

Reality and Resilience: A Zionist Jewish author's Lament



by Howard Rotberg

Right now, we are just weeks, if not days, away from the signing of a new nuclear deal with Iran. The base assumption with Iran is the same as with Russia: If we just economically engage them with large and attractive enough deals, their economy will grow and they will just give up their plans to annihilate Israel and America – the ‘Little Satan’ and the ‘Great Satan.’...Today, any economic benefits dangled in front of Iran must be accompanied by a strong unified stand from the international community denying it any type of nuclear program whatsoever.– Dr. Jurgen Buhler, Jerusalem Post, March 2, 2022

The great Melanie Phillips has recently [written](#):

“Biden’s muddled comment last week that “no-one expected the sanctions to prevent anything from happening” to Ukraine suggested that the US wrote off that country long ago. The

suspicion is that it has done the same with Israel over Iran. The fate of Ukraine tells us that Israel will have to fight its existential foe in Tehran alone."

How can Americans become complicit in a new Axis of Evil – Russia, China and Iran?. The world is afraid to help Ukraine with certain military equipment and fighter jets, lest we be drawn into "World War 3". But why can Americans think that appeasing Iran at the expense of Israel is acceptable?

I have been angry now for over 20 years. My anger started when I read in the late 1990s how Iranian leader Ayatollah Rafsanjani pledged that Iran would get nuclear weapons and use them against Israel. Since Israel at that time had 6 million Jews, the same number as murdered in the Shoah, I thought a lot of people would be speaking out and that American Jews, if they had any power and any conscience would lead the way at de-fanging Iran well before that happened.

But I was wrong. Nothing much happened during the terms of all the American presidents, except for Donald Trump, being the only leader to make proper agreements, pull America out of the Iran agreement, and point the way to peace through the Abraham Accords – yet American Jews by a large margin supported Joe Biden who is in the process of signing a much worse Iran deal for Israel, according to reports.

And so, Israel must protect itself, and it is commonly thought that once Iran completes the nuclear arsenal, Israel must undertake preemptive strikes. We hope the Americans will not object.

I am the son of a survivor of Auschwitz and my father was slave labor who lost his parents and then eight year old sister to the gas chambers. And so, every year I became angrier and angrier because outside of Israel no one seemed to much care.

By the time of the Second Intifada and its targeted murder of Jewish civilians, I had had enough and I decided to use whatever writing skills I had to write a novel in 2003 that would show (to any book readers left in the world) that we were in danger from a "Second Holocaust" – notwithstanding that Israel possesses its own nuclear weapons, high tech missile defense systems, and probably the best military in the world.

The book became *The Second Catastrophe: a Novel About a Book and its Author*.

I arranged for a long stay in Israel in late 2001 and early 2002 to write my book and, despite not being a university faculty member, I was allowed to live in the Maiersdorf Faculty Residence at the Mount Scopus campus of the Hebrew University. The 29 rooms of the residence were nearly empty because a lot of foreign professors had cancelled their plans to stay there because of the violence of the Second Intifada.

I decided to combine fact and fiction and so the fictional part was about a Canadian professor, son of a survivor of the Shoah, who writes a controversial book, excerpted through various parts of the novel, claiming that a Second Shoah is already underway, this time by Iran and its terrorist proxies, and once again tolerated by the West.

And I used facts to further my fiction. The professor has a daughter, as I did, studying at Hebrew University. In real life, my daughter and some of her friends from university were heading to the Sbarro pizza restaurant when it was blown up in a terrorist attack – they missed being killed or severely injured by a mere 20 minutes. 15 civilians were killed, including 7 children and a pregnant woman, and 130 wounded.

In the novel, I have the protagonist's daughter at Sbarro on Rehove Yaffa when it is blown up and she gets severely injured. With every new terrorist attack and every failure of

the West to better help Israel through ethical conduct and writings by its educational and media elites, I got angrier. I threw myself into my writing, founded a pro-Israel publishing company and wrote three more books and dozens of op-eds for magazines and newspapers around the world. I had no illusions that my task would be easy or that it would even be possible to influence people, but I had to channel my anger into a course of action.

And through my publishing efforts and my continued writing, I realized that in fact there were many colleagues with whom I could work in the effort of hasbara.

Just to mention some of them: non-Jews like Giulio Meotti from Italy and, Canadians Paul Merkley. Christine Douglass Williams, and the pro-Israel reformist Muslim Salim Mansur, and Canadian Jews Stephen Schecter, Jake Sivak, and David Solway,, South Africans like Steve Apfel, Americans like Phyllis Chesler, Farrell Bloch, and Jamie Glazov, and Israelis like Mordechai Nisan and, Pamela Peled..

As I have recently [argued](#) that one effect of the Russian war on Ukraine might be a renewed emphasis on the caliber of leadership of nations, as much is written about Zelenskyy versus Putin, and Americans begin to realize what Biden/Harris are doing to both American national security and its economy. Another is the effect of millions of Eastern Europeans fleeing war and others being killed in the conflict, which can result in a dearth of population that many Muslims will be happy to fill.

