination and the glorification of violence. The same principle applies to Hamas, although the historical and political circumstances are distinct. A future in which Israelis and Palestinians can live securely requires more than the temporary absence of fighting. It requires a political and educational environment in which children are not taught to regard the destruction of another people as a moral achievement.

Conclusion: Hamas's Own Record Must Remain at the Center of the Debate

The attempt to redefine October 7 as a legitimate military operation or a heroic act of resistance cannot withstand serious examination of the attack itself. Hamas's preparations, operational planning and subsequent conduct demonstrate that the massacre was neither spontaneous nor confined to military targets. The deliberate killing of civilians and the abduction of hostages were defining features of an assault that devastated Israeli communities and triggered a war with catastrophic consequences for Gaza's population.

The operational order attributed to Mohammed Deif adds a deeply troubling ideological dimension. Its reported invocation of the humiliation and destruction of Jews is significant because it connects the planning of the attack to explicitly antisemitic language. The document requires independent authentication, but its reported contents are consistent with elements of Hamas's longstanding ideological record. They reinforce the importance of examining the organization's own statements and actions rather than relying exclusively upon the political explanations offered after the massacre.

October 7 was not an unavoidable expression of Palestinian national aspirations. It was a deliberate decision by Hamas to launch a large-scale armed attack that included the murder and abduction of civilians. No political grievance, historical argument or religious claim can justify those acts.

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The international community must preserve this distinction if it hopes to contribute to a lasting resolution of the conflict. Supporting Palestinian rights does not require defending Hamas, and acknowledging Palestinian suffering does not require minimizing the atrocities committed against Israelis. The future of both peoples depends upon rejecting the proposition that civilians may be murdered because of their nationality, religion or association with a political conflict.

Israel's security cannot rest upon the assumption that an organization committed to its destruction will necessarily become moderate through economic incentives or temporary arrangements. The events preceding October 7 demonstrate the risks of confusing apparent calm with a genuine change in strategic objectives. Preventing another massacre requires vigilance, credible deterrence and a sustained effort to confront the ideological justification of violence.

The most important lesson of October 7 is that the world must take extremist organizations seriously when they describe their objectives. When their leaders invoke the destruction of Jews, those words should not be dismissed as rhetoric, and when their forces deliberately murder civilians, those actions should not be rebranded as liberation. A peaceful future will require accountability, historical honesty and a rejection of the antisemitic ideology that helps sustain the conflict. It will also require protecting the rights and dignity of Palestinians who deserve a future free from the destructive ambitions of armed movements. **The truth about October 7 must not be rewritten to serve the interests of its perpetrators. The victims deserve an accurate historical record, Israel deserves the security necessary to prevent another massacre, and Palestinians deserve a future in which their national aspirations are no longer subordinated to an ideology of hatred and destruction.**

FOOTNOTES

1 **https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel-at-war/artc-al-jazeera-airs-never-before-seen-footage-of-deif-documents-on-hamas-preparations-for-oct-7 (https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel-at-war/artc-al-jazeera-airs-never-before-seen-footage-of-deif-documents-on-hamas-preparations-for-oct-7)** ↑

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2 https://jcfa.org/book/islamic-warfare-and-the-october-7th-massacre-an-ancient-doctrine-marches-on/ (https://jcfa.org/book/islamic-warfare-and-the-october-7th-massacre-an-ancient-doctrine-marches-on/) ↑

3 https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/the-deception-plan-practiced-by-hamas-before-the-october-7-2023-attack-including-documents-from-the-gaza-strip/ (https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/the-deception-plan-practiced-by-hamas-before-the-october-7-2023-attack-including-documents-from-the-gaza-strip/) ↑

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Mark Ginsberg writes for FactSignal. Mark is an Israel-based writer and commentator on technology and artificial intelligence, with over two decades of firsthand perspective on the country's innovation economy. Originally from South Florida and now based in Efrat, he analyzes the growth of Israel's tech ecosystem and the broader implications of AI on business, policy, and society.

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Zionism Is as American as Thanksgiving: The Remarkable History of America's Support for the Jewish Homeland

> *From the Puritans to John Adams and the Blackstone Memorial, explore America's long tradition of backing the Jewish return to their homeland.*

Thanksgiving is one of America's most cherished traditions, a celebration of gratitude, faith, freedom and the extraordinary journey of a people who crossed an ocean in search of a place where they could build a better future. Each November, American families gather to remember the blessings of liberty, the importance of community and the enduring values upon which their country was founded. Yet there is another remarkable dimension to this history that is too often overlooked: the connection between America's earliest religious traditions and the Jewish people's ancient dream of returning to their ancestral homeland. Long before the establishment of the modern State of Israel, before Theodor Herzl articulated the political vision of modern Zionism and even before the United States declared its independence, influential American religious leaders were already expressing their belief that the Jewish people would one day return to the Land of Israel. The relationship between America and Zionism is therefore not simply a product of twentieth-century diplomacy, modern strategic interests or the aftermath of the Holocaust. It is rooted in some of the earliest intellectual, religious and moral traditions that helped shape the American nation itself.

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This extraordinary connection reflects a deeper affinity between two national experiences. The American story is one of people seeking freedom, establishing institutions of self-government and building a society in which religious liberty and individual rights would become foundational principles. The Jewish story is one of an ancient people who preserved their national identity, religious traditions, historical memory and connection to their homeland through centuries of dispersion, persecution and exile. The circumstances of these two experiences were different, and their histories cannot be equated in every respect. Nevertheless, both traditions contain powerful ideas about liberty, national identity, faith, responsibility and the determination of a people to shape its own future. For generations of Americans, the restoration of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel was therefore not an unfamiliar foreign cause but an aspiration that resonated with their own understanding of history, scripture and freedom.

The depth of this relationship is especially significant at a time when support for Israel is sometimes portrayed as a relatively recent political development or a departure from traditional American values. The historical record tells a far richer story. From seventeenth-century Puritan ministers who anticipated the Jewish return to Zion, to early American statesmen who expressed sympathy for Jewish restoration, to nineteenth-century religious and civic leaders who advocated a Jewish homeland, support for Jewish national aspirations has appeared repeatedly throughout American history. It has crossed religious, ideological and political boundaries, attracting supporters motivated by biblical faith, humanitarian concern, opposition to antisemitism and the belief that the Jewish people deserved the same opportunity for national self-determination enjoyed by other peoples.

The modern partnership between Israel and the United States has developed into one of the most important relationships in international affairs, encompassing security cooperation, scientific research, technological innovation, economic development and a shared commitment to democratic institutions. Yet its foundations extend beyond the practical advantages that both countries derive from cooperation. They are reinforced by a historical understanding that Jewish national renewal and American ideals of freedom need not be competing principles, but can be complementary expressions of the conviction that peoples should be able to preserve their identities, protect their communities and build their futures in freedom. Thanksgiving offers an especially meaningful opportunity to reflect upon this history and to recognize that the friendship between America and Israel is not merely a diplomatic arrangement. It is a relationship with roots reaching deep into the American experience.

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Key Takeaways

- American sympathy[1] for the Jewish return to the Land of Israel predates the establishment of the United States and the emergence of modern political Zionism.
- Early Puritan religious leaders[2] drew upon the Hebrew Bible and expressed expectations that the Jewish people would eventually return to their ancestral homeland.
- Influential figures including Increase Mather and Jonathan Edwards articulated beliefs concerning the future restoration[3] of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel.
- American statesmen and public figures, including John Adams, expressed sympathy for Jewish national restoration long before Israel's establishment in 1948.
- The 1891 Blackstone Memorial, presented to President Benjamin Harrison, demonstrated that organized American support for Jewish restoration existed before Theodor Herzl's major political writings.
- American congressional support for the Balfour Declaration in 1922 reflected the growing legitimacy of Jewish national aspirations within American political life.
- Support for Zionism (https://allyvia.org/judeo-christian-heritage/judeo-christian-heritage/)has historically crossed partisan and ideological boundaries, bringing together religious conservatives, liberal reformers, humanitarian advocates and prominent political leaders.
- George Washington's commitment to the equal rights of Jewish Americans helped establish a tradition of religious liberty and opposition to antisemitism.
- The modern US-Israel relationship builds upon these historical foundations (https://allyvia.org/judeo-christian-heritage/why-millions-of-american-christians-stand-with-israel/)through defense cooperation, economic ties, technological partnerships and shared democratic values.
- Thanksgiving provides an opportunity to celebrate the longstanding connections (https://allyvia.org/culture-faith/)between American liberty, religious freedom and the Jewish people's national renewal.

The American Connection to Zion Began Before America Existed

The earliest European settlers who established communities in New England brought with them a profound familiarity with the Hebrew Bible. For many Puritans, the stories of Abraham, Moses, the Exodus and the ancient Israelites were not distant religious

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narratives but central elements of their understanding of faith, morality and history. They regarded the Bible as a guide to personal conduct and communal life, and they frequently interpreted their own experiences through its language. Their journey across the Atlantic, their efforts to establish religious communities and their struggle to survive in an unfamiliar environment encouraged comparisons with the biblical Israelites and their journey toward the Promised Land. Although these comparisons were theological rather than expressions of modern Jewish nationalism, they helped create an American religious culture in which the history of the Jewish people occupied a position of unusual importance.

This familiarity with Jewish history had lasting consequences. Some Protestant thinkers came to believe that the biblical promises concerning the Land of Israel continued to possess significance for the Jewish people, even after centuries of dispersion. Their conclusions emerged within a Christian theological framework, and many also hoped that Jews would eventually accept Christianity. Nevertheless, their expectation that Jews would return to their ancestral homeland represented a significant departure from interpretations that regarded Jewish national restoration as irrelevant or impossible. In an era when Jews faced widespread discrimination and persecution across much of Europe, the belief that the Jewish people retained a distinct historical destiny helped create an intellectual and religious foundation for later American sympathy toward Zionism.

The significance of this tradition is that it emerged centuries before the establishment of the modern State of Israel. American interest in Jewish restoration did not originate with the strategic calculations of the Cold War, the emergence of the modern Middle East or the horrors of the Holocaust. It developed within religious and intellectual traditions that were present during the earliest periods of European settlement in North America. Those traditions were not universally shared, and they existed alongside prejudices and theological assumptions that would be rejected today. Nevertheless, they demonstrate that the idea of Jewish return to Zion has occupied a place within American thought for far longer than is commonly recognized.

The Puritan Vision of Jewish Restoration

Among the most striking examples of early American support for Jewish restoration was the seventeenth-century Puritan minister Increase Mather, one of the most influential religious figures in colonial Massachusetts. In 1666, Mather expressed his belief that the Jewish people would recover possession of their ancestral land, presenting Jewish

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restoration as part of his understanding of biblical prophecy. His words were remarkable not because they anticipated the precise political institutions of the modern State of Israel, but because they reflected a conviction that Jewish history was not simply a story of ancient glory followed by permanent dispersion. Instead, he believed that the Jewish people had a continuing relationship with the land associated with their origins and that their future would include a return to it.

A similar expectation appeared in the writings of Jonathan Edwards, one of the most influential theologians in early American religious history. Edwards also anticipated that Jews would return to their own land, reflecting the broader presence of restorationist ideas within Protestant thought. These beliefs did not amount to a fully developed political program for Jewish sovereignty, and it would be historically inaccurate to describe every early restorationist as a Zionist in the modern political sense. Nevertheless, they helped establish a powerful intellectual tradition that would later make the idea of Jewish national restoration familiar and meaningful to many Americans.

The importance of these early thinkers extends beyond their individual statements. They helped shape a religious culture in which the Jewish people were understood as a continuing historical community rather than merely as figures from the biblical past. This perspective encouraged generations of Americans to see the Land of Israel as more than a distant territory and the Jewish people as more than a dispersed religious minority. It reinforced the idea that Jewish history possessed a geographical center, that the connection between Jews and their ancestral homeland remained meaningful and that the possibility of return was worthy of serious consideration. These themes would eventually intersect with modern political movements, humanitarian concerns and diplomatic efforts to support Jewish national renewal.

John Adams and the Early American Sympathy for Jewish National Renewal

The American founders inherited a world in which Jews remained a small and frequently disadvantaged minority, yet several leading figures expressed ideas that reflected a more expansive understanding of Jewish history and religious freedom. John Adams, the second president of the United States, demonstrated an interest in Jewish history and expressed sympathy for the possibility of Jewish restoration to the Holy Land. In correspondence with Jewish American leader Mordecai Manuel Noah, Adams imagined Jews returning to their ancestral land under circumstances that would allow them to regain a measure of national independence and dignity. His remarks were shaped by the

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religious and cultural assumptions of his time, but they nevertheless reflected an early American recognition that the Jewish people possessed a historical connection to the land from which their ancestors had been dispersed.

Adams's interest is particularly significant because it shows that sympathy for Jewish restoration was not confined to religious ministers or theological speculation. It had entered the thinking of individuals who helped establish the political institutions of the United States. The founders' generation was deeply concerned with questions of liberty, national independence and the rights of communities to govern themselves. Although the American Revolution and the Jewish national movement arose in very different historical circumstances, the principles of freedom and political self-determination created a framework within which some Americans could recognize the legitimacy of Jewish national aspirations.

This connection became increasingly important during the nineteenth century, when national movements transformed the political map of Europe and the Middle East. As Americans observed peoples seeking independence and recognition, the idea that Jews might also recover a national home gained support among religious leaders, intellectuals and public figures. The Jewish people's experience of persecution provided an additional moral argument, particularly as discrimination and violence continued in parts of Europe. Support for Jewish restoration could therefore emerge from several directions simultaneously: biblical conviction, humanitarian sympathy, opposition to antisemitism and the belief that national self-determination should not be denied to the Jewish people.

The Blackstone Memorial: American Zionism Before Herzl

One of the clearest demonstrations of organized American support for Jewish restoration occurred in 1891, when William Eugene Blackstone presented a memorial to President Benjamin Harrison urging diplomatic efforts to support a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The initiative attracted the signatures of prominent Americans from religious, political, business and civic life, reflecting a broad coalition of individuals who believed that the Jewish people should have an opportunity to reestablish themselves in their ancestral homeland. The memorial emerged during a period of intense concern about antisemitic persecution, particularly in the Russian Empire, where Jewish communities

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faced discrimination and violence. Its supporters viewed Jewish restoration as a potential response to the suffering of European Jewry and as an aspiration supported by historical and religious considerations.

The timing is especially revealing. The Blackstone Memorial appeared five years before Theodor Herzl published *The Jewish State* in 1896 and several years before the First Zionist Congress convened in Basel in 1897. This does not diminish Herzl's central role in organizing modern political Zionism or the work of Jewish thinkers and activists who had already advanced restorationist ideas. Rather, it demonstrates that the aspiration for Jewish national renewal had attracted organized support in the United States before the emergence of the political movement most commonly associated with Zionism's modern development.

The memorial also illustrates the breadth of the American coalition that supported Jewish restoration. Its signatories were not united by a single theological interpretation or political ideology. Some were motivated by Christian religious beliefs, others by concern for persecuted Jews and still others by the conviction that restoring a national home could provide a durable solution to the insecurity faced by Jewish communities. The diversity of these motivations is important because it shows that American support for Zionism was never exclusively the property of one political faction or religious movement. It developed through the convergence of different traditions that found common ground in recognizing the Jewish people's historical connection to the Land of Israel.

American Support for Zionism Crossed Political Divisions

As the twentieth century progressed, American sympathy for Jewish national restoration became increasingly visible in public policy and political debate. The Balfour Declaration of 1917, in which the British government expressed support for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine, received significant attention in the United States. In 1922, Congress adopted the Lodge-Fish resolution expressing support for the objectives of the declaration, demonstrating that Jewish national aspirations had gained recognition within American political institutions. The resolution emerged during a period when the future of the former Ottoman territories was being determined and competing national movements were seeking international support. Its adoption reflected the growing belief among American leaders that the Jewish people's historical and national aspirations deserved a place within the emerging international order.

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Support for Zionism also transcended the ideological divisions that characterized American politics during the twentieth century. Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the most prominent liberal figures of her generation, became a supporter of Jewish national aspirations and the establishment of Israel. Robert Taft, a leading Republican conservative, likewise expressed support for the Jewish national cause. Their agreement on this issue did not erase their differences over domestic policy, international relations or the role of government. It demonstrated that recognition of Jewish national rights could command support among leaders whose political philosophies diverged sharply in other areas.

This history is especially relevant because it challenges the assumption that support for Israel belongs exclusively to a particular American political movement. The relationship has drawn upon religious convictions, democratic ideals, humanitarian concerns, strategic interests and the historical experiences of Jewish Americans. Its supporters have included presidents, legislators, religious leaders, civil rights advocates, intellectuals and ordinary citizens from across the political spectrum. The relative importance of these motivations has changed over time, and American opinion concerning Israel has never been completely uniform. Nevertheless, the historical breadth of support helps explain why the US-Israel relationship developed into an enduring feature of American foreign policy rather than remaining a temporary diplomatic preference.

George Washington's Vision of Religious Freedom and Jewish Equality

The American tradition of support for Jewish life cannot be understood without recognizing the importance of George Washington's commitment to religious liberty. In his celebrated 1790 letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, Washington articulated a vision of American citizenship in which religious minorities would not merely be tolerated by the majority but would enjoy rights inherent in their status as citizens. His declaration that the government of the United States would give bigotry no sanction and persecution no assistance became one of the defining statements of the American commitment to religious equality. At a time when Jews in many parts of the world faced legal restrictions and social exclusion, Washington's words expressed an unusually expansive principle: Jewish Americans were entitled to participate in national life as equal members of the political community.

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The significance of this principle extends beyond the Jewish community. It helped establish the foundation of American identity in which citizenship was not supposed to depend upon adherence to a particular religion. The United States would struggle repeatedly to fulfill this ideal, and discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities remained part of its history. Nevertheless, Washington's statement provided a powerful standard against which later generations could measure their society. The protection of Jewish religious freedom became part of the broader American commitment to individual rights, pluralism and the rejection of government-sanctioned persecution.

