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*They say art  
imitates life.  
Post-October 7th,  
dystopian art  
imitates  
dystopian life.*

**SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, AN EXHIBIT SHOWCASING THE** Hamas massacre by Israeli sculptor Orna Ben-Ami was on display at United Nations headquarters. The U.N. initially opposed the exhibit, claiming it was “a politically sensitive issue under dispute,” and only relented under pressure by Israel’s then-Ambassador to the U.N. Gilad Erdan.

I attended the opening night of the exhibit. A lump rose in my throat as I viewed images of normal everyday living amidst the carnage. A doll in a crib overlooking a blood-splattered room, children’s books scattered among bombed-out debris, a twisted stethoscope lying amidst rubble and dried blood.

While we hope that the exhibit influenced viewers, it would be naïve to think that it swayed the movers and shakers in that notorious hall of Jew-haters, the place that the Lubavitcher Rebbe called “a house of lies.” In his inauguration of the exhibit, Ambassador Erdan criticized the U.N. for “massacre denial” and pointed out that no U.N. body has even condemned Hamas months after the massacre occurred.

If October 7th has taught us anything, it is that increasing majorities around the world could not care less about Jewish suffering. And no amount of PR seems to be able to counter that.

# No amount of hyperbole could describe the irrationality of twisting Israel's status from oppressed to oppressor. And seemingly no amount or type of *hasbarah* can halt the normalization of Hamas as a terrorist organization.

For years, Israel's *hasbarah* (public diplomacy) has been getting a bad rap. Michal Cotler-Wunsh, Israel's Special Envoy for Combating Antisemitism, said that Israel needs to shape up its public diplomacy efforts. "There is an unconventional war for public opinion that has been raging for decades," she said.

President Trump said in a radio interview that Israel is "absolutely losing the PR war."

This is not a new story.

No matter how hard Israel has tried, its efforts yielded diminishing returns. Missiles rain down on Israel, terrorists stab, shoot, and ram into Jewish victims, and somehow Israel's failing *hasbarah* is blamed for the lack of support among the world's anti-Semites.

It is an uphill battle, especially among left-wing anti-Semites. Israel's gurus of public diplomacy have nothing to show for their sustained efforts to convince progressives that Israel is the poster boy of progressive values. They tried to woo the world with pride parades, environmental advocacy, and cultural outreach and were rewarded with accusations of pink-washing, green-washing, and

apartheid.

Indeed, if you google "*hasbarah*," one of the very first websites to pop up defines it as "the art of deception: How Israel uses '*hasbarah*' to whitewash its crimes." Another one calls it "Israel's propaganda machine."

Then came October 7th. In a macabre way, what should have been the biggest public relations stunt Madison Avenue could ever conjure up backfired. No PR agency could have ghoulishly concocted a better plan to generate sympathy for the Jewish state than the brutal murder of over 1200 men, women, and children, some burned alive and dismembered, and the kidnapping of hundreds of its citizens into dark and dank tunnels.

Instead, most of the world spun the facts until Israel became the perpetrator.

Posters of the hostages and "Bring them home" dog tags burst onto the scene, but as of this writing most of the hostages are still prisoners. October 7th should have become the mother of all hashtags, but unlike the #BringBackOurGirls hashtag blitz for the kidnapped victims of Boko Haram, it never went viral. Instead, posters were ripped down by frenzied pro-Hamas

protestors amid allegations of genocide and war crimes perpetrated by Jews.

In Kafkaesque style, Hamas succeeded beyond its wildest expectations in painting Israel as the pariah. Israel's version of 9/11 was far greater in terms of deaths per population than America's tragedy. However, it went completely belly-up in garnering the support that President Bush did with his famous words, "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."

A majority of Americans still support Israel over the terrorists, but pro-Hamas protests are proliferating on the streets, in the media, at universities, and within the Democratic Party. A recent Gallup poll shows a decline in Americans' opinion of Israel since last year, especially among young Americans.

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If Hamas's atrocities and its stated vow to commit more October 7ths

until it has eradicated all the Jews is not enough fodder for sympathy, then perhaps the solution is not to double down on *hasbarah*. Perhaps the solution is to double down on preventing more October 7ths.

This does not mean that Israel should abandon its efforts at advocacy or discontinue cultivating relationships, especially with Israel's natural allies among Evangelical Christians and right-wing conservatives. On the contrary, it should redirect those efforts towards championing its goal of self-defense rather than apologizing for its right to self-defense.

When Trump stated that Israel was losing the PR war, he also advised the people of Israel to finish what they started, not to abandon their efforts. "Get it over with," he said, "and get it over with fast."

*Hasbarah* in Hebrew means

explanation. Israel has to stop explaining why Jews have a right to defend themselves and just defend themselves. It needs to be less concerned about being liked than about being feared. Efforts by Israel to spare Gazan civilians, perhaps even at the expense of Jewish lives, are going unnoticed anyhow. Anti-Semites aren't interested in how Hamas, or Hezbollah for that matter, uses its citizens as human shields, and civilian deaths as strategic trophies.

As of this writing [Tishrei], the Biden administration demands that Israel kill off Hamas terrorists piecemeal or leave over a portion of them to regenerate. Such a policy will cause more IDF casualties and threaten Israel. Whether the Jewish state fights a war of attrition or finishes off Hamas with a bang, world opinion will still remain the same. And whether or not Israel vanquishes Hezbollah in similar fashion, Israel will

still be blamed for "escalating" tensions in the Middle East.

In a meeting with Ariel Sharon, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, *zy"y*, said, "It is imperative to stop trying to find favor in the eyes of the gentile nations. This has never helped in the past nor will it help in the future. The indecisiveness of Israel must stop. It is obligatory to uproot the mentality of exile from the Land of Israel."

These prescient words clearly delineate the government's first and foremost responsibility to protect its citizens. *Hasbarah* or no *hasbarah*.



*A version of this article first appeared in Hamodia. Sara Lehmann, an award-winning freelance writer, lives in Brooklyn, NY. Her guest editorial, "Then the Marriage Will*

*Succeed and Flourish," appeared in the Gimmel Tammuz N'shei Chabad Newsletter.*



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