

Kristallnacht, Act II

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by Thane Rosenbaum

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In an ordinary year, this week, specifically the days November 9 and 10, would call to mind *Kristallnacht*—the night of the broken glass. Given the grotesque carnage in southern Israel on October 7, global Jewry is today mindful of a brokenness far worse than glass—the confidence of their place in the world, which far too many had believed was secured.

The year was 1938, and all throughout Germany, Austria and parts of Czechoslovakia, two days were set aside to kill and terrorize Jews. Nazi-affiliated paramilitary groups, the Hitler Youth, and willing civilians, murdered hundreds of Jews (hundreds more committed suicide afterward, when the fate of European Jewry was realized), 269 synagogues were reduced to rubble and glass or burned to the ground, over 7,000 Jewish-owned businesses were ransacked and destroyed, and 30,000 Jewish men were placed in concentration camps.

Hitler's Final Solution to the Jewish Question was now, officially, in progress, and without the need for a question mark. The Master Race was determined to rid the world of that inferior race known as the Jews (sorry Whoopi Goldberg, the Holocaust was about race, because the Nazis made it so). *Kristallnacht* shattered both glass and illusions. All countries were placed on notice that world domination was only part of

Hitler's grand plan. The Jews were the Third Reich's first victims, and their annihilation its ultimate aim.

With a war raging in Gaza to eliminate Hamas after nearly two decades of still unabated rocket fire, the anniversary of *Kristallnacht*—a mere month from that ungodly slaughter; October 7, a new date that will live in infamy—could easily go unnoticed.

But *Kristallnacht* must be remembered, especially now, precisely because Jews, and not just those living in their ancestral homeland, but in the diaspora, as well, are once again facing threats of mass murder. The threats are largely empty, ironically, because of the existence of a Jewish state—the very same state that today's murderous antisemites wish to eliminate. The safe haven of a Jewish homeland was not an option both before and during the Holocaust. The new obsession of this generation of Jew haters is to turn that escape route into a dead end.

The sheer bloodlust of October 7, and its colossal success as an invasion of Israeli sovereignty—Hamas storming through the security fence on motorcycles like Hells Devils; the mighty IDF nowhere in sight—perhaps for the first time gave the enemies of Zion a feeling that after 75 years dreadfully watching tiny Israel outshine the 22 failed Arab states of the region, the dream of driving the Jews into the Mediterranean Sea might actually come true. The breaking of that barrier separating Gazans from Israelis on October 7 tampered with the psyches of both Jews and Arabs, and transported the symbolism of *Kristallnacht* to the Negev Desert.

In 1938, after two millennium of exile, persecution, forced conversions, and the occasional pogrom, the diaspora didn't take their refuge, wherever that might be, for granted. Whether inside the original ghetto of Venice or the relative comfort of

Amsterdam, Jews knew their host countries saw them as suspect outsiders—clannish and conniving wandering Jews. Some were hospitable, like George Washington’s letter to the Jews of Rhode Island; others, like Torquemada and Joseph Stalin, made Jewish lives insecure and instantly disposable.

But since 1948, with the creation of Israel, Jews suddenly had options. The Jewish state, understandably, made it easier to live as Jews in the United States, Canada, Australia, England, France, and even Germany. Sure, Israel was war-weary from its unwelcoming Middle Eastern neighbors. And it was a favorite target of U.N. General Assembly Resolutions. Perpetually under a microscope and subject to double standards. But it was a plucky and agile nation, resilient and resourceful, geographically small but to world Jewry, a Goliath.

Many Jews feel that the world’s reaction to the massacre on October 7 is a harbinger of something worse ahead, a premonition of the antisemitic alliances of this age. They may be right.

Sympathy for Israel was short-lived. There were immediate denials of Hamas’ butchery. The graphic and grotesque video shot by terrorists, and the delight they expressed from having killed so many Jews, was apparently unconvincing. Why should anyone assume that terrorists acted like barbarians? A hospital parking lot bombed by Islamic Jihad was blamed on Israel—with the target now the hospital itself, and an exponential list of civilian casualties.

Even more disturbingly was the impulse to elevate Hamas to the role of statemen. BBC and MSNBC refused to refer to them as “terrorists.” “Freedom fighters” was, apparently,

a more fitting description since the babies Hamas beheaded, and the grandmothers they killed and kidnapped, were soldiers of a colonialist army.

Savagery was suddenly justifiable “resistance.” Media outlets quoted Hamas as “Palestinian officials.” The accuracy of reports, issued by Hamas, as to the number of dead Palestinians from Israeli airstrikes were unquestioned and unverified. Israel somehow managed to only kill civilians, and never terrorists.

Faculty members on campus and their easily manipulated and largely ignorant students openly blamed Israel for Hamas’ actions, and expressed feelings of “exhilaration” at the thought of so many dead Israelis. The victims of October 7 were not victims at all. The babies and grandmothers deserved what they got.

Universities that twisted themselves into politically correct knots over Black Lives Matter, transgender rights, and anti-racism, found themselves unable to denounce Hamas, or ensure the safety of Jews on campus, who suddenly were responsible for why Palestinians are still without a homeland.

Nearly 30 congresspersons declined to vote in favor of a House resolution condemning antisemitism on campus. Members of the Squad converted their district offices into lobbying firms working for their main client, Hamas.

Israel descended quickly from aggrieved nation that possessed rights under international law to defend itself, to rogue nation that was violating the Geneva Convention and must consent to a ceasefire. No one mentioned the Geneva Convention on October 7.