This tradition of religious liberty and the American sympathy for Jewish national restoration developed along different historical paths, but they eventually reinforced one another. The recognition that Jews should enjoy equal rights as American citizens was compatible with the belief that the Jewish people also possessed legitimate national aspirations in their ancestral homeland. These principles are not contradictory. Jewish Americans can be fully American while maintaining religious, cultural or emotional connections to Israel, just as Americans of other backgrounds can retain meaningful relationships with their ancestral cultures and countries. The strength of the American tradition lies precisely in its capacity to accommodate such identities without treating them as incompatible with national belonging.

Zionism and the American Ideal of Self-Determination

The connection between Zionism and American political ideals is particularly compelling when understood through the principle of national self-determination. The United States emerged from a struggle against imperial rule and established a political tradition emphasizing the legitimacy of a people governing its own affairs. The Jewish national movement developed in a different historical context, shaped by centuries of dispersion, the persistence of Jewish religious and cultural identity, modern nationalism and the insecurity faced by Jewish communities in Europe and elsewhere. Nevertheless, the central aspiration of political Zionism was recognizable: the Jewish people sought the ability to determine their national future in the land with which their history and identity were inseparably connected.

The Jewish connection to the Land of Israel is not a modern political invention. It is reflected in ancient texts, archaeological evidence, religious traditions, historical records and the continued presence of Jewish communities in the region across centuries. Jerusalem has occupied a central place in Jewish prayer and collective

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memory for generations, while Jewish religious observance preserves a profound connection to the land's agricultural cycles, sacred sites and historical geography. The modern Zionist movement transformed this enduring historical and spiritual relationship into a political program for national renewal, but it did not create the relationship itself.

Recognizing Jewish self-determination does not require denying the history, identity or rights of Palestinians, who also possess deep connections to the land and legitimate national aspirations. The challenge of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has always involved reconciling competing political claims and ensuring security and dignity for both peoples. The American tradition of support for Zionism is strongest when understood as an affirmation of Jewish national rights rather than a denial of the rights of others. A positive vision of Zionism recognizes that Jewish sovereignty, democratic institutions and peaceful coexistence can be pursued together, even when the political obstacles to achieving that vision are substantial.

Israel's Establishment Fulfilled a Dream That Americans Had Supported for Generations

When the State of Israel declared independence in May 1948, the event represented the culmination of generations of Jewish national aspiration, political organization, immigration, institution-building and struggle. For the Jewish people, it marked the restoration of sovereignty in their ancestral homeland after nearly two millennia without an independent Jewish state. For many Americans, it also represented the realization of a historical aspiration that had been expressed by religious leaders, intellectuals and political figures long before the modern Zionist movement emerged. President Harry Truman's decision to recognize the new state shortly after its declaration of independence became a defining moment in the relationship between the United States and Israel.

The establishment of Israel occurred in the aftermath of the Holocaust, when the murder of six million Jews had demonstrated the catastrophic consequences of antisemitism and the vulnerability of Jewish communities without reliable protection. Yet the case for Jewish statehood did not begin with the Holocaust, and it should not be understood solely as a response to European persecution. Zionism was also a movement of national renewal rooted in Jewish history, language, culture and the aspiration to restore political independence. The revival of Hebrew as a modern spoken

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language, the establishment of educational and civic institutions, the development of agricultural communities and the creation of democratic political structures reflected a nation-building project that had been underway for decades before 1948.

The new state faced enormous challenges from its earliest days, including war, economic hardship, the absorption of refugees and the development of institutions capable of serving a rapidly growing population. Israel also became home to Jewish communities from Europe, the Middle East, North Africa and other regions, bringing together diverse traditions and experiences within a common national framework. The resulting society was neither simple nor free from internal disagreements, but its development demonstrated the extraordinary capacity of a dispersed people to rebuild national institutions, revive a language and create a functioning state. For Americans who had long supported Jewish restoration, Israel's independence was therefore both a historical milestone and a remarkable example of national determination.

From Historical Affinity to a Modern Strategic Partnership

The relationship between the United States and Israel has evolved far beyond the religious and moral considerations that influenced some of its earliest supporters. Today, the partnership encompasses military cooperation, intelligence sharing, defense technology, scientific research, cybersecurity, medical innovation, agricultural development and extensive commercial ties. Israel's technological capabilities and experience confronting complex security threats have made it an important partner for the United States, while American diplomatic, military and economic cooperation has contributed substantially to Israel's security and development. The relationship is not without disagreements, and successive American and Israeli governments have differed over important policy questions. Nevertheless, its breadth reflects a level of institutional cooperation that extends beyond the personal relationships of individual leaders or the priorities of any single administration.

Defense cooperation provides one of the clearest examples of the partnership's practical significance. Israel and the United States collaborate on missile defense, military technology, research and development, and security challenges affecting both countries. Programs such as Iron Dome, David's Sling and Arrow illustrate the role of joint investment and cooperation in developing defensive capabilities intended to protect civilian populations from missile and rocket attacks. These systems have also contributed to broader technological knowledge relevant to American defense

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interests. Israel's experience in cybersecurity, intelligence and counterterrorism has similarly created opportunities for cooperation on threats that increasingly cross national borders.

The economic relationship is equally important. Israeli companies and researchers have contributed to advances in medical devices, pharmaceuticals, water management, agricultural technology, software, artificial intelligence and other fields that affect everyday life. American companies have established substantial research and development operations in Israel, while Israeli firms have invested in American markets and collaborated with universities, businesses and public institutions. These connections demonstrate that the relationship is not simply a matter of American assistance to Israel. It is also a partnership through which knowledge, investment and innovation move in both directions, creating benefits for businesses, researchers and consumers in both countries.

The enduring significance of the partnership lies in its combination of historical affinity and practical cooperation. American support for Jewish national renewal helped establish a foundation of sympathy and recognition, while the development of modern Israel created opportunities for cooperation in areas that early supporters could scarcely have imagined. The result is a relationship that connects centuries-old ideas about freedom and national identity with some of the most advanced technologies and strategic challenges of the modern world.

The Jewish State Reflects the Extraordinary Power of National Renewal

One of the most inspiring aspects of Israel's history is the transformation of an ancient national aspiration into a modern, functioning society. The Jewish people maintained their identity through centuries of dispersion, often under conditions of discrimination, persecution and insecurity. Jewish communities preserved religious traditions, languages, scholarship and cultural practices while retaining a connection to the Land of Israel. The modern Zionist movement brought together these historical foundations with the political and social movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, creating institutions capable of supporting Jewish national life on an unprecedented scale.

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Israel's development since independence has been remarkable. A country that began with limited resources, severe security challenges and the enormous responsibility of absorbing successive waves of immigrants has become a center of technological innovation, scientific research and economic activity. Its universities, research institutions and private companies have contributed to advances that benefit people far beyond its borders. Its agricultural and water technologies have helped address challenges involving food production and water scarcity, while its medical and scientific achievements have contributed to international research and healthcare. These accomplishments reflect not only investment and technological expertise but also the capacity of a diverse society to adapt, innovate and build institutions under difficult circumstances.

The country's achievements do not mean that it has solved every political or social problem. Israel continues to face internal disagreements, economic inequalities, security threats and difficult questions concerning the relationship between its Jewish national identity and its democratic institutions. Yet these challenges are part of the experience of a functioning democracy whose citizens debate their country's future openly and vigorously. The existence of disagreement does not diminish the significance of Jewish national renewal. It demonstrates that the Jewish people have regained the ability to conduct their political life through their own institutions, elections, courts, public debates and civic organizations.

For Americans who value freedom and self-government, this achievement offers a powerful example of what national independence can make possible. The Jewish people did not simply return to a geographical location. They rebuilt the institutions of national life, revived an ancient language for modern use and established a society capable of contributing to the wider world. That accomplishment helps explain why Israel's story has resonated so strongly with generations of Americans who recognize the importance of political freedom and the determination of a people to shape its own destiny.

The American Tradition of Friendship With Jews Is Worth Celebrating

The history of American support for Zionism is inseparable from the broader American tradition of religious liberty and the rejection of antisemitism. From George Washington's commitment to Jewish equality to the participation of Jewish Americans in the country's political, economic, scientific and cultural development, the Jewish community has been an integral part of the American experience. Jewish Americans have contributed to

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medicine, education, law, business, literature, public service and countless other areas of national life, while maintaining religious and cultural traditions that enrich the country's diversity. Their story reflects the American ideal that individuals and communities should be able to preserve their identities while participating fully in a shared civic society.

This tradition has not always been upheld consistently. Antisemitism has existed throughout American history, including periods of discrimination in employment, education, housing and public life. Contemporary incidents of antisemitic harassment, intimidation and violence demonstrate that prejudice remains a serious concern. Nevertheless, the American commitment to religious freedom provides a strong foundation for confronting these challenges. The principle that Jews should enjoy the same rights and protections as every other community is not a concession granted by the majority. It is a fundamental expression of the constitutional and moral ideals upon which the United States is built.

The relationship between American Jewish life and Israel adds another dimension to this history. Many Jewish Americans maintain religious, familial, cultural or emotional connections to the Jewish state, while others hold a wide range of views concerning Zionism and Israeli government policies. Such diversity is consistent with the pluralism of American society. The important principle is that Jewish identity, including connections to Israel, should not become grounds for exclusion, suspicion or discrimination. Americans can debate foreign policy, criticize governments and disagree about the Middle East while continuing to uphold the rights and dignity of Jewish citizens.

The longstanding American friendship with the Jewish people is therefore worth celebrating not because it requires agreement on every political question, but because it reflects a broader commitment to liberty, equality and respect for historical identity. These are values that strengthen the United States itself and provide a meaningful foundation for its relationship with Israel.

Thanksgiving Is an Opportunity to Remember What America and Israel Share

Thanksgiving invites Americans to reflect upon the blessings that are easily taken for granted: freedom, family, security, opportunity and the ability to build a future in accordance with one's beliefs and aspirations. These themes resonate deeply with the history of the Jewish people and the establishment of Israel. The return to an ancestral

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homeland, the restoration of national sovereignty and the creation of institutions capable of protecting Jewish life are achievements that reflect extraordinary perseverance and determination. They also illustrate the importance of freedoms that many societies have struggled to obtain and preserve.

The connection between Thanksgiving and Zionism is not that the American and Jewish national experiences are identical. Their histories, circumstances and political challenges are distinct. Rather, both stories contain enduring themes of faith, memory, national identity and the desire for freedom. Early American religious thinkers drew upon Jewish scripture to understand their own experiences, while later American leaders recognized the legitimacy of Jewish national aspirations. Over time, these historical connections developed into a relationship between two countries whose citizens have contributed significantly to one another's security, prosperity and cultural life.

At a time when public debate is often dominated by conflict and polarization, this history offers an opportunity to emphasize what is constructive and enduring. The American relationship with Israel has never depended exclusively upon agreement between governments or the absence of political disagreements. It has been sustained by historical connections, shared institutions, cultural exchanges, economic cooperation and the contributions of millions of individuals who recognize value in the partnership. Thanksgiving provides a fitting occasion to remember these foundations and to appreciate the positive achievements that have emerged from them.

The celebration of gratitude also encourages reflection upon the responsibilities that accompany freedom. The liberties enjoyed by Americans and Israelis did not emerge automatically, and they cannot be preserved through indifference. They depend upon institutions, civic participation, mutual respect and a willingness to defend the rights of individuals and communities. The history of American support for Jewish national renewal is therefore not merely a subject for historical curiosity. It is part of a broader story about the values that have shaped both nations and the opportunities that arise when those values are translated into practical cooperation.

Conclusion: Zionism Is Part of America's Historical Inheritance

The relationship between America and Zionism is far older, richer and more deeply rooted than is often acknowledged. It began long before the establishment of Israel, before the emergence of modern political Zionism and even before the United States

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existed as an independent country. Early Puritan thinkers anticipated the Jewish return to the land of Israel. American statesmen expressed sympathy for Jewish restoration, and religious and civic leaders helped transform those ideas into organized support for a Jewish homeland. Over generations, this tradition developed into a broad American recognition of the Jewish people's historical identity and national aspirations.

The establishment of Israel in 1948 gave practical expression to a dream that had been sustained through centuries of Jewish history and supported by generations of Americans. The country's subsequent development demonstrated the extraordinary achievements possible when a people regains the ability to govern itself, protect its communities and build institutions for future generations. Today, the partnership between Israel and the United States continues to produce benefits in security, science, technology, medicine, commerce and numerous other fields, reinforcing the historical relationship through practical cooperation that serves both nations.

The significance of this history extends beyond diplomacy. It reminds Americans that support for Jewish national renewal is not an alien concept introduced into their political tradition by modern events. It has roots in the religious imagination of early settlers, the humanitarian concerns of nineteenth-century reformers and the political commitments of leaders across the ideological spectrum. The American tradition of religious freedom, articulated so powerfully by George Washington, provides a complementary foundation for recognizing both the rights of Jewish Americans and the legitimacy of Jewish national aspirations.

Thanksgiving is a celebration of gratitude for freedom, opportunity and the ability of people to build their futures. The history of Zionism reflects those same enduring human aspirations: the determination of an ancient people to preserve its identity, return to its homeland and restore its national independence. The connection between these two stories is a reminder that the friendship between America and Israel cannot be reduced to a temporary alignment of interests or the preferences of contemporary political leaders. It rests upon centuries of historical affinity, shared values and a recognition of the importance of freedom and self-determination.

Americans have many reasons to value their relationship with Israel. They can appreciate the country's democratic institutions, its technological achievements, its contributions to science and medicine, and its role as a partner in addressing regional and international security challenges. They can also recognize the deeper historical significance of a Jewish state that has restored sovereignty to a people whose connection to its homeland reaches back thousands of years.

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The American story is enriched by its longstanding friendship with the Jewish people, and the modern relationship with Israel demonstrates how historical sympathy can develop into a partnership that benefits both nations and contributes to the wider world. As Americans gather around their Thanksgiving tables, they have an opportunity to remember that some of their country's most enduring traditions include not only gratitude for their own freedom but also an appreciation of the aspirations of others seeking the same dignity and independence. **Zionism is not a foreign addition to America's historical consciousness. It is part of a longstanding American tradition that recognizes the Jewish people's connection to their ancestral homeland and the importance of their national freedom.** And that is something worth celebrating with genuine gratitude: **a friendship rooted in history, strengthened by shared values and carried forward through a partnership that continues to demonstrate what two nations can achieve together.**

Footnotes & Scientific Citations

[1] https://freebeacon.com/columns/thanksgiving-with-a-heaping-side-of-zionism/ (https://freebeacon.com/columns/thanksgiving-with-a-heaping-side-of-zionism/)
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[2] https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/how-the-puritans-reimagined-israel-and-why-their-heirs-let-that-vision-fade/ (https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/how-the-puritans-reimagined-israel-and-why-their-heirs-let-that-vision-fade/)
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[3] https://www.jpost.com/christian-news/nurturing-christian-zionism-in-colonial-america-467000 (https://www.jpost.com/christian-news/nurturing-christian-zionism-in-colonial-america-467000)
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Medical Devices & Biotech (https://innovascope.org/health-and-science-innovation/medical-devices-biotech/) ·

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Israeli Innovation Offers New Hope in the Fight Against Rheumatic Heart Disease

Mark Ginsberg (https://innovascope.org/author/msginsberg/) · November 2026 · 15 min read

KEY STRATEGIC TAKEAWAYS

Researchers at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev have developed an experimental synthetic sensor designed to detect E-selectin, an inflammatory biomarker relevant to cardiovascular research.

Rheumatic heart disease is a serious but largely preventable condition that disproportionately affects children and young adults in low- and middle-income countries.

The technology uses synthetic polymers, specialized peptides and near-infrared fluorescent dyes instead of conventional biological antibodies.

Laboratory experiments demonstrated the ability to detect and measure E-selectin in complex serum samples.

The synthetic approach could eventually reduce dependence on refrigeration, costly reagents and sophisticated laboratory infrastructure.

The research was led by Professor Ayelet David and colleagues at Ben-Gurion University, with international collaboration involving researchers associated with Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School.

Further improvements in sensitivity, the detection of additional biomarkers and clinical validation will be necessary before the technology can be considered a practical diagnostic test.

The platform could potentially be adapted to detect biomarkers associated with other cardiovascular and inflammatory diseases.

The research demonstrates Israel's ability to combine advanced scientific expertise with solutions intended for economically disadvantaged communities.

Israeli medical innovation continues to contribute to international efforts to improve healthcare, expand access to diagnosis and reduce preventable disease.

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> *"Ben-Gurion University researchers engineered an experimental sensor that could help detect rheumatic heart disease in the world's poorest communities."*

Israel's remarkable contribution to global medicine continues to demonstrate how scientific innovation can improve lives far beyond the country's borders. In another promising development, researchers at Ben-Gurion University (https://innovascope.org/israeli-researchers-create-light-activated-plastic-that-stays-liquid-until-needed/) of the Negev have engineered an experimental diagnostic sensor that could eventually help detect inflammatory biomarkers associated with rheumatic heart disease, a serious and largely preventable condition that disproportionately affects children and young adults in some of the world's poorest communities. By combining advanced molecular engineering with a focus on accessibility and affordability, Israeli scientists (https://innovascope.org/israeli-science-how-breakthrough-research-from-jerusalem-is-improving-lives-worldwide/) are developing technology that could help address one of the most persistent inequalities in global healthcare: the inability of millions of people to obtain timely diagnosis and treatment for conditions that are manageable when identified early.

Rheumatic heart disease is particularly devastating because it can develop following an ordinary bacterial throat infection. When certain streptococcal infections are not adequately treated, some patients develop acute rheumatic fever, an inflammatory condition that can damage the heart valves and lead to lifelong complications, heart failure and premature death. Although antibiotics and appropriate medical care can prevent many of these outcomes, the disease remains a major health challenge in regions where specialized diagnostic equipment, trained medical personnel and reliable laboratory facilities are unavailable. The consequences are especially severe for families living in rural communities and economically disadvantaged areas, where obtaining a diagnosis may require traveling considerable distances or paying for services beyond their financial means.