I agree with the great Daniel Greenfield that both Russia and Ukraine face a demographic challenge that may be troublesome: low birth rates, high numbers of abortions, rampant suicide and dead militants will see Eastern Europe and Western Europe alike turn to Islam for laborers, soldiers and uses for the many beautiful churches as future mosques: "[Islam is the Only Winner in the Ukraine War](#)" as [wrote Giulio Meotti as well.](#)

It is of little solace, I am sure, for Israelis to know that radical Islam or Islamism is now as much of a threat to Europe as it is to Israel. As someone fearing America's permission for Iran to have nuclear bombs, is there anything at all that can give me some optimism after so many years of pessimism?

When Putin put some 160,000 Russian troops south and east of Ukraine, most people were in denial of the reality that he would greenlight an invasion. Then when he did invade, most people thought Ukraine would be defeated within a matter of days. Many were shocked at how calm and determined was the Ukrainian leader Zelenskyy who after all was in recent times a comedian and actor. However, when he turned down an American offer to escort him out of the country he declined, saying he needed weapons more than a taxi.

And then the Ukrainian people showed a bravery, determination and nationalism that astounded most commentators. In my mind, however, it was clear that Ukrainian resilience was similar to the Israeli resilience I witnessed during the Second Intifada. It was also clear that there is a difference in commitment, military skills and courage between those attacking a neighboring country and those defending their homeland.

Attitude and social resilience are important, but as Zelensky argued to the Western World, he needed more weapons too. With the amount of location of Russian bombing going on, there may be little left in Ukraine for its citizens to come back to, even if Russia is somehow defeated.

In my book, *The Ideological Path to Submission...* and what we can do about it, I looked at the nature of Israeli social resilience.

Can we compare how the Israelis have countered the demoralizing effects of terrorism and how the Ukrainians have countered the effects of the Russian invasion? In both cases, it will be seen that social resilience backed by modern

weapons can be the turning point in any existential battle.

Social resilience got the Israelis through the Second Intifada and missile attacks from Hamas. The Ukrainians were similar, but they had the benefit of thousands of people around the world demonstrating and protesting in their favor. Israelis have to worry about a future war with a nuclear-armed Iran, and whether students throughout the West may side with Iran or Israel in their protests.

Of course there are differences in the nature of terrorism against Israel and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Professor Dov Waxman of the City University of New York in a 2011 [essay](#) entitled "Living with terror, not Living in Terror: The Impact of Chronic Terrorism on Israeli Society" in *Perspectives on Terrorism* reviewed the literature and brought together psychological, sociological, economic and political factors into a most enlightening study.

He noted that "the purpose of terrorism is not just to kill people, inflict material damage, or frighten an audience."

Terrorism, says Waxman, seeks to alter the social and political dynamics of the societies it targets and through indiscriminate attacks, attempts to change the political agenda of the targeted population. "One of the key objectives of terrorism, then, is to demoralize the targeted society—to induce a widespread sense of helplessness and hopelessness and feeling of despair among members of the society. If the targeted society does not become demoralized, terrorism fails in this respect."

"By this criterion", says Waxman, "Palestinian terrorism during the second Intifada was ineffective because it did not succeed in demoralizing the Israeli-Jewish public. While Israelis were certainly fearful of terrorist attacks, they did not become despondent and dispirited. Rather, Israelis demonstrated resolve and steadfastness in the face of

relentless terrorism. Indeed, any visitor to Israel during the second Intifada could not help but be struck by the seemingly nonchalant manner with which Israelis lived with the constant threat of terrorism. Instead of panic and public hysteria, there was stoicism and fortitude. Israelis did not allow the threat of terrorism to dominate their lives. Although they experienced high levels of stress and fear, they went on with their lives.”

So, while Israelis may not have had the world support that Ukrainians do, on the Israeli side, most still had homes to return to, compared to the level of destruction of apartment buildings we are seeing in Ukraine and the amount of Ukrainians leaving the country, taking only a small amount of personal possessions. And, despite the separation of men between 18 and 60 (who were mandated to stay in the country to fight) from their wives and children, still the Ukrainians demonstrated resilience.

In a [paper](#) in 2013 by Markus Keck and Patrick Sakdapolrak, they define social resilience as being comprised of three dimensions: 1. Coping capacities – the ability of social actors to cope with and overcome all kinds of adversities; 2. Adaptive capacities – their ability to learn from past experiences and adjust themselves to future challenges in their everyday lives; 3. Transformative capacities – their ability to craft sets of institutions that foster individual welfare and sustainable societal robustness toward future crises.

We should have learned from Putin’s actions in Ukraine that there are some evil leaders in the world. We should also learn that letting evil regimes like Iran’s get nuclear weapons might lead to a terrible reality that cannot be defeated by resilience alone. Why is Russia moderating the discussions with Iran for a new nuclear agreement for Iran? We must stop denying reality; we seem to be on the verge of a major war with Russia and Iran unless their leaders can be eliminated

and replaced with a moral leadership. Weakness provokes; strength deters.

The lack of urgency to prevent Iran's promises to nuke Israel and the worrisome leftist/Islamists now in American politics, have once again made me angry. We must figure out how to turn that anger into successfully weakening Russia and Iran and preventing another Holocaust.

First published in [INN](#).