

Can Hamas' Levers be trimmed?

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by Lev Tsitrin

The use of levers is known since antiquity. Observing how a lever allows moving the un-liftable objects with relative ease, Archimedes famously extrapolated lever's almost miraculous force-multiplying powers to the entire cosmos. "Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it, and I shall move the world," he said.

Politicians want to move the world too – though not in Archimedes' way. Their levers are very different indeed from those used by engineers – the levers of brutal, raw power, which they pivot against the fulcrums of human fears, emotions, and empathy. Examples are plenty. Every police state – Soviet Union, Communist China, Nazi Germany, North Korea, Afghanistan, Iran – leverages people's fear that a horror they saw happening to their compatriot or neighbor will happen to them too, unless they fall into line – and, invariably, they do.

But it is not just the internal dissent that gets suppressed by the levers of power pivoted against the fulcrum of emotions. Using them externally works too. Hamas used levers against Israel – and how it did it, deserves close scrutiny, since it teaches some hard political lessons.

One lesson is, that unlike engineering, in politics the length of the pivot does not really matter: if the fulcrum is good, a really short lever can do as great a job as a very long one. When in 2006 Hamas dug a tunnel from Gaza into Israel and kidnapped just one soldier, Gilad Shalit, it acquired a lever of immense power – because, while short in itself, it was pivoted on a fulcrum of unbounded Israeli empathy for Shalit. Shalit's father met world figures to implore them to intervene with Hamas; he set up a protest tent near Knesset to keep his son's name in the news. The press, needless to say, was a huge force multiplier (it always is – if one has the access to it, of course), generating mass rallies to push the government to accept Hamas's terms. And the pressure worked – Hamas's lever of just one Israeli soldier taken captive, skillfully pivoted on the fulcrum of Israel's empathy, resulted in the release of 1,027 Palestinian terrorists – including Yahya Sinwar, the mastermind of the October 7 atrocity that was perpetrated to give Hamas an even longer lever. Thus, leveraging the release of Shalit, on October 7 Hamas killed 1,200, and dragged into captivity another 240 Israelis, putting further pressure on

Israeli government (the recent *New York Times*' headline reads "[Families of Hamas Hostages Warn That Time Is Running Out](#)"). Some use of a lever!

And Hamas has yet another lever that it uses equally artfully – this one, pivoted on the world's need to feel good. This lever offers Hamas both an excuse, and the hoped-for protection from Israeli counter-attack, and it is made of the dead Palestinians. Unlike the lever used on Israel, this one needs to be really long to produce results; the greater the number of Palestinians killed, the louder the screams of "stop it," "cease-fire now," heard all over the world – putting pressure on the likes of VP Kamala Harris to put pressure on Israel (quoting *New York Times*' headline again, "[Harris Takes Forceful Tone With Israel in a Foray Into Mideast Diplomacy](#)"), and resulting in [UN chief's hysterical invocation of Article 99](#) to force a cease-fire that would save Hamas from destruction – though ostensibly, to quote Mr. Guterres "to avert a humanitarian catastrophe."

Accordingly – so as to create the very "humanitarian catastrophe" which the good-hearted Mr. Guterres would then "avert," giving Hamas a breather – Hamas embeds itself among the non-combatants whose deaths it then presents to the pitying world so the world organizes huge demonstrations in world's capitals pressuring their governments to pressure Israel to stop.

This, in essence, is how Hamas' military-political lever works – it puts on good people's tender hearts, both in Israel and the world, the pressure that is more than they can bear – and they wind up doing Hamas's bidding: releasing terrorists, and letting Hamas survive.

The question is, can anything be done about it?

I think that the answer is a "yes." The first lesson of October 7 is that the public must understand that it is being

manipulated and played by Hamas – and refuse to play along. It is tough, but statecraft is a tough business. If, at the time of the capture of Shalit, Israel stood firm and insisted on a 1-to-1 exchange, trimming Hamas' lever to its actual size rather than multiplying it thousand-fold, perhaps there would be no October 7 attack – simply because Hamas would have known that the return on investment would be minimal, and the investment not worth it. Instead, Hamas was sure – and said so at the time – that by grabbing so many Israelis they would be able to get all terrorists jailed in Israel released.

The other way of trimming Hamas' lever, is having in custody as few of those whom Hamas badly wants released as possible. Today, Israelis vow to hunt down the mastermind of October 7 atrocity, Yahya Sinwar, and kill him – but he was in Israeli custody for 22 years. What prevented them from hanging him when he was in their hands? As [Wikipedia most helpfully informs us](#), Sinwar “was sentenced to four life sentences [for four murders] in 1989. He tried to escape several times but was always caught. In 2008 while serving a prison sentence he was operated on by Israeli doctors to remove a tumor in his brain to save his life.” Well, there indeed was something that prevented Israel from hanging Sinwar for committing four murders: Israeli law. Israel does not have death penalty, you see. It is of course nice – but is the price paid by so many Israelis who got such horrible death sentences on October 7 worth it?

And then, there is the international side of the Hamas lever – the side constructed not of captured Israelis, but of dead Palestinians. With a little toughness, this one is not difficult to cut down to size either – by counting Palestinian casualties as a proportion of the size of Hamas, rather than in meaningless, absolute numbers. According to [Wikipedia](#), Hamas has 20-25,000 members (though in this, Wikipedia contradicts itself: it lists “Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades” as its military wing, [estimating its membership](#) in 15-40,000

range). A European assessment of Hamas' size I recently heard on BBC was 25,000 armed members and 40,000 "civil servants." – 65,000 total. So clearly, if Hamas is to be eradicated, this would be the reasonable ballpark of casualties – apart from the collateral damage. The current overall number that Hamas is leveraging against the world public opinion, (the count that gives fits to the likes of VP Harris and Mr. Guterres) is 15,000 – a fraction of Hamas' membership. So the answer – and admittedly, it is a hard and unsentimental one, is "this number is still a fraction of what Hamas is. It is nowhere near what that number has to be. So don't freak out – but inform your public properly, i.e. not in terms of absolute number of the dead, but in terms of the proportion of the dead to the size of Hamas, to give the numbers proper context."

Long story short, Hamas is very good at making and using political levers. We must learn how to trim those levers – and know that while doing it is tough, it can, nonetheless, be done.