Israel On My Mind
by Shea Lerner

Israel Must win and we as Jews must support this unconditionally. It is imperative that American Jews insist to all of our political leaders that Israel has the right to proceed into Rafah, that we articulate the necessity of finishing the job that was started.

More and more, we are starting to hear from influential people in America, even Jews, that Israel's time in Gaza is effectively expired. This has started to go beyond the usual anti-Zionist Jews to those who are historically and politically ignorant. It is victory over Hamas – the terror organization that Mosab Hassan Yousef recently called "the devil who uses Palestinian children as human shields" – that is the moral imperative.

As is well known by now, on October 7, 2023, Hamas terrorists broke through the barrier between Israel and Gaza to torture, rape, and kill 1200 men, women, and children, and take another 240 back to Gaza as hostages. Much has been made about the fact that by October 8, before Israel had even completely repelled this barbaric attack, anti-Israel protesters were marching by the hundreds in Chicago, New York, San Francisco, San Diego, Atlanta, and elsewhere. But few have articulated the real reason behind these protests. The immediate increase in security presence at Jewish institutions, beginning at the Simchat Torah observances on the night of October 7 in the US, demonstrated what we all understood instinctively – that the Hamas attack on Israel was a signal to antisemites everywhere: It's open season on the Jews.

This played out in the weeks that followed: In October New York's Second Avenue Deli was vandalized, as were, in November, Jewish-owned shops in San Francisco and Philadelphia. Also in November, the president of AIPAC had his home smoke-bombed and vandalized, a synagogue and a JCC in Montreal were attacked with firebombs, two Jewish schools in Montreal were attacked with gunshots, and a school in Indiana was attacked in the mistaken belief that it was Jewish. That same month a teacher in a New York City high school had to hide from a mob of antisemitic students in her own school.

Israeli and diaspora Jews are inextricably connected, one corporeal being. When Israel is weak, Jews around the world are more vulnerable. When Israel is secure, Jews around the world are secure as well, not only because Israel projects Jewish strength, but even if for no other reason than they know they have a place to go. In France, in the aftermath of the 2006 kidnapping, torture and murder of 23-year old Ilan Halimi, the 2012 murders of three Jewish children and a rabbi at a Jewish school in Toulouse, and the 2015 shooting at the Hyper Cacher kosher supermarket, French Jews departed for Israel in record numbers. Watching Hamas sympathizers take over American universities, while rhetoric worthy of actual Nazis find its way to *This Week with George Stephanopoulos* and *USA Today*, it no longer seems inconceivable that one day American Jews will follow a similar path.

The fate of Jews in Israel and Jews in the diaspora are intertwined. We need each other, and we

depend on each other. And if Israel does not destroy Hamas, all Jews around the world will be less safe.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues to pledge to destroy Hamas; the IDF said is ready, willing and able. Whether Israel has the military power to do so is not a serious question. Whether political leaders around the world, whose support is waning as the chorus of antisemitic protests grows, will ever allow the Jews to win another war, is.

But if Hamas is allowed to live another day, it will mean that Hamas is able and allowed to cross the border and attack Jews with functional impunity. Functional impunity, because the destruction in Gaza, the civilian deaths, and even their own "martyrs" are not a punishment for the jihadists of Hamas. Existentially, this will bring the Jews both in Israel and worldwide back to the pre-Israel condition of being essentially defenseless, as they were in Europe as well as the Middle East from the beginning of the diaspora until the reestablishment of the Jewish state in 1948. The fact of Jews having a refuge in Israel will become meaningless, as it won't be a true refuge, but just another place where Jews can be attacked by their enemies at will.

Jews in the diaspora need Israel, and need Israel to be secure. It is imperative, therefore, that American Jews insist to all of our political leaders that Israel has the right to proceed into Rafah, that we articulate the necessity of finishing the job that was started. And Israel needs Jews in the diaspora to make clear to all, the necessity of Israeli victory.

Yasher Koach, may we all go from Strength to Strength.

In Friendship,
Shea