The Israeli breakthrough seeks to address this problem through an innovative synthetic sensor designed to detect E-selectin, a molecule associated with inflammatory processes. Unlike conventional diagnostic approaches that rely on biological antibodies, the technology uses engineered polymers, specialized peptides and fluorescent dyes to identify the presence of the target molecule. The approach could eventually reduce dependence on expensive laboratory materials and temperature-controlled storage, making diagnostic testing more accessible in environments where medical infrastructure is limited. Although further research and clinical validation are necessary before the technology can be used in routine healthcare, the achievement represents an important step toward developing practical diagnostic tools for underserved populations.

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The wider significance of this research lies in its potential. Israel is frequently discussed internationally through the lens of conflict and security, yet its universities, hospitals and research institutions continue developing technologies intended to address challenges affecting humanity as a whole. From medical devices and pharmaceutical research to water management, agricultural innovation and advanced diagnostics, Israeli scientists have repeatedly demonstrated how a relatively small country can make an extraordinary contribution to global progress. This latest development is another example of the scientific creativity, international cooperation and commitment to practical problem-solving that have made Israel an important center of medical innovation.

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A Preventable Disease That Continues to Claim Lives

Rheumatic heart disease remains one of the most troubling examples of inequality in global healthcare because many of its most serious consequences can be prevented through relatively straightforward medical interventions. The disease develops when acute rheumatic fever causes inflammation and damage to the heart valves, often following an inadequately treated infection with group A streptococcal bacteria. Over time, repeated inflammation can lead to scarring and permanent deterioration of the valves, making it increasingly difficult for the heart to function normally. Patients may develop fatigue, breathing difficulties, abnormal heart rhythms and eventually severe cardiac complications requiring specialized treatment or surgery. For children and young adults, the consequences can be particularly devastating, affecting education, employment opportunities, family life and long-term health.

The disease is especially prevalent in communities where poverty, overcrowded living conditions and limited access to healthcare increase the risk of untreated infections and delayed diagnosis. In many parts of Africa, Asia and the Pacific, healthcare systems struggle to provide the specialist examinations and continuing treatment needed to identify and manage rheumatic heart disease effectively. Echocardiography, an important method of diagnosing heart-valve damage, requires equipment and trained personnel that may not be readily available in remote communities. As a result, patients can remain undiagnosed until the disease has progressed considerably, reducing the effectiveness of treatment and increasing the likelihood of permanent complications.

The tragedy is that timely medical care can make an enormous difference. Early treatment of streptococcal infections, appropriate management of acute rheumatic fever and continuing preventive antibiotic treatment for patients at risk of recurrence can substantially reduce the burden of disease. Yet these interventions depend upon the ability of healthcare providers to identify patients and ensure that they receive appropriate care. The development of more accessible diagnostic technologies could therefore contribute to a broader effort to prevent avoidable suffering, particularly if they can help clinicians identify patients who require further investigation before serious heart damage develops.

Israeli Scientists Develop an Innovative Diagnostic Approach

Researchers at Ben-Gurion University have approached the challenge through molecular engineering, developing a synthetic sensor that produces a measurable fluorescent signal when it interacts with a specific biological target. The technology incorporates a polymer structure, specialized peptide components and near-infrared fluorescent dyes. Under its initial configuration, the fluorescent components are positioned in a way that suppresses their signal. When the sensor encounters E-selectin, the molecular arrangement changes, allowing fluorescence to increase and providing an optical indication of the target molecule's presence. This approach offers a potentially useful method of detecting biomarkers without depending upon conventional antibody-based laboratory techniques.

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E-selectin is associated with inflammatory processes involving the cells that line blood vessels and may provide useful information about cardiovascular inflammation. The Israeli researchers demonstrated that their sensor could detect and measure this molecule in complex serum samples, an important

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experimental achievement because biological fluids contain numerous substances that can interfere with accurate measurements. The ability to produce a measurable response in such samples provides a foundation for further work toward more sensitive and clinically useful diagnostic systems.

The innovation is particularly significant because of its synthetic design. Conventional diagnostic tests often use antibodies that recognize particular biological targets, but these materials can be expensive to produce and may require carefully controlled storage conditions. By developing a platform based on synthetic polymers and peptides, the researchers are exploring a method that could eventually offer greater stability and simplify production. Such advantages would be especially valuable in healthcare environments where maintaining refrigeration and sophisticated laboratory infrastructure is difficult.

The technology remains at an experimental stage, and detecting E-selectin alone is not sufficient to diagnose rheumatic heart disease because the molecule is not unique to that condition. Further research will be necessary to determine how the platform can detect additional biomarkers, achieve the sensitivity required for clinical use and distinguish patients with rheumatic heart disease from those with other inflammatory or cardiovascular conditions. Nevertheless, the successful laboratory demonstration represents a promising step toward a new generation of diagnostic technologies.

Making Advanced Medicine Accessible to the World's Poorest Communities

One of the greatest challenges in global healthcare is not necessarily the absence of effective medical knowledge, but the inability to deliver that knowledge and the technologies associated with it to the people who need them most. Wealthy countries possess sophisticated hospitals, specialist physicians, diagnostic laboratories and extensive healthcare infrastructure, while many poorer communities struggle to provide basic services. This inequality means that diseases which can be diagnosed and treated relatively effectively in developed healthcare systems may continue to cause serious illness and premature death elsewhere. Rheumatic heart disease is a particularly compelling example because early intervention can prevent substantial suffering, yet the diagnostic equipment needed to identify affected patients may be unavailable in the communities where the disease is most prevalent.

The Israeli research offers a potentially important response to this problem. By seeking to develop a diagnostic system that is less dependent on expensive biological reagents and refrigeration, the scientists are addressing practical barriers that prevent modern testing from reaching remote clinics and underserved populations. If the technology can be successfully developed into an affordable, portable and clinically reliable device, it could eventually enable healthcare providers to identify patients who require further medical evaluation without relying exclusively on distant specialist facilities. Such an achievement would not replace established diagnostic methods, but it could improve access to screening and support earlier intervention in communities where medical resources are limited.

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The humanitarian importance of this approach extends beyond the immediate benefits of diagnosing one disease. Earlier detection can help reduce the need for expensive treatment, prevent avoidable complications and improve the quality of life of patients and their families. In communities where serious illness can impose enormous financial burdens, preventing advanced heart disease can also protect

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household incomes and reduce pressure on already overstretched healthcare systems. The potential value of the Israeli technology therefore lies in its ability to contribute to a broader shift toward healthcare that is more accessible, preventive and equitable.

Israel's Scientific Excellence Is a Global Asset

Israel has established itself as an important international center for medical research and technological innovation, combining strong academic institutions, entrepreneurial expertise and extensive collaboration with leading research organizations around the world. Its scientists have contributed to advances in medical imaging, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, digital health, rehabilitation technologies and other fields that have improved diagnosis and treatment. The development of the experimental sensor at Ben-Gurion University reflects the same tradition of combining sophisticated scientific research with practical applications that address real medical needs.

The significance of Israel's scientific achievements is particularly striking given the country's size and the challenges it faces. Despite its relatively small population and the substantial resources devoted to national security, Israel has developed universities, research institutions and technology companies capable of competing and collaborating internationally. Its innovation ecosystem encourages cooperation among scientists, engineers, physicians and entrepreneurs, helping transform academic discoveries into technologies that may eventually be used in hospitals, clinics and communities around the world. This ability to connect scientific knowledge with practical problem-solving has become one of Israel's most important contributions to international development.

The work at Ben-Gurion University also demonstrates that Israeli innovation (https://innovascope.org/israels-innovation-security-leadership-an-established-reality/) is not limited to commercially attractive technologies designed for wealthy markets. Researchers are addressing diseases that disproportionately affect disadvantaged populations and developing approaches that could reduce barriers to healthcare. This humanitarian dimension is especially important because it shows how scientific excellence can serve a purpose beyond national economic growth. The benefits of medical innovation can cross political, religious and geographical boundaries, reaching patients who may have no direct relationship with Israel but whose lives could nevertheless be improved by discoveries made in its laboratories.

International Cooperation That Benefits Humanity

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The collaboration between Ben-Gurion University researchers and medical experts associated with Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School demonstrates the importance of international scientific partnerships. Modern medical challenges are often too complex to be addressed effectively by a single discipline or institution. Developing a new diagnostic technology requires expertise in chemistry, molecular biology, engineering, cardiovascular medicine and clinical research, and cooperation among specialists can accelerate progress by bringing together complementary knowledge and experience. Such partnerships also help ensure that promising laboratory discoveries are evaluated within a broader medical context and developed with an understanding of the needs of patients and healthcare providers.

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The Israeli-American research relationship is especially valuable because both countries possess advanced scientific institutions and a strong tradition of medical innovation. Collaboration allows researchers to exchange ideas, share expertise and pursue projects that may produce benefits far beyond the participating institutions. The development of diagnostic technologies for underserved communities is an example of how this cooperation can contribute to global health rather than serving only the immediate interests of the countries involved. When researchers combine their expertise to address preventable diseases affecting vulnerable populations, scientific cooperation becomes a practical expression of international humanitarian responsibility.

The broader significance of such partnerships is that medical science provides opportunities for constructive cooperation even in a world marked by political divisions. Diseases do not distinguish between nationalities, religions or political identities, and the benefits of effective treatment can be shared across borders. An Israeli-developed diagnostic platform that eventually helps identify disease in a rural clinic in Africa or Asia would represent a contribution to human welfare that transcends the political circumstances in which the technology was created.

The Potential to Transform Diagnostics Beyond Heart Disease

Although the immediate focus of the research is the detection of E-selectin and its possible relevance to rheumatic heart disease, the underlying technology may have applications in other areas of medicine. The synthetic polymer platform has been designed in a way that allows researchers to modify the targeting components, potentially enabling the detection of additional biological molecules. This flexibility could support future development of diagnostic tools for other cardiovascular and inflammatory conditions, particularly where existing tests are expensive, complicated or difficult to deploy outside specialized laboratories.

The ability to adapt a common diagnostic platform to different biomarkers could become particularly important in healthcare systems facing shortages of equipment and trained personnel. Rather than requiring entirely separate technologies for every disease, a modular approach may eventually allow researchers to develop related tests using shared scientific principles and components. Such a system could simplify development and manufacturing while creating opportunities for broader diagnostic applications. These possibilities remain subject to further research, and each new application would require its own validation, but they demonstrate why the scientific value of the Israeli discovery may extend beyond the original medical challenge.

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The development also reflects a wider trend toward more accessible and personalized diagnostics. Advances in molecular engineering, optical sensing and biomarker research are creating opportunities to identify biological changes earlier and with greater precision. If these technologies can be made affordable and practical for use outside major hospitals, they could contribute to a significant expansion of preventive healthcare. The Israeli research provides an early example of how this scientific direction might eventually benefit communities that have historically lacked access to sophisticated medical testing.

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Conclusion: Israeli Innovation Is Helping Build a Healthier World

The development of an experimental synthetic sensor for inflammatory biomarkers associated with rheumatic heart disease is another promising example of Israel's contribution to global medical research. By combining advanced molecular engineering with a focus on affordability and accessibility, scientists at Ben-Gurion University have created a platform that could eventually help address a serious healthcare challenge affecting some of the world's most vulnerable populations. Although the technology requires further refinement, additional biomarker development and clinical validation before it can be used in routine medical practice, its potential demonstrates how scientific creativity can open new possibilities for preventing disease and improving lives.

The importance of this research lies in the problem it seeks to solve. Rheumatic heart disease continues to cause suffering and premature death despite the availability of medical interventions capable of preventing many of its worst consequences. The challenge is ensuring that patients can be identified early enough to benefit from appropriate care. A diagnostic technology that reduces dependence on expensive laboratory infrastructure could eventually help healthcare providers reach communities where specialized testing has traditionally been unavailable, supporting earlier diagnosis and more effective treatment.

The wider lesson is that Israel's scientific achievements have significance far beyond its national borders. In universities, hospitals and research laboratories across the country, scientists are developing technologies that address challenges shared by humanity as a whole. Their work contributes to international progress in medicine, agriculture, water management and other fields, demonstrating that innovation can be a powerful instrument of humanitarian development.

The true value of medical innovation is measured not only by the sophistication of the technology but by its ability to improve the lives of people who need it most. The Israeli researchers working on this diagnostic platform are pursuing precisely that objective, seeking to bring advanced scientific capabilities closer to patients who may otherwise remain beyond the reach of modern healthcare. Israel's contribution to the world is therefore not confined to its achievements in technology or economic development. It is also reflected in the practical humanitarian benefits that its research may produce, including the possibility of preventing avoidable illness, reducing suffering and expanding access to essential medical services.

A small sensor developed in an Israeli laboratory could one day help protect the hearts of children living thousands of kilometers away. That is the extraordinary promise of Israeli innovation: transforming scientific knowledge into solutions that cross borders, overcome inequalities and create opportunities for healthier lives. The research at Ben-Gurion University is still at an early stage, but its ambition is already significant. It reflects the determination of Israeli scientists to use their expertise not only to advance scientific understanding but also to address some of the world's most pressing medical challenges. **In a world too often defined by division and conflict, Israeli science continues to demonstrate the extraordinary power of innovation to unite people around a shared purpose: protecting human life and building a healthier future for all.**

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1. https://thejewishedition.com/news/israel/2026/11/21/israeli-scientists-engineer-diagnostic-tool-to-combat-rheumatic-heart-disease/ (https://thejewishedition.com/news/israel/2026/11/21/israeli-scientists-engineer-diagnostic-tool-to-combat-rheumatic-heart-disease/) ↑
2. https://24jerusalem.com/en/rheumatic-heart-disease-diagnosis-new-blood-test-probe/ (https://24jerusalem.com/en/rheumatic-heart-disease-diagnosis-new-blood-test-probe/) ↑
3. https://www.eurekalert.org/news-releases/1151444 (https://www.eurekalert.org/news-releases/1151444) ↑

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Mark Ginsberg writes for Innovascope. Mark is an Israel-based writer and commentator on technology and artificial intelligence, with over two decades of firsthand perspective on the country's innovation economy. Originally from South Florida and now based in Efrat, he analyzes the growth of Israel's tech ecosystem and the broader implications of AI on business, policy, and society.

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HAMAS & GAZA (HTTPS://COGNITURA.ORG/HAMAS-GAZA/) Published: November 23, 2026 •

Estimated Reading Time: 29 min

The Education of Hatred: How Hamas Prepared a Generation for October 7 and Why Gaza Cannot Be Rebuilt Without Ending Indoctrination

> Hamas spent years teaching a generation to hate. Gaza cannot be rebuilt or October 7 prevented again without dismantling that system of indoctrination.



EXECUTIVE KEY FINDINGS & INVESTIGATIVE TAKEAWAYS

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(https://cognitura.org/)

1 Documents recovered by the IDF and examined in a November 2026 study describe a structured system of ideological and religious education within Hamas's military wing.

2 Hamas reportedly used specialized institutions, religious committees, instructors and examinations to ensure that operatives absorbed its teachings.

3 A 2021 collection of religious rulings circulated within Hamas reportedly reproduced a ruling treating Jews broadly as combatants, undermining the distinction between civilians and military personnel.

4 Other recovered materials addressed the treatment of captives and circumstances in which killing prisoners could be permitted.

5 The documents suggest that ideological indoctrination was an organized component of Hamas's military structure rather than merely informal propaganda.

6 Recovered operational materials and attack plans provide further evidence that the deliberate targeting of civilians was contemplated within elements of Hamas's preparations.

7 The available materials are not entirely uniform, and some reportedly prohibit abuses such as the desecration of bodies, making careful analysis of individual documents essential.

8 Hamas's ideological training may help explain its organizational resilience despite significant military losses and the destruction of infrastructure.

9 Disarming Hamas without dismantling the institutions that promote antisemitism and justify violence against civilians risks allowing extremist recruitment to continue.

10 Gaza's reconstruction must include independent educational oversight, protection for teachers and students, and the removal of material that glorifies terrorism or dehumanizes Jews.

11 Palestinian children deserve an education that equips them for productive, peaceful lives rather than preparing them for another generation of conflict.

12 A durable peace requires confronting both the military capabilities of terrorist organizations and the ideological systems that legitimize attacks against civilians.

The October 7 massacre did not begin when thousands of Hamas-led terrorists crossed the border into southern Israel. Its ideological foundations were laid over many years, through a systematic process of indoctrination that transformed antisemitism, religious extremism and the glorification of violence into essential elements of Hamas’s organizational identity. The murder of Israeli civilians, the abduction of hostages and the deliberate targeting of Jewish communities were not simply the actions of armed men

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operating without moral or ideological direction. They took place within a movement whose leadership had developed an extensive system of religious instruction, military education and internal discipline designed to shape how its members understood their enemies, their obligations and the supposed religious legitimacy of violence. Newly examined documents recovered by the Israel Defense Forces from Gaza provide disturbing evidence of this process, revealing that Hamas's military wing operated a structured educational apparatus in which religious rulings, memorization, examinations and ideological instruction were integrated into the training of its operatives. The implications extend far beyond understanding the atrocities of October 7. They raise a fundamental question about the future of Gaza and the prospects for genuine peace: how can a society emerge from decades of conflict if an armed organization continues teaching its members that Jewish civilians are legitimate targets and that violence against them is a sacred obligation?

The significance of these findings lies in their systematic nature. The recovered materials reportedly include religious instruction booklets, disciplinary rules, formal curricula and rulings concerning the treatment of Jews and captives. They describe an organization that did not leave ideological commitment to chance but sought to cultivate it through repeated instruction, supervision and examination. Hamas operatives were expected to memorize religious passages, attend classes, fulfill prescribed religious obligations and demonstrate familiarity with teachings selected by the organization's military and religious authorities. Commanders were responsible not only for military training but also for ensuring that their subordinates absorbed the ideological content being taught. This was not an occasional speech delivered before an operation or an inflammatory statement intended for public consumption. It was an institutionalized system intended to shape the worldview of armed personnel and reinforce the organization's cohesion, discipline and willingness to continue fighting.

