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Facts & Logic About the Middle East

January 3, 2023



New Israeli government responds to besieged public: Terrorists will get death penalty

Dear Friend of Israel, Friend of FLAME:

The American press, the Biden administration and many Jewish groups have been raising frantic alarms and threats against the new Israeli government. Their outrage is misplaced in many cases.

Indeed, some of the reforms targeted by the new ruling coalition address pressing security issues—even life-or-death threats. One of the problems American critics would be better served complaining about is skyrocketing Palestinian terrorism.

Those who don't reside in tiny Israel can't fully appreciate the frustration and abject fear of living under the almost daily threat of terrorist attacks—and murders—within a few miles of their homes.

Right now, Israel is facing a wave of terrorism that has caused more deaths than in over a decade.

This year, 31 Israelis have been murdered by Palestinian terrorists, the highest number of fatalities since 2008. The overwhelming majority were civilians—such as 84-year-old Shulamit Rahel Ovadia, who was bludgeoned to death by a Palestinian terrorist this past September.

More than 300 Israeli civilians and soldiers were targeted in shooting attacks in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) this year, compared with 91 in 2021. In 2022, Palestinians were responsible for 8,483 violent incidents, such as riots or stone-throwing, up 20% from last year.

Tragically, terrorists seem undeterred by the threat of jail time in Israeli prisons. And why should they be?

Palestinians imprisoned by Israel live a comfortable life. For starters, their prison time is compensated by the Palestinian Authority (PA), which pays them and their families generous lifetime salaries as part of the PA's pay-for-slay policy.

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YOU DESERVE TO KNOW THE TRUTH...

Democracy Thrives in Israel

A new report ranks the Jewish state as one of the world's strongest, most equitable democracies—despite baseless falsehoods about its oppression of Palestinians

While some accuse Israel of oppression, genocide, and rights violations, they offer little convincing evidence. In the contrary, Israel has a superior record of civil liberties, elections, rule of law and other opportunities of civil society making it the world's 24th most successful democracy.

What are the facts?
Israel's Jewish citizens, as well as Palestinian Arabs living in surrounding disputed territories, have no contact with such poorly reported accusations. In fact, Democracy Index 2021, by ICIJ—the Economist Intelligence Unit—ranks Israel as one of the most thriving democracies in the world, scoring higher than the United States, Spain, Italy and some 19 other nations. The index ranks countries according to 15 criteria covering each nation's performance according to its 1) electoral process and pluralism; 2) functioning of government; 3) political participation; 4) political culture and 5) civil liberties.

Israel's 2021 ranking shows consistent improvement in its democratic processes
compared with the first such report in 2006, when the Jewish state ranked only 47. In the current report, Israel was ranked for its achievements as an Arab party in today's ruling government coalition.

No surprise since Israel's robust democracy has a vibrant elected tradition, stable governing institutions, high political participation among its citizens, a vigorous, even business political culture, and broad, equal civil liberties for all its citizens.

Unfortunately, even in Israel, democracy is opposed in the past year, the ICIJ noted that democracy globally is under attack. This was due to the United Kingdom, calling "an unprecedented withdrawal of civil liberties," including "a huge increase of state power over large areas of public and personal life."

In contrast to Israel news Middle Eastern regimes, the highest ranking of which was Tunisia, reaching only 75th place—and then not as a democracy, but as a "hybrid regime." The center of Palestine was ranked as an "authoritarian" regime in 20th place.

Like all countries in the index, Israel's performance in the 2021 evaluation was based on the health and performance of democratic institutions among its citizens.

While critics often unfairly blame Israel for a lack of democratic freedoms in Judea and Samaria ("the West Bank") and Gaza, they ignore the fact that the PA, the UN, and the governing authorities of Palestinians in those territories are responsible for their respective deteriorations—the Palestinian Authority in Gaza.

Unfortunately, neither of these Palestinian governments holds regular elections, supports basic civil liberties, nor freedom of speech, assembly and religion—or enforces rule of law.

Neither respects women's equality, and both violently persecute members of LGBTQ and religious minorities.

Arab-Israeli commentators readily admit in acknowledgment that Palestinians have been waging terrorism war against Israeli civilians since the state's birth in 1948. Much of Palestinian suffering results from Israel defending itself against their—sometimes attack, as well as British/Palestinian refusal to accept multiple offers of land for peace and a state of their own.

