

NEWS BYTES

May 19, 2021

No. 1018

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“Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.” Tozer

Trumpets and Tank Engines: A Turning Point in Gaza?

by Richard Kemp
May 16, 2021

Gatestone Institute

- Hamas is no match for the IDF and could be quickly and much more cheaply defeated by blunt and crushing military force were it not for one thing — the Israeli need to minimise loss of civilian life. Hamas know that.
 - Over many years of conflict in Gaza, the majority of the world's media have enthusiastically reported the deaths of Palestinian civilians as though they were the deliberate object of Israel's callous and uncaring way of war. This blatantly false propaganda has been taken up by Hamas supporters and "useful idiots" in the West.... Human rights groups around the world have been doing the same.
 - The wilful ignorance combined with malice has always been breathtaking. Every commission of inquiry determined Israel's guilt before it even met for the first time.
 - Every debate and vote has overwhelmingly and of course falsely affirmed Israel's supposed war crimes and crimes against humanity. Meanwhile Hamas's actual multiple war crimes have been brushed aside.
 - [T]he IDF did all they could to ensure minimum loss of civilian life by selecting targets where the lowest levels of innocents would be harmed.... As in previous conflicts in Gaza the IDF has made radio broadcasts in Arabic, sent SMS messages and even phoned civilians inside the strip to warn them of impending strikes.... Gazans have given interviews confirming this.
 - Many in the media, human rights groups and international bodies have rushed to characterise all civilian casualties (other than those inflicted by Hamas of course) as war crimes. But the Geneva Conventions disagree. Inflicting civilian casualties is not illegal provided a military operation is necessary for the prosecution of a war, they are not disproportionate to the planned military gain and that combatant commanders do not intentionally target civilians while doing all they can to avoid hitting them.
 - The media takes reports from the Gaza health ministry as authoritative and objective. That is disingenuous and they know it. The health ministry is controlled by Hamas and follows their every order.
 - Despite all of this, as the media unceasingly show us, the real victims in this campaign have indeed been Gaza civilians. But they usually get the cause wrong. Every one is due to Hamas's unprovoked aggression against Israel. None would have occurred without it.
 - If Western governments, international bodies and human rights groups are genuinely interested in avoiding suffering in Gaza, they should start now, striving to end Hamas's reign of terror rather than support it by parroting their baleful narrative.
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Every civilian casualty is due to Hamas's unprovoked aggression against Israel. None would have occurred without it. Hamas's entire strategy is to attack Israeli population centres using rockets, kamikaze drones and tunnels, aimed at luring IDF counter attacks that will kill their own civilians in order to vilify and isolate Israel around the world. Pictured: Missiles, launched by Hamas from within densely-populated residential neighborhoods in Gaza, streak towards Israeli towns and cities on May 16, 2021. (Photo by Mohammed Abed/AFP via Getty Images)

During an operation in Gaza last week, the Israel Defence Forces attacked a Hamas tunnel complex with 12 squadrons of 160 combat planes striking over 150 targets with hundreds of bunker-busting JDAMs [Joint Direct Attack Munitions] in less than an hour. Although the battle damage assessment is still underway, the raid destroyed perhaps the most critical element of Hamas infrastructure, wiping out vast stocks of munitions and likely killing dozens if not hundreds of fighters. This was a hammer blow to Hamas and may prove to be a turning point in the conflict. It also sent a powerful message to Iran and Hizballah, foretelling the consequences of an assault on Israel with their arsenal of tens of thousands of missiles in southern Lebanon.

The IDF operation was a carefully coordinated combination of intelligence, surveillance, knowledge of enemy tactics, deception, surprise and precisely targeted, overwhelming force. Of all these, deception and surprise were key. Surprise is a principle of war in the American, British and many other forces, defined in the US Army Field Manual as "striking the enemy at a time or place or in a manner for which he is unprepared." The manual goes on to say: "Deception can aid the probability of achieving surprise". Throughout the history of warfare, surprise achieved through deception has led to many stunning military victories — often against the odds.

The IDF's deception operation was reminiscent of the biblical Israelite leader Gideon's famous stratagem against the Midianites. He had his men blow trumpets, light torches and yell battle cries, simulating a much larger force and causing the vastly superior enemy army to flee the field.