Among the most disturbing materials are religious rulings reportedly circulated within Hamas's military apparatus that erase the distinction between Israeli combatants and civilians. A 2021 collection of rulings issued by Hamas's Shura Council in Gaza reproduced a religious opinion attributed to Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, an influential figure associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, asserting that Jews generally could be treated as combatants, with limited exceptions. Other recovered materials reportedly addressed the circumstances in which captives could be killed, including during attempted rescue operations. These teachings are profoundly significant because the deliberate targeting of civilians and the murder of captives are prohibited under international humanitarian law. The existence of such rulings does not establish that every Hamas member followed them or that every atrocity committed on October 7 resulted directly from a particular lesson. Nevertheless, they provide important evidence of an ideological environment in which fundamental protections for civilians were undermined and violence against Jews could be presented as religiously permissible.

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The international community has devoted considerable attention to the military dimensions of Hamas's threat, including its rockets, tunnels, weapons stockpiles and command structures. These are legitimate and urgent security concerns, particularly after the organization demonstrated its capacity to carry out the deadliest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust. Yet military capabilities are only one part of the problem. Weapons can be confiscated, tunnels can be destroyed and command structures can be dismantled, but an organization whose members have been systematically taught to regard the destruction of their adversaries as a religious duty may retain the ideological foundations necessary to rebuild. If Gaza's future reconstruction focuses exclusively on infrastructure, economic development and the physical disarmament of Hamas while neglecting the educational and ideological systems that sustain it, the conditions for another generation of violence may remain intact. The most important question facing Gaza's future may therefore be not only who controls its borders or administers its institutions, but who shapes the beliefs of the next generation.

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Key Takeaways

- Documents recovered by the IDF and examined in a November 2026 study describe a structured system[1] of ideological and religious education within Hamas's military wing.
- Hamas reportedly used specialized institutions, religious[2] committees, instructors and examinations to ensure that operatives absorbed its teachings.

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- A 2021 collection of religious rulings[3] circulated within Hamas reportedly reproduced a ruling treating Jews broadly as combatants, undermining the distinction between civilians and military personnel.
- Other recovered materials addressed the treatment of captives and circumstances in which killing prisoners could be permitted.
- The documents suggest that ideological indoctrination was an organized component of Hamas's (https://cognitura.org/disinformation/the-machinery-of-anti-israel-hatred-how-indoctrination-propaganda-and-extremism-threaten-israel-and-the-west/)military structure rather than merely informal propaganda.
- Recovered operational materials and attack plans provide further evidence that the deliberate targeting of civilians was contemplated within elements of Hamas's preparations.
- The available materials are not entirely uniform, and some reportedly prohibit abuses such as the desecration of bodies, making careful analysis of individual documents essential.
- Hamas's ideological (https://cognitura.org/hamas-gaza/hamas-was-prepared-to-terrorize-its-own-people-the-gaza-document-that-exposes-the-cruelty-behind-the-human-shields-strategy/)training may help explain its organizational resilience despite significant military losses and the destruction of infrastructure.
- Disarming Hamas without dismantling the institutions that promote antisemitism and justify violence against civilians risks allowing extremist recruitment to continue.
- Gaza's reconstruction (https://cognitura.org/hamas-gaza/hamas-was-never-just-israels-problem-the-west-may-see-the-next-october-7-massacre/)must include independent educational oversight, protection for teachers and students, and the removal of material that glorifies terrorism or dehumanizes Jews.
- Palestinian children deserve an education that equips them for productive, peaceful lives rather than preparing them for another generation of conflict.
- A durable peace requires confronting both the military capabilities of terrorist organizations and the ideological systems that legitimize attacks against civilians.

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The Hidden Educational System Behind Hamas's Military Wing

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The recovered documents reveal an organizational structure in which ideological education was embedded within the everyday functioning of Hamas's armed forces. Among the materials reportedly seized in Gaza were small booklets bearing the emblems of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, containing tables through which operatives recorded their religious activities. These included daily prayers, memorization of selected Quranic passages, attendance at religious instruction and visits to the families of individuals described by the organization as martyrs. Additional materials established disciplinary measures for failures to comply with prescribed religious obligations, including arriving late to prayers or falling asleep during them. Although some of these activities are ordinary expressions of religious observance and are not inherently extremist, their institutional role within Hamas's military organization is important. They demonstrate how the movement sought to integrate religious identity, ideological instruction and military discipline into a single framework of organizational loyalty.

The materials reportedly originated from standing bodies within the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, including institutions responsible for military recruitment, religious rulings and curriculum development. Operatives were expected to study assigned texts at regular intervals, often in connection with daily prayers, while commanders were responsible for teaching the material and verifying that it had been learned. The instruction was reinforced through examinations and formal assessments, including at the Abdullah Azzam military academy in Gaza City, where religious law reportedly formed part of the certification requirements for cadets. This structure suggests that Hamas regarded ideological education as an essential component of military preparation, comparable in organizational importance to weapons training, tactical instruction and operational discipline.

The distinction matters because terrorism is often understood primarily through its immediate manifestations: attacks, explosions, hostage-taking and armed confrontation. Yet organizations capable of sustaining prolonged campaigns of violence frequently depend upon institutions that recruit, socialize and motivate their members. The development of a shared ideological worldview can help reinforce obedience, justify sacrifices and sustain organizational cohesion during periods of military defeat. Hamas's reported educational system appears designed to serve precisely these functions, ensuring that operatives did not simply receive instructions about how to fight but also absorbed a framework explaining why their actions were supposedly justified. Understanding that framework is essential to explaining how the organization maintained its identity and military objectives despite the enormous consequences of its decisions for both Israelis and Palestinians.

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When Antisemitism Becomes a Religious Instruction

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The most alarming element of the recovered materials concerns the treatment of Jews and Israeli civilians within religious rulings circulated by Hamas's institutions. According to the findings, a 2021 volume issued by Hamas's Shura Council in Gaza reproduced a religious opinion attributed to Yusuf al-Qaradawi that broadly classified Jews as combatants, with narrow exceptions. The significance of this teaching is that it challenges one of the most fundamental principles of the laws of armed conflict: the distinction between those who participate directly in hostilities and civilians who must not be deliberately targeted. By presenting an entire religious or national community as a legitimate object of violence, such a doctrine creates an ideological justification for attacks that international humanitarian law unequivocally prohibits.

This is not a minor theological disagreement or an ordinary expression of political hostility. Opposition to Israeli government policies, criticism of military operations and advocacy for Palestinian national rights are legitimate forms of political expression that do not require antisemitism. A doctrine that treats Jewish identity itself as sufficient grounds for targeting individuals crosses an entirely different boundary. It transforms the identity of the victim into the justification for violence and removes the moral distinction between an armed soldier and an unarmed civilian. When such ideas are taught within a military organization, they can help create an environment in which atrocities against civilians are not merely tolerated but understood as consistent with the organization's ideological objectives.

It is essential to distinguish this extremist interpretation from Islam as a religion and from the beliefs of Muslims generally. Islamic scholarship encompasses diverse traditions and interpretations, and many Muslim religious authorities reject terrorism and the deliberate killing of civilians. Hamas's use of religious language to justify violence is therefore a political and ideological choice made by an armed organization, not an inevitable expression of Muslim faith. The responsibility for promoting such teachings lies with the institutions and leaders who circulate them. This distinction is particularly important because confronting extremist indoctrination requires identifying the specific doctrines and organizations responsible rather than treating entire religious communities as collectively accountable.

The reported rulings also help explain why antisemitism cannot be dismissed as incidental rhetoric within Hamas's worldview. The organization's 1988 founding charter contained explicitly anti-Jewish conspiracy theories and language calling for Israel's destruction, while later political documents adopted formulations that distinguished Jews as a religious community from Zionists as political adversaries. The recovered military materials raise serious questions about how far that distinction was

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reflected in internal operational doctrine. Public statements designed for international audiences may emphasize political objectives, but internal instructional materials can provide a different perspective on the beliefs and conduct that an organization seeks to cultivate among its members.

The Treatment of Hostages Reveals the Moral Consequences of Indoctrination

Another disturbing element of the recovered documents concerns religious rulings governing the treatment of captives. A 2023 collection reportedly produced by the military wing's religious committee discussed circumstances in which prisoners could be kept alive for potential exchanges or killed under particular conditions. One ruling allegedly permitted killing a captive during an attempted rescue, while another addressed the killing of a wounded enemy prisoner if a commander determined that doing so served the interests of the organization. Such teachings are especially troubling in light of the hostage-taking carried out on October 7, when Hamas-led attackers abducted 251 people from Israel and took them into Gaza. The deliberate killing of prisoners and hostages is prohibited under international humanitarian law, and the existence of religious rulings purporting to authorize such acts raises serious questions about the instructions and expectations communicated to armed personnel.

The distinction between lawful detention during armed conflict and hostage-taking is fundamental. International humanitarian law establishes protections for individuals who are no longer participating in hostilities, including those who have surrendered, been wounded or been captured. Civilians must not be seized to compel governments or other parties to act, and prisoners cannot be executed simply because their captors believe that doing so serves a strategic purpose. The reported Hamas rulings appear to subordinate these protections to organizational interests, allowing commanders to interpret the treatment of captives through a framework of military expediency and religious authorization rather than universally recognized humanitarian obligations.

The consequences of such a worldview extend beyond individual incidents. When an armed organization teaches that captives may be treated as instruments of political leverage or killed under circumstances determined by commanders, it undermines the moral and legal protections intended to restrain warfare. The hostage crisis following October 7 demonstrated the profound human suffering associated with the deliberate abduction of civilians, including the anguish experienced by families who waited for information about loved ones held in Gaza. Any serious effort to prevent future atrocities must therefore examine not only the weapons and operational plans of armed groups but also the doctrines through which their members are taught to understand the treatment of civilians and prisoners.

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October 7 Was the Result of Preparation, Not Spontaneous Violence

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The ideological materials must be understood alongside evidence concerning Hamas's operational preparations for October 7. Recovered attack plans, intelligence documents and operational instructions have demonstrated that elements of the assault were carefully planned and that civilian locations were included among intended targets. Documents recovered from attackers and reported in October 2023 included plans for assaults on locations such as elementary schools and a youth center in Kibbutz Sa'ad. Additional material attributed to senior Hamas leadership reportedly contained instructions concerning the killing of civilians and the recording of attacks. These accounts require careful attention to the provenance and authentication of individual documents, but the wider evidence establishes that October 7 was a coordinated assault involving substantial preparation rather than a spontaneous eruption of violence.

The relationship between ideological education and operational conduct is particularly important. Religious rulings that diminish the distinction between civilians and combatants may help create an environment in which attacks on civilian communities become easier to justify, while operational instructions translate organizational objectives into specific actions. It would be overly simplistic to claim that every atrocity committed on October 7 resulted directly from a particular religious text, and the recovered literature reportedly contains some rulings that prohibit certain abuses. Nevertheless, the combination of extremist teachings, operational planning and documented attacks against civilians raises profound concerns about the role of institutional indoctrination in preparing and legitimizing violence.

The atrocities committed on October 7 cannot be understood solely as a failure of Israeli border security or intelligence assessment, although those failures were significant. They also reflected the decisions of an organization that had invested substantial resources in developing military capabilities, preparing attacks and cultivating an ideological framework that justified extreme violence. Any future security arrangement that addresses only the physical infrastructure of Hamas while neglecting these ideological foundations risks misunderstanding the nature of the threat that Israel confronted.

Why Military Defeat Alone Cannot Eliminate Hamas

Military operations can destroy weapons stockpiles, dismantle tunnel networks, eliminate command facilities and reduce an armed organization's capacity to conduct attacks. These achievements can be essential to protecting civilian populations and preventing further violence. Yet the history of extremist

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movements demonstrates that military pressure alone does not necessarily eliminate the beliefs, networks and institutions that sustain them. Organizations may lose territory and equipment while retaining ideological influence, recruitment networks and the ability to rebuild over time. Hamas's reported system of ideological education is therefore relevant not only to understanding its past conduct but also to assessing the conditions under which it might regenerate its military capabilities.

The recovered materials suggest that Hamas regarded ideological commitment as a central source of organizational resilience. Religious instruction, internal discipline and a shared sense of mission can help sustain loyalty even when an organization suffers substantial losses. This is particularly important in an environment where military structures have been damaged and leaders have been killed, because ideological networks may continue operating through informal relationships, religious institutions and community organizations. If the next generation is exposed to teachings that glorify violence against Jews or portray the destruction of Israel as a sacred duty, the potential for renewed recruitment may remain even after significant military setbacks.

This does not mean that religious education itself is a threat or that Palestinian religious institutions should be treated as inherently suspect. The issue is the specific promotion of antisemitism, the glorification of terrorism and the justification of attacks against civilians. A credible approach to preventing renewed extremism must distinguish legitimate religious instruction and political expression from materials that encourage violence or dehumanize entire communities. Such distinctions are necessary both to protect individual freedoms and to ensure that efforts to counter indoctrination are effective rather than indiscriminate.

The broader strategic lesson is that disarmament and educational reform must be understood as complementary objectives. Removing weapons without addressing the ideological justification for using them may produce only temporary security improvements, while attempting educational reform without credible security arrangements may leave teachers, students and institutions vulnerable to intimidation by armed groups. A sustainable approach requires both physical security and institutions capable of promoting peaceful civic life.

Gaza's Reconstruction Must Include the Reconstruction of Education

The international discussion surrounding Gaza's future has understandably concentrated on the enormous physical challenges of reconstruction. Homes, roads, hospitals, schools, electricity networks, water systems and other essential infrastructure have suffered extensive damage, while displaced

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families require immediate assistance and long-term support. Restoring these services is indispensable to improving civilian welfare and creating the conditions for economic recovery. Yet reconstruction cannot be measured solely by the number of buildings repaired or the amount of money committed by international donors. The institutions operating inside those buildings, particularly schools and educational organizations, will play a decisive role in determining whether the next generation grows up with opportunities for peaceful development or remains vulnerable to recruitment by extremist movements.

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Education is especially important because it shapes how children understand their own identity, their neighbors and the possibilities available to them. A school system that teaches mathematics, science, languages, history and critical thinking can provide young people with the knowledge and skills needed to participate in a modern economy and build meaningful lives. A system that glorifies violence, celebrates attacks against civilians or portrays an entire people as legitimate targets can have the opposite effect, reinforcing hostility and normalizing the idea that political objectives should be pursued through terrorism. The challenge for Gaza's reconstruction is therefore not simply to reopen classrooms but to ensure that the education offered within them supports the dignity, safety and future opportunities of Palestinian children.

This requires transparent curriculum development, independent review of educational materials and meaningful protections for teachers and students. International donors should be able to verify that the institutions they support are not promoting antisemitism or encouraging attacks against civilians. At the same time, educational oversight must respect Palestinian identity, history, language and legitimate national aspirations. A curriculum can teach Palestinian history and political rights without presenting the murder of Israelis as heroic, just as Israeli education should encourage an understanding of Palestinian humanity and the importance of civilian protection. The objective should not be to erase national identity or impose political conformity, but to establish educational standards that reject dehumanization and promote the possibility of peaceful coexistence.

The practical implementation of such reforms will be difficult. Teachers may face pressure from armed organizations, educational institutions may lack resources and families may be struggling with trauma, displacement and economic insecurity. Reform therefore requires sustained international support rather than a short-term administrative intervention. Investment in teacher training, educational materials, psychological services, school infrastructure and independent monitoring will be necessary to create an environment in which children can learn without being exposed to extremist recruitment. The long-term success of reconstruction may depend as much upon these efforts as upon the rebuilding of physical infrastructure.

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International Funding Must Not Rebuild the Machinery of Indoctrination

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The international community is likely to play a substantial role in financing Gaza's recovery, and such assistance is essential given the scale of destruction and humanitarian need. However, financial support must be accompanied by safeguards ensuring that resources intended for civilian welfare are not diverted to armed organizations or institutions that promote violence. The reported existence of a structured Hamas educational apparatus makes this requirement particularly important. If reconstruction funds support schools, religious institutions or media organizations that remain under the effective control of an armed movement committed to attacks against civilians, international assistance could inadvertently contribute to preserving the ideological networks that sustain future violence.

Donor oversight should therefore extend beyond financial accounting to the educational and institutional environment in which assistance is delivered. Monitoring the use of funds is necessary, but it is also important to examine whether publicly supported institutions promote antisemitism, glorify terrorism or encourage the deliberate targeting of civilians. Such assessments should be conducted through transparent, evidence-based procedures rather than broad political accusations, with clear standards and opportunities for independent review. The objective should be to protect humanitarian assistance while ensuring that international resources contribute to institutions capable of supporting peaceful development.

This approach must also recognize the importance of maintaining essential services. Suspending educational or humanitarian assistance indiscriminately could harm Palestinian children and families while creating conditions that extremist organizations might exploit. The challenge is to design funding mechanisms that preserve access to education, healthcare and social support while preventing armed groups from controlling or manipulating those services. Independent administration, external auditing, teacher protections and transparent curriculum standards can help reduce these risks without abandoning vulnerable communities.

The principle is straightforward: international assistance should help create the conditions for a better future rather than reproduce the institutions that contributed to past violence. Reconstruction should provide Palestinian children with opportunities to develop their talents, pursue education and participate in peaceful economic and civic life. It should not finance the perpetuation of antisemitic indoctrination or the glorification of attacks against civilians.

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The Palestinian Authority's Educational Institutions Also Require Scrutiny

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The challenge of educational reform extends beyond Hamas because the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict has involved longstanding disputes over educational materials, historical narratives and the portrayal of violence. Critics of Palestinian Authority (https://cognitura.org/hamas-gaza/why-handing-gaza-to-the-palestinian-authority-risks-renewed-terror/) curricula have raised concerns about the treatment of Israel, the representation of Jews and the glorification of individuals involved in attacks. These concerns should be examined through systematic review of actual textbooks, classroom materials and official educational policies, with careful distinctions between legitimate expressions of Palestinian national identity and content that promotes hatred or violence. The existence of criticism does not establish that every Palestinian educational institution promotes extremism, but it does underscore the importance of transparent standards and independent evaluation.