Kristallnacht started out this way—the unleashing of violence against Jews was their own fault, and now nothing can be done to stop the inevitable. Are we in the midst of *Kristallnacht*, Act II, re-living the first days of the next Holocaust, a prelude to a newfangled “Final Solution.” This past week college students and raucous demonstrators in cities around the world screamed: “There is only one solution—a one-state solution!” Talk about coopting a message. We’re standing in the shoes of Berlin Jews from 1938, and we’re missing our cue.

All sorts of people with power and prestige are registering shock, and saying the same thing: “I have never seen antisemitism like this in my life.” So much for all those superpowers American Jews are thought to have possessed. It turns out that antisemitism is the Kryptonite of fully-assimilated, cosmopolitan Jews. It can fell Hollywood moguls, hedge fund managers, and Wall Street investment bankers faster than a speeding bullet.

Could it be that “Never Again” was never more than a provisional slogan—a feel-good antidote to an atrocity should another one ever materialize, a chance at redemption for a world that was largely indifferent to the Holocaust? Even the relative silence today of the outside world is feeling eerily familiar.

Liberal Jews are especially confused by this massive reality check. (European Jews have seen the graffiti on the wall for many years now, especially in France. A Jewish woman was stabbed in her home this past Shabbat, her assailant defaced her door with a swastika before departing.) Jews on the left naively believed they had earned enough sweat equity in marching for the civil rights of others to ensure that these alliances could be counted on to pump their fists and chants slogans in support of Jews—should the need ever arise.

Instead, it is precisely those very same unfaithful allies who have commandeered bullhorns and are reciting the catchy, genocidal theme song: “From the River to the Sea.” In far-flung places as Madrid and Melbourne, we are hearing: “Gas the Jews!” “Rape Jewish girls!” and “Intifada!”

Seriously? There are still people alive who survived the Holocaust, and we’re back to gassing? Hamas actually placed babies in *ovens*—two nouns that should never been uttered in the same sentence: “Jews” and “ovens.”

At least during the Holocaust, the world may have been asleep, but they surely weren’t cheering the Nazis on like they were this past week with the handiwork of Hamas. This is *Kristallnacht* on crack. Actually, it’s more like, *Kristallnacht*, meet the Arabian Nights.

So many of the protestors on campuses and in the streets are Muslims who have been galvanized by what is now happening in Gaza—and now have an opportunity to lawfully tell the world how much they really hate Jews. America is finally getting to see the Arab street, up close. It’s only in the Middle East, North Africa and Persian Gulf where thousands of people will burn American and Israeli flags and scream, “Death to America!”; “Death to Israel!”; “Death to British novelists!”; “Death to Danish cartoonists!”; “Death to the Popel!”; Death to death!”

With the steady migration of Muslims to Europe, such scenes have been played out throughout the continent, except in places like Poland, which, ironically, had a role to play in the Holocaust, but nowadays, the country has been relatively quiet in its antisemitism largely because they maintain a strict, airtight border. Very few Muslims have been granted refugee status.

The Jews of Paris, Munich, Madrid, Brussels, Stockholm, and Copenhagen, however, have slowly emigrated to Israel. They have stories to share with American Jews, who have been largely oblivious to their departure. Now that Jewish-Americans are declining to openly wear the artifacts of their religion, they are catching up.

There has been a lot of talk since the Trump administration about the return of the 1930s. The Alt-right and MAGA, and the Biden administration's obsession with "white supremacy," has sounded the alarm that fascists are among us. Remember the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, with the chanting, "Jews will not replace us"? Sounds ominous, even though hardly anyone knew what that phrase meant. But only 30 protestors from the alt-right showed up that day, compared with thousands of counter protestors.

Yes, I know that a few slackers hung antisemitic signs off the LA freeways in support of Kanye West, and his problem with Jews from a year ago. But how is that comparable to what we have been seeing on campus and city streets—a movement that is avowedly left-wing, progressive, and American Muslim. The fact that progressives are, paradoxically, standing in solidarity with those who believe in a strict adherence to Sharia law—where women, gays, nonbelievers, and artists do not fare especially well—one day will lead multitudes to feel foolish.

What we are seeing today is not a return to the 1930s, but something else entirely. It is an antisemitism rooted in Marxist theory, with its class consciousness and intellectual pretensions, its purity tests and loyalty oaths. It is fixated on race in ways that would have given Hitler a heart attack: the Master Race has dark skin! Pigmentation is a sign of virtue; whiteness nothing but shame. It reserves its most critical indictment of the colonialism of the west and the power it has exerted over oppressed peoples.

No matter what ideological label it warrants, it is proving to be toxic for Jews who are presumed guilty because all the things Jews have benefitted from, and brought to, liberal societies.

So far the Biden administration is standing firm with Israel against global pressures to reward Hamas for using Gazans as human shields. I fear that will soon change. Jewish donors are finally sending a message to colleges that antisemitism is not some benign prerogative of free speech and academic freedom. But most don't wish to jeopardize the legacy admissions of their children, even if that means betraying their fellow Jews.

The day after *Kristallnacht*, the Jews of Europe were without an army to settle the score and deter what would become the Holocaust. Many decades later, Israelis had the means for a reprisal after the slaughter on October 7. Given the Hamas Charter, and the chatter of its leaders this past week, their genocidal ambitions are undiminished. And so, the IDF must fight on.

Israel has never received global sympathy for its moral dilemma: surviving in region that largely wishes for them to disappear, Abraham Accords, notwithstanding. Brace yourselves: There will be a new price to pay for all that glass.

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