Last Thursday, the IDF massed tanks, artillery and infantry combat vehicles on the Gaza border, engines roaring like Gideon's trumpets. The build-up was observed by Hamas and widely reported in international media as an imminent ground invasion. Like the Midianites, hundreds of Hamas fighters rushed to take shelter inside the "metro" tunnel network. Built by Hamas after the 2014 conflict to house command facilities, store weapons and facilitate protected movement, these tunnels covered dozens of kilometres beneath the Gaza Strip. There the fighters were trapped as JDAM after JDAM thundered in from above. Emerging to fight the invasion that never came, the surviving anti-tank teams and mortar squads were then also hit from the air.

This masterpiece of tactical synchronisation, with all its complex elements, symbolises the IDF's precision attacks during this campaign, Operation Guardian of the Walls, which have already inflicted damage from which Hamas will not recover for years. The IDF learnt many lessons from previous engagements in Gaza and since 2014

have vigorously collected intelligence and worked to develop battle plans and technological solutions to deal with Hamas and their Palestinian Islamic Jihad bedfellows.

Hamas is no match for the IDF and could be quickly and much more cheaply defeated by blunt and crushing military force were it not for one thing — the Israeli need to minimise loss of civilian life. Hamas know that. They know they cannot prevail over the IDF and have no intention of trying. Their entire strategy is to attack Israeli population centres using rockets, kamikaze drones and tunnels, aimed at luring IDF counter attacks that will kill their own civilians in order to vilify and isolate Israel around the world and gain international support for their cause. With human shields as the fundamental element of every operation, Hamas are the first "army" in history to use the lives of their own civilian population as weapons of war.

Their strategy has been woefully successful. Over many years of conflict in Gaza, the majority of the world's media have enthusiastically reported the deaths of Palestinian civilians as though they were the deliberate object of Israel's callous and uncaring way of war. This blatantly false propaganda has been taken up by Hamas supporters and "useful idiots" in the West. In the US, Britain and Europe, last week we have seen hundreds of anti-Israel demonstrators brandishing Palestinian banners, burning Israeli flags, spitting out their hate for the Jewish state and screaming about IDF baby-killers. Hamas's calumny is a prime motivator among Israel-loathing academics in Western universities and high schools who have mined their false allegations as rich seams of material to indoctrinate generations of students.

Human rights groups around the world have been doing the same. There have been dozens of anti-Israel resolutions at the UN, often drawing on Hamas's narrative, twisting every aspect of the conflicts in Gaza. The prize has been the International Criminal Court's decision this year to launch a full investigation with the hope of dragging Israeli soldiers, officials and politicians into the dock at The Hague.

I have taken part in every UN Human Rights Council evidence session and emergency debate on Gaza conflicts in the last 15 years. The wilful ignorance combined with malice has always been breathtaking. Every commission of inquiry determined Israel's guilt before it even met for the first time. Every debate and vote has overwhelmingly and of course falsely affirmed Israel's supposed war crimes and crimes against humanity. Meanwhile Hamas's actual multiple war crimes have been brushed aside.

The reality is very different from the lies emanating from these modern-day Towers of Babel. The IDF attack on the "metro" tunnels this week depended on lightning action and the coordination of 160 planes attacking a small area in a very short space of time. Alongside these awesome complexities, the IDF did all they could to ensure minimum loss of civilian life by selecting targets where the lowest levels of innocents would be harmed, such as empty roadways under which tunnels ran, and maintaining close surveillance to confirm a bus load of civilians didn't suddenly appear. The IDF have so far destroyed several high-rise buildings containing critical Hamas military infrastructure as well as civilian offices and apartments. Remarkably all of these have been smashed down without any reported civilian casualties.

As in previous conflicts in Gaza the IDF has made radio broadcasts in Arabic, sent SMS messages and even phoned civilians inside the Strip to warn them of impending strikes, where to go for their own safety and which routes to take. Gazans have given [interviews](#) confirming this.

When civilians do not leave an intended target building, the IDF sometimes drop specially designed low-power munitions ("knock on the roof") to encourage them to get out. With careful surveillance of target areas, the Israeli air force frequently aborts planned sorties if there is a risk of civilian casualties.