The recovered Hamas documents provide a particularly disturbing example because they concern the internal instruction of an armed organization rather than ordinary civilian education. Nevertheless, the broader question of how political and national narratives are communicated to children remains relevant to any future peace process. Educational systems that portray the opposing community exclusively as an enemy can reinforce fear and hostility, making political compromise more difficult. Conversely, curricula that acknowledge historical complexity, teach respect for civilian life and encourage critical thinking can help create conditions in which disagreements are addressed through political institutions rather than violence.

A serious international approach should therefore apply consistent standards to educational materials across the region, including the rejection of antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred and the glorification of terrorism. Such an approach would protect the rights of children while recognizing the legitimacy of different national identities. It would also demonstrate that the objective of educational reform is not political domination but the creation of an environment in which young people can develop without being taught to regard the murder of civilians as an acceptable or admirable act.

The Greatest Responsibility Is to Gaza's Children

The most important beneficiaries of educational reform would be Palestinian children themselves. Young people in Gaza have endured repeated cycles of conflict, displacement, insecurity and disruption to their education, with consequences that may affect their health, development and future opportunities for years to come. They deserve schools that provide safety, stability and the skills

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needed to build productive lives. They deserve teachers who can educate without intimidation, communities that offer alternatives to armed recruitment and institutions that place their welfare above the political objectives of militant organizations. The existence of an extremist educational system within Hamas's military wing makes these needs even more urgent because it illustrates how organized movements can seek to shape the beliefs of their members through repeated instruction and institutional discipline.

A child growing up in Gaza should not be taught that Jewish civilians are legitimate targets or that participation in violence is the highest expression of national commitment. Such teachings deprive young people of the opportunity to imagine a future beyond conflict and expose them to the possibility of recruitment into organizations that place military objectives above civilian welfare. The same principle applies universally: children should not be indoctrinated to hate entire communities because of their religion, ethnicity or nationality. Education should equip them to understand the world, pursue opportunities and participate in society without being encouraged to dehumanize others.

This is why educational reform must be understood as a humanitarian responsibility rather than merely a security demand. Israel has an obvious interest in preventing the emergence of another generation of terrorists capable of carrying out attacks against its civilians. Palestinian families have an equally compelling interest in ensuring that their children can grow up without being drawn into armed movements that expose them to danger and perpetuate instability. These interests need not be contradictory. A future in which Palestinian children receive high-quality education free from extremist indoctrination would benefit both Palestinians and Israelis by reducing the conditions that sustain repeated violence.

The challenge is not simply removing particular passages from textbooks or replacing one set of administrators with another. It is creating institutions that offer young people credible alternatives to violence, including education, employment, civic participation and the ability to pursue personal ambitions. Such changes require time, resources and sustained commitment, but they are essential if reconstruction is to produce more than a temporary improvement in physical conditions.

Israel Cannot Afford Another Failure to Understand Hamas's Ideology

One of the most consequential lessons of October 7 is the danger of interpreting an extremist organization primarily through assumptions about economic incentives, political pragmatism or conventional calculations of deterrence. Before the massacre, Israeli assessments often emphasized

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the belief that Hamas had become increasingly interested in governing Gaza and preserving arrangements that supported economic stability. The organization benefited from periods of relative calm, while measures intended to improve economic conditions were expected to reduce incentives for escalation. Yet Hamas continued preparing for a major assault, demonstrating that its ideological commitments and military ambitions had not necessarily been displaced by the practical responsibilities of governance.

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The recovered educational materials provide additional insight into why such assumptions proved inadequate. An organization that devotes substantial institutional resources to ideological instruction, religious justification and the cultivation of militant discipline cannot be understood solely through the economic interests of the population it governs. Hamas's leadership may have recognized the practical benefits of temporary stability while continuing to regard armed confrontation as central to its identity and long-term objectives. The existence of an organized educational system promoting hostility toward Jews and legitimizing violence helps explain how such commitments could remain embedded within the movement even during periods when its public conduct appeared more pragmatic.

For Israel, the implication is that future security assessments must examine ideology and organizational culture alongside weapons, personnel and operational capabilities. Statements by extremist leaders should not automatically be dismissed as rhetoric intended for domestic audiences, particularly when internal documents indicate that similar ideas are being taught systematically to armed personnel. Intelligence analysis must distinguish between tactical restraint and genuine ideological change, recognizing that an organization may temporarily reduce violence without abandoning its fundamental objectives. The failure to make this distinction before October 7 had devastating consequences, and preventing another massacre requires a more comprehensive understanding of the institutions and beliefs that sustain Hamas.

This lesson also applies to international diplomacy. Agreements concerning disarmament, reconstruction and governance must be assessed not only according to their immediate practical provisions but also according to whether they create conditions for lasting ideological change. A ceasefire can reduce immediate suffering, and reconstruction can restore essential services, but neither automatically eliminates the possibility that armed organizations will rebuild. Durable security requires institutions capable of resisting extremist influence and protecting civilian life, supported by credible monitoring and enforcement arrangements.

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The Battle for Gaza's Future Is Also a Battle Over What Children Are Taught

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The future of Gaza will not be determined solely by military arrangements, diplomatic agreements or reconstruction budgets. It will also depend upon the values, expectations and historical understanding transmitted to the next generation. A society emerging from prolonged conflict faces a choice between perpetuating narratives that normalize violence and developing institutions that allow young people to imagine a future defined by education, employment, family life and political participation. The recovered Hamas materials demonstrate how seriously extremist organizations take the process of shaping beliefs. Through repeated instruction, formal examinations and institutional supervision, Hamas sought to create members whose ideological commitments would reinforce their willingness to fight and remain loyal to the organization. Any serious effort to prevent renewed violence must recognize that education can be used either to sustain conflict or to create the foundations for peace.

The international community should therefore treat educational reform as an essential component of Gaza's long-term recovery. This requires more than symbolic commitments or occasional reviews of schoolbooks. It demands independent institutions capable of establishing educational standards, protecting teachers from coercion and ensuring that publicly supported schools do not glorify terrorism or promote hatred against Jews. It also requires investment in the practical conditions that make education meaningful, including safe classrooms, qualified teachers, psychological support for children affected by war and opportunities for higher education and employment. Without these elements, educational reform risks becoming an administrative exercise disconnected from the realities of daily life. With them, it can become one of the most important investments in the future of Palestinian society.

The importance of this task should not be underestimated. Generations of conflict have created profound mistrust between Israelis and Palestinians, while the trauma of October 7 and the devastation of the subsequent war have intensified fear, grief and anger on both sides. These experiences cannot be erased through a change in curriculum, and peace cannot be manufactured simply by replacing one set of educational materials with another. Nevertheless, education can influence whether children are taught to understand their neighbors as human beings with legitimate rights and fears or as enemies whose suffering is irrelevant. It can determine whether political disagreements are presented as problems to be resolved through negotiation and institutions or as permanent justifications for violence. Over time, these differences can have enormous consequences for the stability of societies and the prospects for coexistence.

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For Israel, the stakes are existential in the most practical sense: the protection of its citizens from future massacres and the prevention of another generation being recruited into organizations committed to attacks against Jewish civilians. For Palestinians, the stakes are equally profound: the possibility of building communities in which children are not drawn into cycles of armed confrontation and where national aspirations can be pursued through institutions that protect rather than endanger civilian life. These objectives should reinforce one another. A Gaza in which extremist indoctrination is rejected and educational opportunity is expanded would be safer for Palestinians and less threatening to Israelis, creating conditions in which political solutions might eventually become more achievable.

Conclusion: Destroying the Tunnels Is Not Enough if the Ideology Survives

The recovered Hamas educational materials provide a disturbing insight into the institutional foundations of the organization responsible for the October 7 massacre. They describe a structured system of religious instruction, ideological training and internal discipline through which Hamas sought to shape the beliefs and conduct of its military personnel. Particularly alarming are the reported rulings that undermine the distinction between Jewish civilians and combatants and purport to justify the killing of captives under certain circumstances. These materials do not explain every individual act committed during the massacre, nor do they establish that every operative received identical instruction. Nevertheless, they provide important evidence of an organizational environment in which antisemitism and the justification of violence were incorporated into formal educational structures. Understanding this environment is essential to explaining how Hamas prepared its members for violence and why its ideological influence may persist even after substantial military losses.

The central lesson is that the threat posed by Hamas cannot be measured exclusively through the number of rockets it possesses, the length of its tunnels or the size of its remaining armed forces. Those capabilities matter enormously, and Israel has a legitimate and urgent interest in preventing their use against its population. But the ability of an extremist organization to regenerate depends upon more than physical infrastructure. It depends upon recruitment, institutional networks, political authority and the beliefs through which violence is justified. If Hamas retains the ability to teach new generations that Jewish civilians are legitimate targets, that terrorism is an expression of religious duty and that the destruction of Israel is a sacred objective, then the ideological foundations for renewed violence may survive even after its military capabilities have been substantially degraded. A reconstruction process that ignores this reality risks producing new buildings and restored infrastructure without addressing the conditions that could lead to another devastating conflict.

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The international community therefore faces a responsibility that extends beyond providing financial assistance and negotiating temporary security arrangements. Reconstruction must be accompanied by credible institutional safeguards, independent educational oversight and the protection of Palestinian teachers, students and families from extremist coercion. Schools must become places where children learn the knowledge and skills necessary for productive lives rather than institutions through which armed organizations cultivate future recruits. Religious freedom and Palestinian national identity must be respected, but neither can justify teaching that Jews may be killed because of their identity or that civilians are legitimate targets of political violence. These are not unreasonable conditions imposed upon a population seeking to rebuild. They are fundamental principles of human dignity and civilian protection that should apply to every society.

The tragedy of October 7 also demonstrates why ideological indoctrination must be taken seriously before it produces violence rather than examined only after atrocities have occurred. The massacre was carried out by individuals operating within an organization that had spent years developing military capabilities, cultivating loyalty and promoting an extremist worldview. The recovered documents suggest that these efforts were connected through institutions that combined religious instruction with military preparation. The consequences were catastrophic for Israeli communities attacked on October 7, while the war that followed inflicted immense suffering upon Palestinians in Gaza. Preventing another such disaster requires acknowledging that extremist ideology can have practical and devastating consequences, particularly when it is reinforced by armed organizations possessing the ability to translate their beliefs into coordinated violence.

The real measure of Gaza's reconstruction will not be how quickly destroyed buildings are replaced, but whether the institutions that emerge provide children with a future fundamentally different from the one Hamas has promoted. A school rebuilt with international funding should not become a place where antisemitism is normalized or attacks against civilians are celebrated. A religious institution restored through humanitarian assistance should not be used to justify terrorism or recruit young people into armed movements. A new political administration should not permit extremist organizations to control education, media or public institutions in ways that perpetuate hostility and violence. These principles should be central to every serious discussion of Gaza's future because they concern not only Israel's security but also the rights and opportunities of Palestinian civilians who deserve to live without being subjected to the destructive ambitions of armed factions.

There is also a wider lesson for democratic governments confronting extremist movements elsewhere. Terrorist organizations are not sustained by weapons alone, and their long-term influence often depends upon the ability to shape collective memory, define enemies and present violence as a moral obligation. Effective responses therefore require an understanding of ideology, recruitment and

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institutional control alongside military and intelligence operations. This does not mean suppressing religious expression or legitimate political dissent. It means recognizing the difference between beliefs protected by freedom of conscience and organized instruction that encourages attacks against civilians. The recovered Hamas materials provide a compelling reason to examine that distinction carefully and to ensure that international reconstruction efforts do not inadvertently strengthen the institutions through which extremist violence is legitimized.

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Israel cannot be expected to accept a future in which the same organization that planned and carried out October 7 retains the ability to educate, recruit and prepare another generation for attacks against its civilians. Nor should Palestinians be expected to accept a future in which their children's opportunities are subordinated to the ideological priorities of an armed movement. A credible path toward stability must address both concerns through arrangements that protect civilian life, prevent renewed militarization and support institutions committed to peaceful development. The dismantling of terrorist infrastructure and the transformation of educational institutions are not competing objectives. They are complementary requirements for ensuring that the enormous sacrifices and suffering of recent years do not lead merely to another cycle of destruction.

The most powerful conclusion from these findings is that the struggle against Hamas's ideology is ultimately a struggle for the future of both peoples. Israeli children deserve to grow up without fearing another massacre, and Palestinian children deserve to grow up without being taught that murdering Jews is an act of heroism or religious devotion. These aspirations are not mutually exclusive. They are the foundations upon which a more secure and humane future must be built. Achieving them will require political courage, sustained international engagement, credible security arrangements and a commitment to educational institutions that value human life over ideological warfare.

Hamas's tunnels can be destroyed, its weapons can be confiscated and its military commanders can be removed, but none of these achievements will provide lasting security if the organization continues to shape the minds of the next generation. The decisive question is whether Gaza's children will inherit a system that prepares them for another October 7 or an education that gives them the knowledge, opportunities and freedom to build a different future.

For Israel, for Palestinians and for the international community, the answer will determine whether reconstruction becomes the foundation of lasting stability or merely an interval before the next war. **Peace will require more than the absence of weapons. It will require the rejection of an ideology that teaches hatred, legitimizes the murder of civilians and treats the destruction of another people as a sacred mission. Until that ideology is confronted, the foundations of future conflict will remain, regardless of how many buildings are rebuilt or how many agreements are signed.**

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Footnotes

1. https://www.algemeiner.com/2026/11/20/hamas-curriculum-behind-oct-7/ (https://www.algemeiner.com/2026/11/20/hamas-curriculum-behind-oct-7/) ↑
2. https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/idf-press-releases-israel-at-war/february-24-pr/documents-reveal-exploitation-of-mosques-in-gaza-for-terrorist-purposes/ (https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/idf-press-releases-israel-at-war/february-24-pr/documents-reveal-exploitation-of-mosques-in-gaza-for-terrorist-purposes/) ↑
3. https://govextra.gov.il/mda/oct7/missing-files/religioius-dispensations-and-command-level-guidance-for-hamas-leaders-in-preparation-for-the-october-7th-attrocities-and-hostage-handling/ (https://cognitura.org/) (https://govextra.gov.il/mda/oct7/missing-files/religioius-dispensations-and-command-level-guidance-for-hamas-leaders-in-preparation-for-the-october-7th-attrocities-and-hostage-handling/) ↑

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HAMAS & GAZA (HTTPS://FACTSIGNAL.ORG/CATEGORY/HAMAS-GAZA)

When Terrorists Are Presented as Aid Workers: Why the IDF's Evidence Matters in Gaza's Information War

PUBLISHED NOVEMBER 23, 2026 UPDATED NOVEMBER 23, 2026



BY MARK GINSBERG (https://factsignal.org/author/msginsberg)

(https://factsignal.org/author/msginsberg)

The battle against terrorism in Gaza is being fought not only on the ground and in the air but also through an increasingly consequential struggle over information, credibility and the international perception of Israel's military operations. Every Israeli strike can become the subject of immediate accusations, often before the identities of those targeted or the circumstances of the operation have been established. The latest example involves three Palestinian Islamic Jihad operatives killed in an Israeli airstrike in northern Gaza on November 21, 2026, who were subsequently described by Palestinian sources as humanitarian aid workers. The Israel Defense Forces has rejected that characterization, identifying the men by name, detailing their alleged roles within the terrorist organization and explaining that they were conducting reconnaissance between positions controlled by armed groups. The incident demonstrates why the identity and activities of individuals targeted during military operations must be examined carefully, rather than allowing an initial description of casualties to become the definitive international narrative.

According to the IDF, the three men were Ahmad Badran Nimer Sawafiri, a compa commander in Palestinian Islamic Jihad's engineering unit; Mustafa Yousef Musta Rifai; and Khaled Od Fathi Na'im. The military stated that the operatives were

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traveling between positions controlled by terrorist organizations and were using a vehicle employed to transport food and logistical supplies to members of Islamic Jihad. The IDF also disclosed that one of the men had previously worked for an international humanitarian organization but had been dismissed after Israeli authorities provided information identifying his terrorist affiliation. These details are central to understanding the Israeli military's explanation of the strike. Rather than an attack directed at humanitarian personnel delivering assistance to civilians, the IDF describes an operation against identified members of an armed terrorist organization engaged in activities connected to its military infrastructure. The identification and operational details are the IDF's account; the publicly available reporting does not independently establish every element of its intelligence assessment.

The wider implications are substantial because humanitarian assistance has become one of the most sensitive and politically contested dimensions of the conflict in Gaza. Food deliveries, relief vehicles, aid organizations and civilian infrastructure are indispensable to the welfare of a population that has endured immense suffering. Their humanitarian character must be protected, and aid workers must be able to perform their duties without becoming targets of violence. Yet those protections also depend upon maintaining a clear distinction between genuine humanitarian activity and the operational activities of armed organizations. When terrorists use vehicles associated with food distribution or logistical support, and when their deaths are subsequently presented as the killing of humanitarian workers, the resulting confusion can damage public confidence, undermine legitimate relief efforts and make it more difficult to assess military operations accurately.

Israel's position is that this incident illustrates a broader problem: terrorist organizations operating in Gaza can exploit the language, infrastructure and appearance of humanitarian activity to obscure their military operations. The fact that a vehicle carries food or other supplies does not, by itself, establish that everyone using it is a humanitarian worker, particularly when the supplies are intended for armed units rather than the civilian population. Equally, previous employment by an aid organization does not establish that an individual was engaged in humanitarian activity at the time of a strike. The relevant questions concern identity, organizational affiliation, current activities and the nature of the military threat. By publicly naming the three men and explaining their alleged operational roles, the IDF has provided a more detailed account than the initial descriptions of the casualties, allowing the competing claims to be assessed against specific information rather than generalized accusations.

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The IDF identified three men killed in a November 21, 2026, airstrike in northern Gaza as members of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, rejecting claims[1] that they were humanitarian aid workers.
2. The military[2] named Ahmad Badran Nimer Sawafiri as a company commander in Islamic Jihad's engineering unit, alongside Mustafa Yousef Mustafa Rifai and Khaled Od Fathi Na'im.
3. According to the IDF, the three operatives were conducting reconnaissance between operational positions controlled by terrorist organizations.
4. The vehicle they were using was described by the military as a means of transporting food and logistical supplies for terrorist units, rather than civilian humanitarian[3] distribution.