Israel's "nation-state law" has also been unfairly attacked. The law declares that the country's state is built for the Jewish people's "right to self-determination." The criticism, however, is a red herring, attempting to discredit a statute that in no way limits Israeli democracy. Note that this law does not infringe on the rights of individual Israelis, including its two million Arab citizens. Like many other nation states, it merely formalizes symbols of its people—in this case the Jewish people—such as the flag, national anthem, and holidays.

Note that while the nation-state law declares Hebrew to be the national language, this is not different from the United States, in which English is the mother tongue. Nor does Israel's nation-state law establish any official religion—unlike some other European countries that declare state religions in their very constitutions.

While still challenging and inspiring one of the most ethically diverse and free democracies on earth, in fact, some would argue that it is precisely Jewish values of compassion and justice that help Israel help and guarantee Israeli robust democracy.

No matter which discredited accusations Israeli enemies repeat, the Jewish state effectively remains one of the strongest and most successful democracies on earth, providing political freedom and economic opportunities across both to the majority of the world's nation. Moreover, the suffering and plight of the Palestinians has little to do with Israel and almost entirely the result of authoritarian governance by its corrupt, tyrannical regimes and their effective refusal to make peace.

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FLAME
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P.O. Box 2000, Gaithersburg, MD 20878
James Strickman, President
Giovanna Jahn (JF), Treasurer

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In addition, many convicted terrorists—even murderers—are later released early, in negotiated “prisoner swaps,” so a 25-year prison term could only last for five years.

Not surprisingly, some Palestinians who are imprisoned by Israel for terrorist offenses go right back to waging jihad against the Jewish state upon release.

This past November, Israelis elected a new government that promises to take a tougher line on Palestinian terrorism by giving terrorists convicted of murder the death sentence.

Currently, Israel does not employ the death sentence under civil law, though it is an option under the Israeli military justice system.

Earlier this year, in response to the latest wave of terrorist attacks, members of Israel’s parliament, the Knesset, proposed the death penalty for terrorists. Explanatory notes to the bill explained its rationale:

“After each terrorist attack, the top officials of the defense establishment promise that the ‘long arm of the State of Israel will settle the score with the murderers.’ However, in practice, all the murderers receive comfortable conditions in prison and salaries from the Palestinian Authority, and in time most of them are freed in various deals. The purpose of this bill is to curtail terrorism and create a weighty deterrent.”

This proposal was ultimately voted down by the Knesset. Nevertheless, its explanatory notes highlight the problem with the current system in that Palestinian terrorists imprisoned by Israel DO enjoy almost a country-club lifestyle, according to testimony from former prisoners. For example, after spending 8 months in an Israeli jail for assaulting Israeli soldiers and inciting suicide bombings, 17-year-old Ahed Tamimi, in a TV interview delivered by Palestinian Media Watch (PMW), described her experience, saying,

“I did a lot of things: a legal course, we spent a lot of time on that, and matriculation exam studies; I read books; we would sing; we even had joint breakfasts of the entire wing—we would go outside, every room would bring its things, and we would eat together. We also ate lunch together most of the time. We also had parties... We watched TV, for example we jumped around in the rooms and did silly things; we did a lot of things.”

Another prisoner, Mohammad Hilal, described his experience to an interviewer formerfrom PA TV, also via PMW, after serving 10 years:

“In the morning we'd exercise from 7:00 until 8:00... Then the guys would get together in the prison yard and we'd chat, talk, eat, drink, joke and play, etc., throughout the day. At noon the guys would go to their rooms for roll-call. Noon roll-call is from 11:00 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. Roll-call time is time for resting in the rooms. Each group has a routine inside the rooms: Nap time, reading time,

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study time. Some sleep, some read. At 1:30 or 12:30 p.m. they'd take us out to the yard again. We'd spend [time] with the guys walking, laughing, playing, joking, etc., until dark.”

Based on these testimonies, one would think Palestinian terrorists were getting a paid vacation. Indeed, they are. They and their families receive handsome salaries from the PA as part of its pay-per-slay policy. Salaries range from around \$400 a month to as much as \$4,000 per month, the latter of which is three times the average Palestinian wage.