In a conflict designed by Hamas to maximise civilian deaths, some are inevitable. It is too early to accurately assess casualty figures or ratios of civilians to fighters killed, but current assessments suggest the IDF have been even more successful in minimising civilian casualties during this campaign than in previous engagements in Gaza. Many in the media, human rights groups and international bodies have rushed to characterise all civilian casualties (other than those inflicted by Hamas, of course) as war crimes. But the Geneva Conventions disagree. Inflicting civilian casualties is not illegal provided a military operation is necessary for the prosecution of a war, they are not disproportionate to the planned military gain and that combatant commanders do not intentionally target civilians while doing all they can to avoid hitting them.

The media takes reports from the Gaza health ministry as authoritative and objective. That is disingenuous and they know it. The health ministry is controlled by Hamas and follows their every order. For example, of around 2,000 rockets fired so far by Hamas during this conflict, approximately 400 have fallen short, landing inside Gaza. Some of these have killed civilians and the health ministry has attributed all of them to IDF action.

Counterintuitively, the most effective means of saving Gazan civilian lives has been Israel's Iron Dome anti-missile system. Despite Hamas efforts to overwhelm it, Iron Dome has had a 90% success rate in preventing missiles from Gaza hitting their targets. Not only has this saved the lives of countless Israeli civilians but it has also meant the IDF campaign can be more deliberate, discriminating and precise. If hundreds of Israelis were dying under Hamas rockets, the IDF would have no choice other than to strike Gaza with much greater ferocity and ground forces would already have entered the Gaza Strip, unavoidably inflicting vastly more civilian casualties than we have seen so far.

Despite all of this, as the media unceasingly show us, the real victims in this campaign have indeed been Gaza civilians. But they usually get the cause wrong. Every one is due to Hamas's unprovoked aggression against Israel. None would have occurred without it. Once this round of fighting is over, Hamas will work to build back better for next time — that is, to regenerate their military capability rather than civilian infrastructure. If Western governments, international bodies and human rights groups are genuinely interested in avoiding suffering in Gaza, they should start now, striving to end Hamas's reign of terror rather than support it by parroting their baleful narrative.

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The rise of e-money: The digital currencies that matter

Get ready for Fedcoin and the e-euro

May 8th 2021

Technological change is upending finance. Bitcoin has gone from being an obsession of anarchists to a \$1trn asset class that many fund managers insist belongs in any balanced portfolio. Swarms of digital day-traders have become a force on Wall Street. PayPal has 392m users, a sign that America is catching up with China's digital-payments giants. Yet, as our special report explains, the least noticed disruption on the frontier between technology and finance may end up as the most revolutionary: the creation of government digital currencies, which typically aim to let people deposit funds directly with a central bank, bypassing conventional lenders.

These "govcoins" are a new incarnation of money. They promise to make finance work better but also to shift power from individuals to the state, alter geopolitics and change how capital is allocated. They are to be treated with optimism, and humility.

A decade or so ago, amid the wreckage of Lehman Brothers, Paul Volcker, a former head of the Federal Reserve, grumbled that banking's last useful innovation was the atm. Since the crisis, the industry has raised its game. Banks have modernised their creaking IT systems. Entrepreneurs have built an experimental world of "decentralised finance", of which bitcoin is the most famous part and which contains a riot of tokens, databases and conduits that interact to varying degrees with traditional finance. Meanwhile, financial "platform" firms now have over 3bn customers who use e-wallets and payments apps. Alongside PayPal are other specialists such as Ant Group, Grab and Mercado Pago, established firms such as Visa, and Silicon Valley wannabes such as Facebook.

Government or central-bank digital currencies are the next step but they come with a twist, because they would centralise power in the state rather than spread it through networks or give it to private monopolies. The idea behind them is simple. Instead of holding an account with a retail bank, you would do so direct with a central bank through an interface resembling apps such as Alipay or Venmo. Rather than writing cheques or paying online with a card, you could use the central bank's cheap plumbing. And your money would be guaranteed by the full faith of the state, not a fallible bank. Want to buy a pizza or help a broke sibling? No need to deal with Citigroup's call centre or pay Mastercard's fees: the Bank of England and the Fed are at your service.

This metamorphosis of central banks from the aristocrats of finance to its labourers sounds far-fetched, but it is under way. Over 50 monetary authorities, representing the bulk of global gdp, are exploring digital currencies. The Bahamas has issued digital money. China has rolled out its e-yuan pilot to over 500,000 people. The eu wants a virtual euro by 2025, Britain has launched a task-force, and America, the world's financial hegemon, is building a hypothetical e-dollar.