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5 The IDF stated that one operative had previously worked for an international humanitarian organization but was dismissed after Israeli authorities supplied information concerning his terrorist affiliation.

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6 The incident illustrates the importance of distinguishing humanitarian assistance intended for civilians from logistical support provided to armed organizations.

7 Claims about casualties should be assessed against verifiable information concerning the individuals involved, their organizational affiliations and their activities at the time of an attack.

8 Israel maintains that Hamas (https://factsignal.org/hamas-gaza/hamas-is-exploiting-gazas-suffering-again-even-tents-have-become-weapons-in-its-war-against-israel)and Palestinian Islamic Jihad continue posing security threats despite ceasefire arrangements and that its forces must retain the ability to respond to immediate dangers.

9 Genuine humanitarian (https://factsignal.org/hamas-gaza/hamas-turned-a-hospital-into-a-headquarters-and-a-hostage-prison-the-world-must-confront-what-that-means)personnel and organizations must remain protected, while armed groups must not be permitted to exploit humanitarian identities or activities to conceal military operations.

10 Accurate reporting (https://factsignal.org/hamas-gaza/the-gaza-narrative-is-unravelling-hamass-own-figures-challenge-the-accusations-against-israel), transparent evidence and careful distinctions between civilians and combatants are essential to protecting both Israel's security and the integrity of humanitarian assistance.

The IDF Identifies the Men Behind the Humanitarian Claims

The Israeli military's decision to identify the three men publicly is an important aspect of the incident because it moves the discussion beyond competing general descriptions of an airstrike. Rather than referring simply to unidentified individuals traveling in a vehicle, the IDF provided names and specific organizational information, including the assertion that Ahmad Badran Nimer Sawafiri served as a

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company commander in Palestinian Islamic Jihad's engineering unit. Engineering units within armed organizations can perform a range of military functions involving infrastructure, fortifications, explosives and operational support, although the IDF's statement did not publicly specify Sawafiri's individual activities beyond his command role and participation in the reported reconnaissance movement. The other two men were likewise identified by the military as Islamic Jihad operatives, placing the incident within the context of an operation against an organized armed group rather than an indiscriminate attack on unidentified humanitarian personnel.

The IDF's description of the men's activities is equally significant. According to the military, they were conducting reconnaissance between positions controlled by various terrorist organizations when they were targeted. Reconnaissance is a military activity that can support operational planning, movement, coordination and the preparation of future attacks. If the IDF's assessment is accurate, the men were not simply traveling through Gaza to deliver food to civilians but were engaged in an activity connected to the military operations of Islamic Jihad and other armed groups. That distinction is essential because the legal and operational assessment of a strike depends upon the status and conduct of the individuals involved, not merely upon the type of vehicle they occupy or the public description subsequently attached to them.

The revelation concerning the former humanitarian employee adds another dimension to the incident. The IDF stated that one of the operatives had previously worked for an international aid organization and was dismissed after Israeli authorities supplied information indicating his terrorist affiliation. The military did not publicly identify the organization or specify which of the three men had held the position. Nevertheless, the claim raises legitimate questions about the challenges humanitarian organizations face when screening personnel and operating in territories where armed groups exercise substantial influence. Employment histories can be complex, and an individual's former association with a relief agency does not necessarily establish wrongdoing by that organization. At the same time, humanitarian institutions have a clear interest in ensuring that their personnel and resources are not exploited by armed organizations, because their ability to operate safely depends heavily upon maintaining neutrality, independence and public confidence.

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The Difference Between Humanitarian Aid and Terrorist Logistics

One of the most important distinctions in this incident concerns the use of a vehicle carrying food and logistical supplies. Food is normally associated with civilian relief, particularly in Gaza, where humanitarian assistance remains essential to the welfare of large numbers of people. Yet armed organizations also require food, transportation, communications equipment and logistical networks to sustain their operations. The fact that a vehicle transports food does not automatically make it a humanitarian aid vehicle in the legal or operational sense, just as the presence of medical supplies or ordinary civilian goods does not establish the status of every person involved in their transportation. The relevant question is whether the activity forms part of an impartial humanitarian operation serving civilians or is being conducted to support an armed group's military organization.

According to the IDF, the vehicle targeted on November 21 was used to transport food and logistical supplies to members of Palestinian Islamic Jihad. The military also stated that the three men were conducting reconnaissance between operational positions at the time of the strike. These claims distinguish the incident from the ordinary delivery of humanitarian assistance to displaced families or civilian communities. If the vehicle was being used to sustain terrorist units and the occupants were identified operatives engaged in military reconnaissance, describing them simply as aid workers would omit essential information about their status and activities. Such omissions can fundamentally alter how international audiences understand an operation, particularly when initial reports emphasize the humanitarian appearance of a vehicle without examining its alleged military use.

This distinction should not be misunderstood as suggesting that every civilian object used by an armed group automatically becomes a lawful military target. International humanitarian law requires assessments of military objectives, civilian protection, proportionality and feasible precautions, and the mere transportation of food does not by itself settle those questions. The IDF's account is stronger because it identifies the occupants as members of Islamic Jihad and describes their activities as operational reconnaissance, rather than relying solely upon the contents of the vehicle. The broader principle remains that humanitarian terminology must be applied accurately. Genuine aid workers are entitled to protection, while armed operatives cannot acquire humanitarian status simply because they travel in vehicles associated with food or logistical supplies.

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How the Humanitarian Narrative Can Obscure Terrorist Activity

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The speed at which claims circulate following military operations has become one of the defining challenges of contemporary conflict reporting. Images of destroyed vehicles, statements from local sources and initial casualty descriptions can reach international audiences within minutes, frequently before military authorities have completed their assessments or released identifying information. In Gaza, where access for independent international journalists has been severely restricted and reporting often depends upon local witnesses, medical personnel and statements from parties to the conflict, this challenge is especially pronounced. Initial reports can contain accurate information about deaths and physical damage while remaining incomplete or mistaken about the identities and activities of those involved. The danger arises when preliminary descriptions are treated as established facts and subsequent evidence receives less attention because the original narrative has already shaped public opinion.

The November 21 incident illustrates precisely why this process requires greater scrutiny. The initial characterization of the three men as humanitarian workers created an impression that Israel had targeted individuals engaged in delivering essential assistance to civilians. The IDF's subsequent identification of the men as Islamic Jihad operatives, including an engineering-unit commander, presented a materially different account of the same event. The military's explanation did not merely dispute the terminology used by Palestinian sources; it provided names, organizational affiliations and an account of the activity allegedly taking place when the strike occurred. These details deserve careful examination because they concern the central question of whether the individuals were performing humanitarian duties or participating in the operational activities of an armed organization.

The problem is not that allegations against Israel should be ignored or that statements issued by the IDF should automatically be accepted without scrutiny. Credible journalism requires examining claims from all parties and correcting errors when reliable evidence becomes available. The problem is that an accusation involving the killing of aid workers can generate immediate international condemnation, while later information identifying those killed as terrorist operatives may attract considerably less attention. This imbalance can create a lasting public impression that does not reflect the most complete available account. When the

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original allegation concerns conduct as serious as the deliberate targeting of humanitarian personnel, the responsibility to investigate and update the record is particularly important.

There is also a broader strategic dimension. Armed organizations operating in densely populated areas can benefit from confusion surrounding civilian infrastructure, humanitarian activity and military logistics. If military personnel can be presented as civilian relief workers after being targeted, the resulting controversy may serve the organization's interests by increasing diplomatic pressure on its adversary and obscuring its own operational activities. This does not establish that every disputed casualty report is deliberately fabricated, and individual incidents must be evaluated on their evidence. Nevertheless, the possibility of such exploitation makes accurate identification and transparent reporting indispensable.

The Wider Pattern of Continuing Terrorist Activity in Gaza

The incident occurred against the background of continuing Israeli operations directed at Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad personnel whom the IDF described as posing security threats despite ceasefire arrangements. In the days surrounding the November 21 strike, the Israeli military reported several additional operations against commanders and operatives associated with the two organizations. Among those identified were Thaer al-Wadia, described as a commander of Islamic Jihad's commando forces in the Gaza City area; Abd al-Raouf Na'im Abd al-Hai Nabhan, identified as a deputy commander in a Hamas Nukhba cell who participated in the October 7, 2023, attack; and Ahmed Abu Armana, described as an Islamic Jihad elite-force commander involved in training operatives and coordinating activities with Hamas. The IDF stated that these individuals were killed in separate strikes during the preceding week, illustrating its position that organized terrorist capabilities and personnel remain active in Gaza.

The Israeli military also reported targeting Hamas operatives who were allegedly meeting to advance attacks against Israeli soldiers and civilians in central Gaza. According to the IDF, some of those involved belonged to the Nukhba Force and had participated in the October 7 massacre, while others were engaged in rebuilding Hamas's military capabilities. These allegations are significant because they indicate that Israel views the continuing threat not simply as the presence of former combatants but as ongoing organizational activity involving recruitment, coordination, operational planning and attempts to restore military capacity. From

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the Israeli security perspective, a ceasefire cannot be interpreted as requiring the military to disregard credible intelligence about imminent attacks or the active reconstruction of terrorist infrastructure.

The distinction between a cessation of large-scale hostilities and the elimination of terrorist capabilities is essential. A ceasefire can reduce violence, facilitate humanitarian assistance and create opportunities for political arrangements, but it does not necessarily mean that armed organizations have abandoned their objectives or dismantled their operational networks. Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad have historically maintained military structures, weapons systems and command networks capable of operating even under severe pressure. The IDF's position is that it must retain the ability to address immediate threats to Israeli civilians and soldiers while operating within the applicable ceasefire arrangements. Whether any particular strike complies with those arrangements and with international humanitarian law requires examination of the circumstances, but the existence of a ceasefire does not itself eliminate Israel's legitimate security concerns.

This is particularly important in the aftermath of October 7. The massacre demonstrated the catastrophic consequences of allowing an armed organization to develop substantial offensive capabilities while underestimating its intentions. Israel's security establishment now faces the challenge of preventing Hamas and Islamic Jihad from rebuilding the networks that enabled coordinated attacks against Israeli communities. That objective requires intelligence collection, monitoring of terrorist activity and, where legally justified, operations against individuals and infrastructure presenting military threats. The reported reconnaissance activity involving the three Islamic Jihad operatives therefore fits within a broader Israeli assessment that terrorist organizations remain capable of organizing and preparing future attacks even after extensive military losses.

Protecting Humanitarian Organizations Requires Confronting Terrorist Exploitation

Humanitarian organizations perform indispensable work in Gaza, delivering food, medical assistance, shelter materials and other essential services to civilians who have experienced extraordinary hardship. Their personnel frequently operate under dangerous conditions, and their ability to provide assistance depends upon maintaining the trust of local communities, international donors and parties to the conflict. Protecting their independence and safety is therefore not merely a humanitarian obligation but also an important component of any sustainable effort to

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stabilize Gaza. When aid organizations can operate without interference or intimidation, they are better positioned to reach vulnerable populations and ensure that assistance is distributed according to need rather than political or military affiliation.

The possibility that members of armed organizations may seek employment within humanitarian institutions, exploit their logistical systems or use their reputation for protection creates serious challenges for those organizations. The IDF's statement that one of the three Islamic Jihad operatives had previously worked for an international aid agency and was subsequently dismissed after Israeli authorities provided information about his terrorist affiliation illustrates the importance of effective screening and cooperation where credible security concerns arise. It does not establish that the unnamed organization knowingly employed a terrorist or that its operations were compromised. Indeed, the reported dismissal may indicate that the organization acted after receiving relevant information. The wider lesson is that humanitarian institutions need reliable mechanisms for assessing allegations, protecting their staff from coercion and preventing their resources from being diverted to armed groups.

Such safeguards must be carefully designed because humanitarian work frequently takes place in environments where organizations have limited control over local security conditions. Staff may face pressure from armed factions, and aid agencies may need to negotiate access with authorities or groups exercising territorial influence. The answer is not to stigmatize humanitarian personnel or assume that relief organizations are inherently compromised. It is to establish clear procedures for investigating credible allegations, sharing relevant information, auditing operations and maintaining the separation between humanitarian activity and military organizations. These measures protect genuine aid workers by reinforcing the distinction between those delivering assistance to civilians and individuals engaged in armed activity.

Israel also has an interest in ensuring that legitimate humanitarian assistance reaches Gaza's civilian population. Effective aid distribution can reduce suffering, support public health and contribute to stability, while the diversion of resources to armed organizations can undermine those objectives. The protection of humanitarian operations and the prevention of terrorist exploitation should therefore be treated as complementary responsibilities rather than competing priorities. An effective humanitarian system must be capable of assisting civilians while resisting attempts by armed factions to use its personnel, vehicles or resources for military purposes.

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The Importance of Distinguishing Combatants From Civilians

The distinction between combatants and civilians lies at the heart of international humanitarian law and is essential to evaluating the conduct of all parties in armed conflict. Civilians are protected against deliberate attack unless and for such time as they directly participate in hostilities, while members of organized armed groups performing a continuous combat function may be targetable under the applicable legal framework. The classification of an individual depends upon relevant facts concerning organizational membership, function and conduct, rather than upon public descriptions or the clothing they wear. These distinctions can be difficult to establish in conflicts involving non-state armed groups whose members may not wear uniforms and whose operations are conducted within populated areas, but their complexity makes careful investigation more important, not less.

The IDF's account of the November 21 strike rests upon the assertion that the three men were members of Palestinian Islamic Jihad's military organization and were engaged in reconnaissance between operational positions. If established, these facts would be directly relevant to assessing their status and the military purpose of the operation. The reported use of a vehicle transporting supplies to terrorist units provides additional context, but it is the alleged organizational affiliation and operational activity that form the core of the Israeli explanation. The military's identification of a company commander within Islamic Jihad's engineering unit is especially relevant because it describes a defined role within an armed organization rather than an unspecified association.

At the same time, determining whether an individual is a lawful target does not end the legal assessment of an attack. Military operations must also comply with requirements concerning proportionality and feasible precautions, including the protection of nearby civilians. These obligations apply regardless of the identity of the intended target and are particularly important in densely populated environments. Recognizing them does not undermine Israel's right to defend its population against terrorist attacks. It reinforces the principle that military force should be directed toward legitimate military objectives while minimizing harm to civilians.

The danger of misidentifying armed operatives as humanitarian workers is that it obscures the very distinctions upon which civilian protection depends. If every individual traveling in a vehicle associated with food distribution is automatically classified as a humanitarian worker, regardless of membership in an armed group or participation in military activities, the resulting assessment may be fundamentally

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misleading. Conversely, if every person associated with an aid organization is treated with suspicion, genuine humanitarian personnel may face increased danger. The responsible approach is to examine evidence concerning each individual and incident rather than allowing broad assumptions to determine the conclusion.

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Why the International Media Must Examine the Evidence Before Reaching Conclusions

The reporting of military operations in Gaza has become an international political issue in its own right. Accounts of strikes, casualty figures and alleged violations of humanitarian law can influence diplomatic relations, public demonstrations, international institutions and debates over military assistance. Because the consequences of such reporting can be substantial, accuracy is not simply a professional aspiration but a matter of significant public responsibility. Journalists must frequently work with incomplete information under difficult conditions, and it is entirely legitimate to report allegations made by witnesses, medical personnel or local authorities. However, the distinction between an allegation and a verified conclusion must remain clear, particularly when an incident involves competing claims about whether those killed were civilians, aid workers or members of an armed organization.

The Israeli military's decision to publish the names and alleged roles of the three Islamic Jihad operatives provides information that should form part of any comprehensive account of the November 21 incident. The details concerning the engineering-unit commander, the reported reconnaissance activity and the former humanitarian employee are directly relevant to evaluating the claim that the men were aid workers. Reporting that omits these details risks leaving audiences with an incomplete understanding of the circumstances. Equally, presenting the IDF's statements as independently proven without further examination would go beyond what the publicly available evidence establishes. The objective of responsible reporting should be to provide the fullest available factual picture, distinguish verified information from attributed claims and update earlier accounts when significant new details emerge.

The challenge is particularly acute because initial headlines often have a greater impact than later corrections or follow-up reports. An accusation that Israeli forces killed humanitarian workers can circulate widely before the identities of those involved are established, while subsequent information may reach only a fraction of the original audience. This imbalance can distort public understanding even when later reporting is accurate. Media organizations should therefore exercise particular

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care in the language used to describe disputed incidents, making clear when humanitarian status is claimed by local sources and when military authorities provide a conflicting identification. Such precision is not a concession to Israel or any other party. It is a basic requirement of journalism that seeks to inform rather than reinforce preconceived conclusions.

There is also a responsibility to avoid allowing the humanitarian vocabulary of the conflict to become detached from its meaning. Aid workers, medical personnel and civilian relief organizations occupy important protected roles, and allegations concerning attacks against them deserve serious attention. Precisely because those protections matter, the terms should not be applied casually to individuals whose activities and affiliations remain disputed. The credibility of humanitarian reporting depends upon preserving these distinctions and ensuring that public concern for civilian welfare is informed by evidence rather than driven solely by the emotional force of initial accusations.

Israel's Security Cannot Depend on Accepting Terrorist Organizations' Preferred Narratives

The events of October 7 fundamentally changed Israel's understanding of the threats posed by armed organizations operating in Gaza. Hamas demonstrated that it was capable of conducting a coordinated assault against Israeli military positions and civilian communities, murdering approximately 1,200 people and abducting 251 hostages. Palestinian Islamic Jihad has also maintained armed capabilities and participated in attacks against Israel. The continued presence of these organizations, their military infrastructure and their capacity to organize future operations remain central concerns for Israeli security planners. In this environment, Israel cannot reasonably assess threats solely according to how armed groups describe their own activities or how their members are characterized by local sources after military engagements.

The November 21 incident illustrates the importance of independent intelligence assessments and the public presentation of relevant information. According to the IDF, the three men were not neutral humanitarian personnel but Islamic Jihad operatives engaged in reconnaissance between terrorist positions. The military's decision to identify them by name and provide information about their organizational roles reflects an effort to challenge the initial humanitarian characterization and explain the operational basis for the strike. Such explanations are particularly

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important when the international consequences of military action depend heavily upon public perceptions of the individuals targeted. Transparency does not eliminate the need for independent scrutiny, but it can provide a foundation for more informed discussion and reduce reliance upon competing slogans.

