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**The World's Job During the War on Hamas:  
Save the Space For Peace**

**-by Yuval Noah Harari**

**Prof. Harari's above article has been taken from TIME magazine, November 6, 2023**



In its war against Hamas, Israel has a duty to defend its territory and its citizens, but it must also defend its humanity

Aviv Kutz (54), a member of Kibbutz Kfar Aza, is a childhood friend of a very close friend of mine. Aviv and his wife Livnat (49), and their three

children Rotem (19), Yonatan (17) and Yiftach (15), have lived in Kfar Aza for years. Although the Kutz family has endured many Hamas rocket and mortar attacks on their kibbutz, parents and children continue to hope for peace. Every year the Kutz family organized a kite-flying festival, meant to create a small peaceful space in the war zone. Colorful kites—some displaying peace messages—were flown near the border fence with Gaza. Livnat's sister, Adi Levy Salma, who participated in the festival in previous years said that “the idea is to fly the kites near the fence, to show Gaza that we only want to live in peace.” This year's kite festival was planned for Saturday, 7 October. “Kite festival 2023,” said the invitation, “we will meet at the football pitch at 16:00 to decorate the sky.” A few hours before the festival began, Hamas terrorists invaded and occupied the kibbutz. The terrorists went from house to house, systematically torturing, murdering, and kidnapping dozens of kibbutz members. All five members of the Kutz family were slaughtered.

The mind boggles at such atrocities. Why do human beings do such things? What did Hamas hope to achieve? The aim of the Hamas attack was not to capture and hold territory. Hamas didn't have the military capability to hold the kibbutz for long in the face of the Israeli army. To understand the aims of Hamas, three things should be noted. First, Hamas largely focused its attack on killing and kidnapping civilians rather than soldiers. Second, Hamas terrorists tortured and executed adults, children, and even babies in the most gruesome ways the terrorists could think of. Third, instead of trying to hide the atrocities, Hamas made sure they were publicized, even filming some of the atrocities itself and uploading the shocking videos to social media.

This is the very definition of terrorism, and we have seen similar things before with ISIS. Unlike conventional warfare that usually aims to capture territory or degrade military capabilities, terrorism is a form of psychological warfare that aims to terrify. By killing hundreds of people in horrendous ways and publicizing it, organizations like ISIS and Hamas seek to terrify millions. In addition to spreading terror, Hamas also aims to sow seeds of hatred in the minds of millions— Israelis, Palestinians, and other people throughout the world.

A baby stroller, along with other personal belongings are left on the side of the road next to a car after multiple civilians were killed days earlier in an attack by Hamas militants near the border with Gaza, on October 10, 2023 in Kfar Aza, Israel. Alexi J. Rosenfeld-Getty Images

Hamas is different from other Palestinian organizations like the PLO, and should not be equated with the whole Palestinian people. Since its foundation, Hamas adamantly refused to recognize Israel's right to exist, and has done everything in its power to ruin every chance for peace between Israelis and Palestinians, and between Israel and the Arab world. The immediate background to the current cycle of violence is the peace treaties signed between Israel and several Gulf States, and the hoped-for peace treaty between Israel and Saudi Arabia. This treaty was expected not only to normalize relations between Israel and most of the Arab world, but also to somewhat alleviate the suffering of millions of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation, and to restart the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Nothing alarms Hamas more than the possibility of peace. This is why it launched its attack—and this is why it murdered the Kutz family and

more than a thousand other Israeli civilians. What Hamas has done is a crime against humanity in the deepest sense of the term. A crime against humanity isn't just about killing humans. It is about destroying our trust in humanity. When you witness things like parents being tortured and executed in front of their children, or toddlers brutally murdered, you lose all trust in human beings. And you thereby risk losing your own humanity, too. Hamas's crimes cannot be justified by blaming them on past Israeli conduct. Two wrongs don't make a right. There is much to criticize Israel for holding millions of Palestinians for decades under occupation, and for abandoning in recent years any serious attempt to make peace with the Palestinian people. However, the murder of the Kutz family and the many other atrocities committed by Hamas were not meant to restart the peace process, nor are they likely to liberate a single Palestinian from Israeli occupation. Instead, the war Hamas launched inflicts immense suffering on millions of Palestinians. Driven by its religious fanaticism, Hamas just doesn't seem to care about human suffering—either of Israelis or Palestinians. Unlike the secular PLO, many of Hamas's leaders and activists seem to care mainly about their fantasies of heavenly afterlife. They are willing to consign this world to the flames and to destroy our souls in the process, so that their own souls will allegedly enjoy everlasting bliss in another world.

We must win this war of souls. In its war against Hamas, Israel has a duty to defend its territory and its citizens, but it must also defend its humanity. Our war is with Hamas, not with the Palestinian people. Palestinian civilians deserve to enjoy peace and prosperity in their homeland, and even in the midst of conflict their basic human rights should be recognized by all sides.

This refers not only to Israel, but also to Egypt, which shares a border with the Gaza Strip, and which has partially sealed that border.

As for Hamas, it and its supporters should be excommunicated by humanity. Not only Israel, but the entire human community should place Hamas completely beyond its pale, just as it has previously done with ISIS. Israeli citizens cannot live in places like Kfar Aza with Hamas across the fence, just as Iraqi and Syrian citizens could not live with ISIS on their doorstep. Tens of thousands of Israeli civilians have already fled the border areas, and they cannot go back to their homes until the threat to their lives is removed. At a deeper level, the lives of all humans are devalued and endangered as long as organizations like Hamas and ISIS are allowed to exist.

The aims of the Gaza War should be clear. At the end of the war, Hamas should be totally disarmed and the Gaza Strip should be demilitarized, so that Palestinian civilians could live dignified lives within the Gaza Strip, and Israeli civilians could live without fear alongside the Gaza Strip. Until these aims are achieved, the struggle to maintain our humanity will be difficult. Most Israelis are psychologically incapable at this moment of empathizing with the Palestinians. The mind is filled to the brim with our own pain, and no space is left to even acknowledge the pain of others. Many of the people who tried to hold such a space—like the Kutz family—are dead or deeply traumatized. Most Palestinians are in an analogous situation—their minds too are so filled with pain, they cannot see our pain.

But outsiders who are not themselves immersed in pain should make an effort to empathize with all suffering humans, rather than lazily seeing only

part of the terrible reality. It is the job of outsiders to help maintain a space for peace. We deposit this peaceful space with you, because we cannot hold it right now. Take good care of it for us, so that one day, when the pain begins to heal, both Israelis and Palestinians might inhabit that space.

### **-About the Author**

Yuval Noah Harari is a renowned Israeli historian, researcher, and professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is best known for his provocative and insightful books on the nature of humanity, such as "Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind" and "21 Lessons for the 21st Century". Harari's work often challenges conventional thinking and explores the impact of modern technological advancements on human society. He is also a vocal critic of nationalism, inequality, and the exploitation of the environment.