One motivation for governments and central banks is a fear of losing control. Today central banks harness the banking system to amplify monetary policy. If payments, deposits and loans migrate from banks into privately run digital realms, central banks will struggle to manage the economic cycle and inject funds into the system during a crisis. Unsupervised private networks could become a Wild West of fraud and privacy abuses.

The other motivation is the promise of a better financial system. Ideally money provides a reliable store of value, a stable unit of account and an efficient means of payment. Today's money gets mixed marks. Uninsured depositors can suffer if banks fail, bitcoin is not widely accepted and credit cards are expensive. Government e-currencies would score highly, since they are state-guaranteed and use a cheap, central payments hub.

As a result, govcoins could cut the operating expenses of the global financial industry, which amount to over \$350 a year for every person on Earth. That could make finance accessible for the 1.7bn people who lack bank accounts. Government digital currencies could also expand governments' toolkits by letting them make instant payments to citizens and cut interest rates below zero. For ordinary users, the appeal of a free, safe, instant, universal means of payment is obvious.

It is this appeal, though, that creates dangers. Unconstrained, govcoins could fast become a dominant force in finance, particularly if network effects made it hard for people to opt out. They could destabilise banks, because if most people and firms stashed their cash at the central banks, lenders would have to find other sources of funding with which to back their loans.

If retail banks were sucked dry of funding, someone else would have to do the lending that fuels business creation. This raises the queasy prospect of bureaucrats influencing credit allocation. In a crisis, a digital stampede of savers to the central bank could cause bank runs.

Once ascendant, govcoins could become panopticons for the state to control citizens: think of instant e-fines for bad behaviour. They could alter geopolitics, too, by providing a conduit for cross-border payments and alternatives to the dollar, the world's reserve currency and a linchpin of American influence. The greenback's reign is based partly on America's open capital markets and property rights, which China cannot rival. But it also relies on old payments systems, invoicing conventions and inertia—making it ripe for disruption. Small countries fear that, instead of using local money, people might switch to foreign e-currencies, causing chaos at home.

New money, new problems

Such a vast spectrum of opportunities and dangers is daunting. It is revealing that China's autocrats, who value control above all else, are limiting the size of the e-yuan and clamping down on private platforms such as Ant. Open societies should also proceed cautiously by, say, capping digital-currency accounts.

Governments and financial firms need to prepare for a long-term shift in how money works, as momentous as the leap to metallic coins or payment cards. That means beefing up privacy laws, reforming how central banks are run and preparing retail banks for a more peripheral role. State digital currencies are the next great experiment in finance, and they promise to be a lot more consequential than the humble atm.

The Inflation Tsunami Is Starting To Worry Many Economic Experts

Have you noticed that the corporate media has suddenly become obsessed with rising prices over the past week or so? Day after day, mainstream news outlets are barraging us with stories about inflation, and even CNN is occasionally taking a break from bashing Republicans to cover this.

Earlier today, I was directed to a CNN article entitled "Prices are rising everywhere you look", and I decided to read it. Surprisingly, this was one CNN article that would actually pass an impartial fact check. We really are seeing very painful inflation throughout the entire economy, and this is causing many to recall the days of "stagflation" under Jimmy Carter in the 1970s.

But the corporate media doesn't exactly have a long track record of being straight with us.

So why are they seemingly being honest with us in this case?

Is it that this crisis has now become so obvious that nobody can deny it any longer, or is there another agenda at work?

I wish that I had an answer to that question. If you go to Google News and type "inflation" into the search bar, you will get page after page after page of recent articles about rising prices. To me, food inflation is one of the greatest concerns because it hits average American families particularly hard. And at this point, even the price of apples is rising quite dramatically...

Costs for apples are up 10% to 20% depending on the variety, said Mike Ferguson, vice president of produce and floral at Topco Associates LLC, an Elk Grove Village, Ill.-based cooperative of more than 40 food companies including grocer Wegmans Food Markets Inc. Bananas and leafy greens are more expensive too, Topco said, while vegetable oils and oil-heavy products like salad dressing and mayonnaise are also getting pricier in part because of higher ingredient prices.