Do Palestinian terrorists released from Israeli prisons come out regretting what they did? Not according to Asrar Samrin, who said in an interview shown on PMW, “I say to the Israelis: There is no Palestinian who did something for the homeland and his nation who will regret it. We don't regret what we did and we will not regret what we did.”

Samrin was serving a life sentence for murdering an Israeli civilian, but was freed along with 104 other prisoners in October 2013 to satisfy the PA's demand for a prisoner release simply in exchange for renewing peace negotiations. Those negotiations, of course, failed.

Imprisoning Palestinian terrorists actually spurs more terrorism. In fact, according to a government report released to the Israeli news outlet, *Israel Hayom*, some terrorist attacks have been planned inside of prison, including two this year.

Many terrorists freed from the Israeli prison system have gone on to carry out more attacks. For instance, Mohammed Abu al-Kiyan, a released security prisoner, murdered four Israelis in a terrorist attack in Beersheba. In another case, Diaa Hamarsheh, a released Palestinian prisoner from a village near Jenin, murdered five Israelis in Bnei Brak, close to Tel Aviv.

These murders would obviously have been prevented if their perpetrators were given death sentences following their first offenses.

Many American critics of Israel are focusing fearfully on issues the new government may take—or may not. But those critics often ignore the fact that the new government was elected to solve very real problems in Israeli society.

Paramount among these problems is the rising rate of murder by people whose avowed mission is not a two-state solution, but rather killing Jewish people and destruction of the Jewish state.

You may approve of the death penalty, or not, in the abstract, but the question is tragically palpable daily in Israel. This is one way the new government proposes to respond to the voting public—reforming the Jewish state in order to make it more secure for every Israeli: Jew, Arab, gay, straight, Orthodox and Reform.

I encourage you in conversations with your family and friends—or in letters to the editor—to emphasize that the staunchly democratic Jewish state deserves the support of all American citizens, regardless of our personal politics.

It behooves Zionists—especially Jews in the Diaspora—to respect the democratic outcome of Israel’s elections. We should allow the country’s duly elected government to implement measures for which Israelis voted them into office, even as we may disagree with parts of their platform.

I hope you'll also take a minute, while you have this material front and center, to forward this message to friends, visit FLAME's lively Facebook page and review the P.S. immediately below. It describes FLAME's new *hasbarah* campaign —"Democracy Thrives in Israel"—which exposes false claims that Israel deprives Arab Israeli citizens and Palestinian Arabs of their rights.

Best regards,

Jason Shvili, Contributing Editor
Facts and Logic About the Middle East (FLAME)

P.S. Despite Israel’s guarantee of civil liberties and equal treatment for all its citizens—including two million Arab Israelis—Israel is still falsely accused of being an apartheid state. Despite Israel and the Palestinians agreeing that the Palestinian Authority will administer its own civil affairs, including elections, Israel is accused of violating human rights because Palestinians can’t vote in Israeli elections. I think you'll agree that truth is the only antidote to this lie. FLAME’s new *hasbarah* message—called “[Democracy Thrives in Israel](#)” publicizes a new, independent “Democracy Index” in which Israel is named the world’s 23rd most successful democracy—ahead of the United States, Italy, Spain and 139 other nations. This new editorial message also clarifies that Palestinians’ repression is due overwhelmingly to their two ruling dictatorships. (Palestinians are ranked #109 in the Democracy Index—as “authoritarian.”) I hope you'll review this convincing, fact-based editorial, which FLAME published nationwide in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *New York Post*, *Miami Herald*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Los Angeles Times* and *San Jose Mercury News*. This piece will also be sent to all members of Congress, Vice President Harris and President Biden. If you agree that this kind of public relations effort on Israel's behalf is critical, I urge you to support us. Remember: FLAME's powerful ability to influence public opinion—and U.S. support of Israel—comes from individuals like you, one by one. I hope you'll consider giving a [donation](#) now, as you're able—with \$500, \$250, \$100, or even \$18. (Remember, your donation in 2022 to FLAME is tax deductible.) To donate online, just go to [donate now](#). Now, more than ever, we need your support to ensure that the American people, the U.S. Congress and President Biden stay committed to fighting antisemitic, anti-Israel actions by individuals, politicians and commercial companies.

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About the Middle East
PO Box 3460
Berkeley, CA 94703

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