Israel's security interests also extend beyond responding to attacks that have already occurred. Preventing future violence requires monitoring operational networks, identifying attempts to rebuild military capabilities and responding to credible threats before they develop into large-scale assaults. The IDF's reports concerning other Hamas and Islamic Jihad commanders killed during the same period suggest that Israeli authorities view the continued activities of these organizations as an ongoing danger. The central strategic question is whether ceasefire arrangements and reconstruction efforts can be implemented in a manner that reduces civilian suffering while preventing armed factions from restoring the capabilities that enabled previous attacks.

The answer cannot be found in accepting every military claim without examination, but neither can it be found in automatically dismissing Israeli intelligence or treating the statements of armed organizations as more credible than those of the state defending its population. A serious approach requires evaluating evidence, understanding the operational context and recognizing that the protection of civilians depends upon accurately identifying those who participate in hostilities. Israel's ability to protect its citizens and the international community's ability to assess its conduct both benefit from greater transparency and more rigorous factual analysis.

The Real Victims of Humanitarian Exploitation Are Civilians

The most damaging consequence of the exploitation of humanitarian identities and resources is the harm it can cause to the very civilians humanitarian organizations are intended to protect. When armed groups use civilian infrastructure, logistical networks or humanitarian activities for military purposes, they risk undermining the neutrality and credibility upon which relief operations depend. Aid workers may face greater suspicion, humanitarian organizations may encounter additional security restrictions and vulnerable communities may experience delays in receiving essential assistance. These consequences can be particularly severe in Gaza, where many families depend upon external support for food, healthcare and basic

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necessities. The protection of humanitarian space is therefore not an abstract legal principle but a practical requirement for ensuring that assistance reaches people who need it.

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The IDF's account of the three Islamic Jihad operatives highlights why this issue deserves serious attention. The military alleges that the men were using a vehicle associated with the transportation of food and logistical supplies for terrorist units while conducting reconnaissance between operational positions. It also states that one operative had previously been dismissed from an international humanitarian organization after information concerning his terrorist affiliation was provided. If these claims are substantiated, they illustrate how the outward appearance of civilian or humanitarian activity can become entangled with the operational requirements of armed groups. Such entanglement creates dangers not only for Israel's security but also for the credibility and safety of genuine relief operations.

The appropriate response is to strengthen the distinction between humanitarian assistance and military activity. International organizations should have the independence, resources and institutional safeguards necessary to prevent their work from being exploited by armed factions. Governments and military authorities should provide credible information when they identify security concerns, while ensuring that legitimate aid operations are not obstructed unnecessarily. Humanitarian organizations should be able to investigate allegations concerning personnel or resources without being subjected to political intimidation. These responsibilities are mutually reinforcing because an effective humanitarian system depends upon both civilian protection and freedom from military exploitation.

There is a further moral dimension to this issue. Palestinian civilians who require food, medicine and shelter should not have their needs subordinated to the operational priorities of Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Their welfare should not be used as a justification for concealing armed activity, and their suffering should not become an instrument through which terrorist organizations seek political advantage. The international community has a responsibility to support humanitarian assistance while demanding that armed groups respect its independence and refrain from using civilian relief systems to sustain military operations. Such an approach protects Palestinian civilians, supports legitimate aid workers and helps preserve the credibility of humanitarian principles.

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Conclusion: The Truth About Terrorist Activity Must Not Be Hidden Behind Humanitarian Labels

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The Israeli military's identification of three Palestinian Islamic Jihad operatives killed in northern Gaza raises important questions about the way military operations are reported and understood internationally. The initial characterization of the men as humanitarian aid workers presented the strike as an attack against individuals engaged in civilian relief. The IDF subsequently provided a different account, identifying the three by name, describing their alleged membership in Islamic Jihad and stating that they were conducting reconnaissance between terrorist positions while using a vehicle associated with supplying armed units. The military also disclosed that one operative had previously worked for an international humanitarian organization before being dismissed following information supplied by Israeli authorities. Taken together, these details provide a substantive basis for examining the Israeli explanation rather than accepting the initial humanitarian characterization as established fact.

The broader importance of the incident lies in the distinction between genuine humanitarian activity and the military operations of terrorist organizations. Food, medical supplies and civilian vehicles are essential to the welfare of Gaza's population, but their presence does not automatically determine the status of individuals who use them. Armed groups also depend upon logistical networks, transportation and supplies, and their personnel may operate in environments where civilian and military activities overlap. The IDF's account is that the three men were members of an armed terrorist organization engaged in operational reconnaissance, not humanitarian workers carrying out civilian relief duties. If that assessment is accurate, presenting them simply as aid workers would create a fundamentally misleading understanding of the strike and obscure the military activities the IDF says it was seeking to disrupt.

The incident also demonstrates why transparency and detailed identification matter. By naming the individuals and providing information about their alleged organizational roles, the IDF has placed specific claims into the public record that can be examined and challenged. This is preferable to a situation in which competing parties issue broad accusations without supplying details that allow meaningful assessment. The military's account should be evaluated according to the evidence supporting it, but it should not be disregarded merely because it conflicts with the initial narrative. International audiences deserve to know when those killed

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in military operations are alleged to be commanders, operatives or participants in reconnaissance activities, particularly when their deaths are being presented as attacks against humanitarian personnel.

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For Israel, the stakes extend far beyond the interpretation of a single airstrike. The continued activities of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad remain central security concerns following the October 7 massacre, and Israeli authorities have repeatedly stated that these organizations are attempting to preserve or rebuild their military capabilities. The reported reconnaissance activity of the three Islamic Jihad operatives, together with the IDF's announcements concerning other terrorist commanders targeted during the same period, forms part of Israel's assessment that armed factions continue to pose threats despite ceasefire arrangements. Preventing renewed attacks requires credible intelligence, effective security measures and the ability to respond to genuine military dangers within the framework of international law. It also requires ensuring that armed organizations cannot use humanitarian identities or civilian infrastructure to conceal operational activity without scrutiny.

The international community must also recognize that protecting humanitarian assistance and confronting terrorism are not contradictory objectives. Genuine aid workers deserve protection, and Palestinian civilians must be able to receive essential food, medicine and shelter without interference from armed organizations. At the same time, the humanitarian character of relief operations depends upon their independence from military activity. If terrorist groups exploit humanitarian vehicles, personnel or institutions for operational purposes, they undermine the trust necessary for those services to function and increase the risks faced by legitimate aid workers. Preventing such exploitation is therefore an essential part of protecting humanitarian space rather than an argument against humanitarian assistance itself.

The responsibility of the international media is equally important. Reporting on Gaza must distinguish between allegations and established facts, examine the identities and activities of those killed and ensure that significant new information receives attention comparable to the original accusations. The rapid circulation of claims that Israel has targeted aid workers can have serious diplomatic and reputational consequences, particularly when those claims are presented without adequate qualification. When the IDF subsequently identifies individuals as members of an armed terrorist organization and provides an account of their military activities, that information must become part of the public understanding of the incident. Accuracy requires more than reporting the first allegation; it requires following the evidence wherever it leads.

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The central lesson is that humanitarian status cannot be determined by appearances, public accusations or the presence of food in a vehicle. It must be assessed according to the actual identity, role and conduct of the individuals involved. Genuine humanitarian workers must be protected, but members of armed terrorist organizations cannot acquire immunity from military operations merely by being described as aid personnel after an attack. Preserving that distinction is essential to the integrity of international humanitarian law, the safety of legitimate relief organizations and the ability of states to protect their populations from armed threats.

The November 21 incident also reinforces the importance of examining Israel's security decisions within their operational context. The IDF has identified the three men, described their alleged affiliations and explained why it regarded their activities as threatening. These claims provide a substantial account of the strike that must be considered alongside any competing allegations. The ultimate assessment of the operation depends upon the available evidence and applicable legal standards, but the Israeli military's explanation directly challenges the assertion that the individuals were simply humanitarian workers delivering assistance to civilians.

Israel has a legitimate right to defend its citizens against Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas, and the international community has an obligation to distinguish genuine humanitarian activity from the operational activities of armed groups. Those principles can and must coexist. The protection of civilians is strengthened, not weakened, when the identities and conduct of individuals involved in military incidents are accurately established.

The larger challenge is ensuring that the future of Gaza is not defined by a system in which terrorist organizations can exploit humanitarian needs, conceal military activity and then use the resulting confusion to shape international perceptions. Palestinian civilians deserve humanitarian institutions that operate independently of armed factions, while Israelis deserve security arrangements that prevent the reconstruction of terrorist capabilities. Both objectives require clarity, accountability and a refusal to allow the language of humanitarian protection to obscure genuine military threats.

The truth about Gaza's armed organizations must not disappear behind humanitarian labels. When the IDF identifies alleged terrorists, their roles and their operational activities, those claims deserve serious examination rather than automatic dismissal. Protecting civilians and confronting terrorism both depend upon the same fundamental principle: the facts must matter more than the narrative.

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FOOTNOTES

1 https://www.clevelandjewishnews.com/jns/idf-identifies-three-islamic-jihad-terrorists-hit-in-gaza-claimed-to-be-aid-workers/article_69725c3e-496b-5568-983e-59770d10ac86.html (https://www.clevelandjewishnews.com/jns/idf-identifies-three-islamic-jihad-terrorists-hit-in-gaza-claimed-to-be-aid-workers/article_69725c3e-496b-5568-983e-59770d10ac86.html) ↑

2 https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/idf-press-releases-israel-at-war/november-26-pr/the-idf-struck-3-islamic-jihad-terrorists-falsely-presented-as-aid-workers/ (https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/idf-press-releases-israel-at-war/november-26-pr/the-idf-struck-3-islamic-jihad-terrorists-falsely-presented-as-aid-workers/) ↑

3 https://www.ynetnews.com/article/hkaflljy7x (https://www.ynetnews.com/article/hkaflljy7x) ↑

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A Druze Colonel's Emotional Homecoming: A Powerful Story of Israel, Loyalty and the Human Bonds That Transcend Borders

IDF Colonel Atef Hasson returned to his Syrian birthplace and reunited with his family, a moving story of loyalty and human bonds beyond borders.



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FIELD INTELLIGENCE: *Aerial view of the Druze village of Isfiya, on top of Carmel mountain* (https://paxpoint.org/)

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EXECUTIVE STRATEGIC TAKEAWAYS

- Colonel Atef Hasson, a Druze officer in the Israel Defense Forces, returned to his birthplace in Hader, southern Syria, and reunited with his mother and relatives after decades of separation.
- Hasson reportedly left his Syrian village approximately four decades ago, moved to Israel and built a distinguished military career, eventually attaining the rank of colonel.
- The emotional reunion took place while Hasson was wearing his IDF uniform and accompanied by Israeli soldiers.
- Despite living in Mas'ade in the Golan Heights, geographically close to his birthplace, the Israeli-Syrian border prevented ordinary family visits for many years.
- Hasson's story highlights the important contributions of Druze citizens to Israel's security, military leadership and national institutions.
- The Druze community maintains strong historical, cultural and family connections across Israel, Syria and Lebanon, despite the political boundaries separating these countries.
- The reunion illustrates how regional conflict and closed borders have divided families for generations, even when relatives live relatively close to one another.
- Druze commentator Radwan Abu Saada, who publicized the reunion, called for mechanisms to facilitate humanitarian family visits between Israel and Syria.
- The presence of an Israeli Druze colonel returning to his Syrian birthplace offers a compelling example of the complexity and diversity of Israeli society.

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- The reunion provides a hopeful reminder that humanitarian gestures and personal relationships can create opportunities for understanding in a region often dominated by conflict.

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In a region too often defined by conflict, division and hostility, an extraordinary moment of humanity has provided a powerful reminder of the bonds that connect families, communities and nations across even the most heavily guarded borders. Colonel Atef Hasson, a Druze officer in the Israel Defense Forces, recently returned to his birthplace in the Syrian village of Hader, in Quneitra province, where he was reunited with his mother, siblings and other relatives after decades of separation. Wearing his IDF uniform and accompanied by fellow soldiers, Hasson arrived in the village to an emotional welcome from family members who had spent much of their lives divided by the border between Israel and Syria. The images of a decorated Israeli officer embracing his mother in the village where he was born tell a remarkable story of personal perseverance, family loyalty and the human consequences of decades of regional conflict. They also offer a moving illustration of the unique relationship between Israel and its Druze citizens, whose contributions to the country's security, public institutions and national life represent an important part of Israeli society.

Hasson's journey is especially extraordinary because of the contrast between the geographical proximity of his two homes and the political realities that kept them apart. Born in Hader, he left the village approximately four decades ago, moved to Israel and enlisted in the IDF, eventually rising to the rank of colonel. Today, he lives in Mas'ade, a Druze town in the Golan Heights situated relatively close to the Syrian village of his birth. Yet the international border separating Israel and Syria created an obstacle that distance alone could never explain. Although his family remained geographically nearby, the realities of hostile relations, security restrictions and regional instability meant that ordinary family visits were impossible for decades. His reunion therefore represents far more than a personal homecoming. It is a reminder of the enormous human cost imposed by closed borders and prolonged conflict, and of the extraordinary significance of moments when those barriers can finally be crossed.

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The images are also a powerful reminder that the IDF is not composed exclusively of Jewish soldiers, but includes men and women from different backgrounds who contribute to Israel's defense and security. Druze citizens have played a particularly important role in Israel's military history, serving in combat units, command positions and other branches of the security establishment. Their service reflects a longstanding relationship between the Druze community and the State of Israel, characterized by shared responsibilities, deep personal commitments and significant contributions to the country's development. Hasson's rise through the ranks to colonel illustrates how members of minority communities can assume positions of substantial responsibility within Israel's national institutions, while his emotional reunion with his family in Syria demonstrates that service to Israel need not erase the cultural, familial and historical connections that extend beyond its borders.

At a time when Israel is frequently portrayed internationally through simplistic narratives that fail to capture the complexity of its society, Hasson's story provides an important human perspective. It reveals an Israeli military officer whose life connects communities on both sides of a contested border, a Druze family whose bonds survived decades of separation and a moment of reconciliation made possible despite the difficult circumstances of the region. Above all, it reminds the world that behind political disputes, military confrontations and international boundaries are individuals whose most fundamental aspirations are often remarkably simple: to see their parents, embrace their loved ones and maintain the family relationships that give meaning to their lives.

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10. Conclusion: A Colonel, a Mother and a Story That Reveals the Best of Israel
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Key Takeaways

- Colonel Atef Hasson, a Druze officer in the Israel Defense Forces, returned to his birthplace[1] in Hader, southern Syria, and reunited with his mother and relatives after decades of separation.
- Hasson reportedly[2] left his Syrian village approximately four decades ago, moved to Israel and built a distinguished military career, eventually attaining the rank of colonel.
- The emotional reunion took place while Hasson was wearing his IDF uniform and accompanied by Israeli soldiers.
- Despite living in Mas'ade in the Golan Heights, geographically close to his birthplace, the Israeli-Syrian border prevented ordinary family visits for many years.
- Hasson's story highlights the important contributions of Druze[3] citizens to Israel's security, military leadership and national institutions.
- The Druze community (https://paxpoint.org/antisemitism-activism/the-women-the-west-refuses-to-hear-how-the-victims-of-islamist-extremism-are-exposing-a-dangerous-hypocrisy/)maintains strong historical, cultural and family connections across Israel, Syria and Lebanon, despite the political boundaries separating these countries.
- The reunion illustrates how regional conflict and closed borders have divided families for generations, even when relatives live relatively close to one another.
- Druze commentator Radwan Abu Saada, who publicized the reunion, called for mechanisms to facilitate humanitarian family visits between Israel and Syria.
- The presence of an Israeli Druze colonel returning to his Syrian birthplace offers a compelling example of the complexity and diversity (https://paxpoint.org/coexistence-voices/two-peoples-two-political-realities-israeli-arabs-vote-while-palestinians-wait-two-decades-for-elections/)of Israeli society.
- The reunion provides a hopeful reminder (https://paxpoint.org/coexistence-voices/israels-minorities-stand-with-their-country-service-identity-and-the-rejection-of-the-apartheid-

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An Extraordinary Homecoming After Decades of Separation

The reunion between Colonel Atef Hasson and his family in Hader represents the culmination of a remarkable personal journey that began decades earlier when he left his birthplace and established a new life in Israel. According to the information accompanying the footage, Hasson moved to Israel around four decades ago and subsequently enlisted in the IDF, where he developed a long military career and advanced to senior command positions. His path took him from a Druze village in southern Syria to a position of considerable responsibility within the Israeli military, reflecting both his personal dedication and the opportunities available to members of the Druze community who choose to serve in Israel's security forces. Yet despite the professional achievements and life he built in Israel, his family connections to the village of his birth remained an enduring part of his identity.

The circumstances of the reunion are especially moving because they demonstrate how political boundaries can create separation that bears little relationship to physical distance. Hasson now lives in Mas'ade, a Druze community in the Golan Heights, not far from Hader. Under ordinary circumstances, such a distance might allow relatives to visit regularly, celebrate family occasions together and maintain close personal relationships. Instead, the border between Israel and Syria transformed a relatively short journey into an obstacle that endured for decades. Family members who might otherwise have shared everyday experiences were separated by a conflict over which they had little personal control, leaving generations to maintain their relationships through whatever limited means were available.

The footage of Hasson arriving in Hader in his IDF uniform, accompanied by soldiers and embraced by his relatives, captures the emotional significance of overcoming that separation. It is an image that challenges the tendency to view borders exclusively through military and political considerations. Borders also shape the lives of families, determining whether children can visit parents, whether siblings can celebrate milestones together and whether

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elderly relatives can see loved ones before the passage of time makes reunions impossible. Hasson's homecoming is therefore both a personal triumph and a reminder of the human consequences of prolonged regional hostility.