"Our overall goal is to cover cost increases," said Jon Moeller, operating chief at Procter & Gamble Co. Procter & Gamble is raising prices on baby products, adult diapers and feminine-care brands.

For a while, some food producers tried to swallow the cost increases that they were experiencing, but that could only go on for so long.

Now many of those cost increases are being passed on to consumers, and the CEO of Kellogg is admitting that he hasn't seen this sort of inflation "in many, many years"...

Kellogg Co., maker of Frosted Flakes, Cheez-Its and Pringles, said Thursday that higher costs for ingredients, labor and shipping are pushing it and other food makers to raise prices. "We haven't seen this type of inflation in many, many years," Chief Executive Officer Steve Cahillane said.

But at least food prices are not going up as fast as used vehicle prices have been rising. The following comes from Wolf Richter...

This has been going on for months: Used-vehicle prices spiking from jaw-dropper to jaw-dropper, and just when I thought prices couldn't possibly spike further, they do.

Prices of used vehicles that were sold at auctions around the US in April spiked by 8.3% from March, by 20% year-to-date, by 54% from April 2020, and by 40% from April 2019, according to the Used Vehicle Value Index released today by Manheim, the largest auto auction operator in the US and a unit of Cox Automotive.

A 54 percent increase in 12 months?

That is insane.

And the Fed still has the gall to insist that inflation has been "low".

I have written quite a few articles about how home prices have been soaring into the stratosphere, and now rents are escalating rapidly as well. In fact, one of the largest landlords in America just raised rents on vacant properties by 11 percent...

On Thursday, American Homes 4 Rent, which owns 54,000 houses, increased rents 11% on vacant properties in April, the company reported in a statement

All throughout the economy we see prices going up by double digits.

But Fed officials insist that these price increases are just "transitory" and are not any sort of a permanent problem.

We are also being told that all of the shortages that have emerged in the past couple of months are "temporary" too. Some of these shortages are starting to become quite painful, and that is particularly true for the global shortage of computer chips that we are currently experiencing...

In the market for a new car, smartphone or washing machine this year? A global shortage of computer chips could mean you have to wait a while -- and pay more.

A growing number of manufacturers around the world are having trouble securing supplies of semiconductors, delaying the production and delivery of goods and threatening to push up the prices paid by consumers.

Just think of all the products that you own that contain computer chips. It isn't a short list.

As a society, we have become extremely dependent on computer chips, and CNN is admitting that this shortage "is likely to last through 2021"...

The shortage is going from bad to worse, spreading from cars to consumer electronics. With the bulk of chip production concentrated in a handful of suppliers, analysts warn that the crunch is likely to last through 2021.

This shortage is having a dramatic impact up and down various supply chains, and that is going to be the case for the foreseeable future.

At the Sogefi manufacturing facility in West Virginia, the computer chip shortage is just one of the shortages that is causing massive headaches right now. Whenever the Sogefi plant here runs out of resin or computer chips or cardboard boxes or wooden pallets or really anything at all, it's Randy Simpkins's problem. And whenever one of Sogefi's customers howls about a late shipment, that's Simpkins's problem, too.

These days, Simpkins has plenty of problems.

Our economy is not functioning very smoothly at all, and that isn't going to change any time soon.

But on Friday we were supposed to get some good economic news.

The U.S. economy was supposed to have added about a million jobs in April, but instead we learned that it only added 266,000...

Employers added a disappointing 266,000 jobs in April even as the number of new COVID-19 cases stayed low, more states lifted constraints and vaccinations accelerated.

The gains fell well short of projections in a recovery that's expected to gather force through the summer, with a million or more jobs added each month.

This is supposed to be "the recovery", but the unemployment rate actually went up last month.

Ouch.

Let us hope for a better number next month, because there are millions upon millions of Americans that still need to get back to work.

This little "bubble of hope" is about as good as things are going to get for the U.S. economy, and it is just a matter of time before the economy heads into more dark days.

We have literally mortgaged our future to give our economy a temporary short-term boost, and after trillions of dollars in spending the economic numbers are still incredibly anemic.

Yet again, this is another major wake up call, but most people out there seem quite content to continue snoozing.

(or, as I like to say, they're hitting the snooze button on their smoke alarms... MD)