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The story also carries a broader message about identity and belonging. Hasson has spent much of his adult life serving Israel, rising to a senior military rank and establishing his home within Israeli society. At the same time, his origins in Hader and his continuing attachment to relatives in Syria remain important parts of his personal history. His life illustrates that individuals can maintain meaningful connections to different communities and places without those relationships necessarily diminishing their commitment to the country in which they live and serve. In a region where questions of identity are frequently presented as rigid and mutually exclusive, such experiences demonstrate a more complex and deeply human reality.

The Druze Community's Distinguished Contribution to Israel

The Druze community occupies a distinctive and important place within Israeli society. Druze citizens have contributed to the country's defense, public service, political institutions, economy and cultural life, while preserving a religious and communal identity that predates the modern borders of the Middle East. The relationship between Israel and its Druze citizens has developed through decades of shared experience, military service and participation in national institutions, producing a strong tradition of public responsibility and leadership. Druze soldiers have served in numerous IDF units and have risen to senior ranks, while members of the community have also held prominent positions in government, diplomacy and other areas of public life.

Military service has been an especially significant element of this relationship. Since the early years of the state, Druze men who are Israeli citizens have generally been subject to compulsory military service, although the legal and social circumstances of Druze residents of the Golan Heights differ from those of Druze citizens elsewhere in Israel. Many Druze soldiers have served with distinction, and members of the community have made substantial sacrifices in Israel's wars and security operations. Their contribution is not merely symbolic.

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Druze officers and soldiers have participated directly in defending Israeli communities, securing borders and carrying out demanding operational responsibilities, becoming an integral part of the country's military establishment.

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Colonel Hasson's career reflects this tradition of service and leadership. His advancement to the rank of colonel demonstrates the level of responsibility that Druze officers can attain within the IDF, while his continued connection to his family in Syria illustrates the complex personal experiences that some members of the community carry with them. Druze identity extends across national boundaries, and families may have relatives living in Israel, Syria and Lebanon. The resulting relationships can be especially complicated when those countries are divided by conflict or lack normal diplomatic relations. Hasson's life brings these realities together in a particularly striking way: an officer serving Israel while remaining deeply connected to the village and family from which he came.

The importance of Druze contributions to Israel also extends beyond the military. Druze communities have produced educators, physicians, business leaders, academics and public officials who contribute to the country's development. Their presence enriches Israeli society and reinforces the reality that Israel contains diverse communities with distinct religious traditions, cultural histories and forms of national identification. Recognizing this diversity does not mean ignoring the challenges that Druze citizens continue to face, including disputes over equality, development, public investment and legislation affecting minority communities. Rather, it means acknowledging that their contributions are substantial and that their full inclusion and equal treatment are important to Israel's democratic character and national future.

An Israeli Officer's Uniform Becomes a Symbol of a Remarkable Journey

One of the most powerful elements of the reunion is the image of Colonel Hasson arriving in his Syrian birthplace wearing the uniform of the Israel Defense Forces. The uniform represents decades of service, professional achievement and commitment to Israel's security, while the village represents his childhood, family history and the relationships that existed long before he began his military career. The combination creates a striking visual reminder that the lives of individuals in the Middle East cannot always be understood through

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simple national or political categories. Hasson is an Israeli military officer and a member of the Druze community whose family history reaches across the border into Syria. His homecoming demonstrates how these different elements of identity can coexist within a single life.

The presence of Israeli soldiers accompanying him adds another dimension to the scene. Rather than appearing solely as an instrument of military power, the IDF uniform is seen in the context of an emotional family reunion, surrounded by relatives welcoming a son and brother who had been absent for decades. The circumstances of the visit should not be interpreted as evidence of a broader political agreement or a permanent change in border arrangements, but the human significance of the moment is undeniable. It offers an image of soldiers participating in an event defined not by confrontation but by personal connection and family emotion.

This is particularly meaningful because international perceptions of the IDF are often shaped almost entirely by images of combat operations and the controversies surrounding them. The military's primary responsibility is to defend Israel and its population, and its operations must be assessed according to the relevant legal and ethical standards. Yet the institution also includes individuals with personal histories, families and cultural identities that reflect the diversity of Israeli society. Hasson's story reminds audiences that soldiers are not abstract figures defined solely by their uniforms, but people whose lives extend beyond military service and whose personal experiences may connect communities separated by political conflict.

The image of a Druze colonel returning to his Syrian village in Israeli uniform is therefore a powerful symbol of the region's complexity. It demonstrates that military service, national belonging and family identity can intersect in unexpected ways, and that even amid longstanding hostility, individual relationships can create moments of warmth and humanity.

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The Human Cost of Closed Borders and Divided Families

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The Israeli-Syrian border has separated families and communities for generations, particularly among Druze populations whose historical and familial connections extend across the Golan Heights and southern Syria. The division has affected individuals who may live relatively close to their relatives but remain unable to visit because of political restrictions, security concerns and the absence of normal diplomatic relations. In some cases, families have endured decades without direct contact, while younger generations have grown up knowing relatives only through photographs, stories or distant communication. The consequences extend beyond emotional hardship, affecting family ceremonies, religious occasions, marriages, funerals and the everyday relationships that sustain communal life.

Druze commentator Radwan Abu Saada, who publicized Hasson's reunion, emphasized that the story reflects a much wider humanitarian reality. He pointed to families in the Golan, Galilee and Carmel regions who have relatives in Syria, including people who have not met for decades and younger family members who have never had the opportunity to know their relatives across the border. His appeal for mechanisms allowing humanitarian family visits highlights a practical challenge that deserves serious consideration. While security arrangements and political disputes cannot simply be ignored, the possibility of carefully supervised humanitarian meetings could offer meaningful relief to families who have endured prolonged separation.

The significance of such measures would extend beyond individual reunions. Family relationships can preserve channels of understanding and communication even when formal political relations are absent. They can remind communities that people living on the other side of a border are not merely representatives of an opposing state but individuals with shared histories, religious traditions and personal connections. In the Druze context, these bonds are particularly important because communal identity extends across several countries whose political relationships are often strained or hostile.

Hasson's reunion provides a compelling illustration of what such humanitarian opportunities can mean. For his mother and relatives, the moment represented the return of a family member whose absence had lasted much of a lifetime. For Hasson, it offered the opportunity to reconnect physically with the people and place associated with his earliest memories. For

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the wider community, it demonstrated that even deeply entrenched barriers can sometimes be crossed under particular circumstances. The challenge now is whether this exceptional event can encourage consideration of arrangements that allow other families to experience similar reunions without compromising legitimate security requirements.

Israel's Diversity Is One of Its Greatest Strengths

Israel's society is frequently described internationally through broad political categories that obscure its cultural, religious and ethnic complexity. The country is the national home of the Jewish people, but it is also home to Arab Muslims, Christians, Druze, Circassians and other communities whose identities and traditions form part of its social fabric. These communities differ in their histories, religious practices, political perspectives and relationships with the state, and their experiences cannot be reduced to a single narrative. Nevertheless, their participation in Israeli public life demonstrates the diversity of a society in which individuals from different backgrounds contribute to national institutions, professional fields and civic organizations.

The Druze community's relationship with Israel provides a particularly important example. Its members have served in senior military positions, participated in public administration and contributed to the country's security and development while preserving their distinct religious and cultural traditions. Colonel Hasson's career illustrates the opportunities for leadership available within Israeli institutions, while his personal story reflects the transnational connections that many minority communities maintain. His identity as an Israeli officer does not erase his origins in Syria, just as his connection to relatives across the border does not diminish the significance of his military service.

Recognizing this complexity is essential to understanding Israel beyond the political arguments that dominate international discussion. The country's democratic institutions provide opportunities for participation, debate and representation, while its minority communities continue advocating for equality, resources and recognition. These debates are part of the ongoing development of Israeli society and should not be ignored. Yet the achievements of individuals such as Hasson demonstrate that national institutions can bring together people whose backgrounds and experiences differ considerably.

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The broader lesson is that diversity becomes a national strength when individuals are able to contribute their abilities, experience and commitment while maintaining their cultural identities. Israel's Druze citizens have demonstrated this through decades of military service, civic leadership and participation in public life. Their contributions deserve recognition not only during moments of national crisis but as an enduring part of the country's history and future.

A Powerful Reminder of the Human Side of the IDF

The Israel Defense Forces is often discussed primarily in terms of military operations, strategic capabilities and security challenges. These are essential aspects of its role, particularly in a country that has faced repeated wars, terrorism and threats along its borders. Yet the IDF is also a national institution composed of individuals whose backgrounds reflect the diversity of Israeli society. Its personnel include people from different religious and cultural communities, each bringing personal histories and experiences into their service. Colonel Hasson's story provides an unusually vivid illustration of this human dimension, showing an officer whose professional life has been devoted to Israel's defense while his family relationships remained shaped by the political geography of the wider region.

The emotional reunion in Hader demonstrates that the identity of a soldier cannot be understood solely through the uniform he wears. Hasson's military rank represents years of professional commitment, but the moment he embraced his mother revealed another equally important aspect of his life: his identity as a son returning to his family after an extraordinary period of separation. The contrast between these roles is not a contradiction. It is a reminder that military personnel, like all individuals, possess relationships and personal histories that exist independently of their professional responsibilities.

The images also offer a positive example of how military institutions can sometimes become part of humanitarian moments, even in environments marked by political hostility. The reported presence of Israeli soldiers accompanying Hasson during the visit does not change the underlying security realities between Israel and Syria, but it places the military in a context that international audiences rarely see. Instead of confrontation, the scene is defined

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by family affection, personal history and the emotional significance of reunion. Such moments do not resolve regional conflicts, but they can broaden public understanding of the individuals involved and the communities connected to them.

For Israelis, the story offers an opportunity to recognize the contributions of Druze service members and the personal sacrifices that can accompany their commitment. For international audiences, it provides a reminder that the IDF includes individuals whose identities and experiences challenge simplistic assumptions about Israeli society. The human dimension of military service is an important part of understanding the country and the people who defend it.

The Druze Connection Offers Opportunities for Regional Understanding

The Druze community's presence across Israel, Syria and Lebanon creates a distinctive network of cultural and familial relationships that extends beyond the political boundaries of the modern Middle East. These connections have survived wars, diplomatic hostility and periods of instability, reflecting the strength of communal identity and the importance of family relationships. Although Druze communities in different countries have developed distinct political experiences and relationships with their respective states, they share religious and cultural traditions that continue to provide a sense of connection across borders.

This reality offers opportunities for humanitarian engagement that deserve careful consideration. Family visits, cultural exchanges and supervised meetings between relatives could provide meaningful benefits without requiring the immediate resolution of broader political disputes. Such arrangements would need to address legitimate security concerns and the complex political circumstances in Syria, but their potential humanitarian value is substantial. For families separated for decades, even a brief reunion can represent an extraordinary improvement in quality of life and emotional well-being.

Hasson's homecoming demonstrates the importance of approaching regional relationships not only through the language of diplomacy and security but also through the experiences of ordinary people. Political agreements are necessary for lasting peace, but human

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relationships can help create the understanding and goodwill that make cooperation more conceivable. A mother embracing her son after decades apart is not a substitute for diplomatic negotiations, yet it can remind societies of the human aspirations that political arrangements are ultimately intended to serve.

The story also highlights the potential value of protecting minority communities and respecting their cultural and familial connections. Druze populations have faced difficult circumstances in different parts of the region, and their security and welfare remain important humanitarian concerns. Supporting opportunities for family contact, cultural continuity and community stability can contribute to a more constructive regional environment, particularly when such efforts are undertaken with sensitivity to local circumstances and security requirements.

A Moment of Hope in a Region Too Often Defined by Conflict

The emotional reunion between Colonel Hasson and his family is especially meaningful because it occurred in a region where conflict has shaped the lives of successive generations. The border between Israel and Syria has long represented military confrontation, political hostility and unresolved territorial disputes. For communities living nearby, these realities have affected everyday life in ways that are not always visible to international observers. Families have been separated, travel has been restricted and relationships that might otherwise have flourished have been interrupted by circumstances beyond the control of those involved.

Against this background, the image of an Israeli Druze officer returning to his birthplace and embracing his mother offers a rare moment of hope. It does not erase the suffering caused by decades of conflict or resolve the political challenges that continue to divide the region. Nevertheless, it demonstrates that human connections can endure even when circumstances make their expression extraordinarily difficult. The persistence of family loyalty across decades of separation is itself a powerful testament to the importance of relationships that transcend political boundaries.

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The significance of the moment extends beyond the Hasson family because it represents an experience shared by many others whose lives have been shaped by closed borders. For every reunion that becomes publicly visible, there may be numerous families still waiting for an opportunity to reconnect. Some have relatives who are elderly, others have children who have never met grandparents or cousins, and many have experienced important life events without the presence of loved ones living only a short distance away. The possibility of creating carefully managed humanitarian arrangements for such families deserves attention precisely because it addresses a deeply personal consequence of regional conflict.

Israel's security requirements remain substantial, and any future cross-border arrangements would need to account for the risks associated with the unstable situation in Syria. Yet recognizing these challenges does not diminish the humanitarian importance of exploring practical solutions. The ability to balance security with compassion is an important measure of responsible governance, and individual cases such as Hasson's can help draw attention to needs that might otherwise remain overlooked.

Conclusion: A Colonel, a Mother and a Story That Reveals the Best of Israel

The reunion of Colonel Atef Hasson with his mother and relatives in the Syrian village of Hader is a deeply moving story of family, perseverance and the human bonds that survive even the most difficult political circumstances. After leaving his birthplace decades ago, building a life in Israel and rising to the rank of colonel in the IDF, Hasson returned to the village where his journey began and embraced the family members from whom he had been separated for much of his adult life. The extraordinary contrast between his distinguished military career and the intensely personal nature of his homecoming gives the story its emotional power. It is simultaneously the account of an Israeli officer's professional achievements, a Druze family's endurance and a reminder of the human cost of borders that have divided communities for generations.

The story also highlights the important place of Druze citizens within Israel's national life. Their contributions to the country's security, public institutions and civic development have been substantial, and their service reflects a longstanding relationship between the community and the state. Hasson's rise through the ranks demonstrates the responsibilities

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that Druze officers can assume within the IDF, while his continuing connection to his Syrian birthplace illustrates the complexity of identities and family histories in the Middle East. His life is a reminder that loyalty to Israel and attachment to a wider cultural or familial heritage need not be mutually exclusive. Individuals can serve their country with distinction while maintaining profound emotional connections to relatives and communities beyond its borders.

The reunion offers a particularly positive illustration of Israel's diversity because it challenges the tendency to portray the country as a society defined by a single religious or ethnic experience. Israel is the national home of the Jewish people, but its citizens include members of numerous communities whose contributions shape the country's institutions and future. The Druze community occupies an important place within that society, and its members have demonstrated a deep commitment to public service while preserving their distinct traditions. Recognizing these achievements is essential to understanding Israel's character and the relationships that have developed among its different communities.

At the same time, Hasson's homecoming reveals the profound humanitarian consequences of prolonged regional conflict. The distance between his home in Mas'ade and his birthplace in Hader is relatively small, yet the border separating Israel and Syria transformed that journey into something that could not be undertaken for decades. The reunion therefore symbolizes both the resilience of family relationships and the extraordinary barriers that political hostility can create. It reminds us that behind every border are individuals whose lives are shaped by decisions and conflicts over which they often have little influence, and whose hopes may be as simple as spending time with parents, siblings and children.

The appeal for mechanisms allowing humanitarian family visits deserves consideration because Hasson's experience is not unique. Many Druze families remain divided between Israel and Syria, while younger generations have grown up without opportunities to meet relatives across the border. Carefully supervised arrangements that respect legitimate security concerns could potentially provide meaningful relief to these families and help preserve relationships that have survived decades of separation. Such measures would not resolve the political disputes between the two countries, but they could demonstrate that humanitarian considerations retain importance even when diplomatic relations remain difficult.

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Perhaps the most powerful aspect of this story is the image of an Israeli colonel, wearing the uniform of the country he has served for decades, embracing his mother in the Syrian village where he was born. The uniform represents his commitment to Israel, his professional achievements and the responsibilities he has carried throughout his military career. The embrace represents something equally fundamental: the enduring bond between a mother and her son, a relationship that survived years of separation and the political divisions of the Middle East. Together, these images offer a remarkable illustration of the complexity, humanity and resilience that characterize so many lives in the region.

Israel's story is often told through its wars, political debates and security challenges, but moments such as this reveal another dimension of the country. They demonstrate the diversity of its society, the contributions of its minority communities and the personal experiences of those who serve in its institutions. They also show that behind military uniforms and national borders are individuals whose lives are shaped by family, memory and the desire for human connection.

Colonel Hasson's homecoming is a celebration of family, an acknowledgment of the Druze community's contribution to Israel and a reminder that humanity can find expression even across borders shaped by decades of conflict. It is a story that deserves recognition not because it resolves the region's political challenges, but because it reveals what is possible when personal relationships are allowed to overcome barriers that once appeared insurmountable.

For the Hasson family, the reunion was an extraordinary moment of personal joy. For Israel, it offers an opportunity to recognize the dedication of a Druze officer whose life reflects the country's diversity and the contribution of minority communities to its national institutions. For the wider region, it provides a reminder that family relationships and humanitarian concerns deserve attention even when political disagreements remain unresolved.

The image of a Druze IDF colonel embracing his mother after decades apart is more than a moving family photograph. It is a powerful reminder that Israel's strength lies not only in its military capabilities or technological achievements, but also in the people from different backgrounds who contribute to its society, defend its citizens and carry with them the human stories that connect communities across borders. In a Middle East too often

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dominated by images of division, Colonel Atef Hasson's reunion offers something profoundly different: a moment of gratitude, belonging and hope, and a reminder that even after decades of separation, the bonds of family and humanity can endure.

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FOOTNOTES

1 https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/436802 (https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/436802) ↑

2 https://www.jfeed.com/news-israel/druze-idf-officer-reunites-with-mother-in-syria (https://www.jfeed.com/news-israel/druze-idf-officer-reunites-with-mother-in-syria) ↑

3 https://www.fidf.org/blog-a-covenant-of-life-gadeer-kamal-mreeh/ (https://www.fidf.org/blog-a-covenant-of-life-gadeer-kamal-mreeh/) ↑

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