

# JEWISH JOURNAL

## “Mar-a-Gaza” vs. Hamas Inc

Trump’s ‘Mar-a-Gaza’ vision faces one roadblock: the Hamas Inc. brand that’s survived the destruction

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Abid Katib/Getty Images

The staged [spectacle](#) this past week of the return of the remains of the Bibas children, Ariel and Kfir, kidnapped by Hamas on Oct. 7, 2023, and a deliberately [stage-managed kiss](#) by a hostage on a Hamas fighter’s forehead, brought into sharp relief the enormous risks behind President Donald Trump’s outlandish “Mar-a-Gaza” proposal. He proposed to evict *all* Palestinians—ostensibly including the Hamas fighters involved in the production—and build beachfront property out of the rubble of Hamas’ war with Israel in Gaza.

Trump floated the idea two weeks ago at a press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and he was globally panned by leaders, including from the Middle East, who would have to accept these Palestinians.

Astute as a marketing man, there is one element Trump isn't acknowledging—evident in the latest propaganda orchestrated by militants in Gaza in recent days: the Hamas brand has survived the war, literally rising even stronger than before out of sheer rubble.

The Israeli government [finally responded](#) to the outrageous show of force by Hamas by putting a hold on the release of more militants in exchange for more hostages unless Hamas ends the shaming productions of the propaganda-filled hostage releases. Why Netanyahu didn't put a stop to it sooner should be a question posed by the public once the investigations into the Oct. 7 massacre begins. But Hamas's strategy puts Trump's "Mar-a-Gaza" travesty of a plan and its consequences into sharp relief.

Under Trump's vision, the U.S. would be involved in forcibly moving Palestinians in Gaza to a motley crew of Arab countries that Trump would bully, pressure or bribe. Then, the U.S. and Israel would turn Gaza into a high-end resort. The idea reportedly emerged after Trump's Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, returned from a [fact-finding mission](#), showed Trump photos of Israel's devastation of Gaza and told him that the area has been leveled and that it is unlivable.

"It is the buildings that could tip over at any moment. There's no utilities there whatsoever, no working water, electric, gas, nothing. God knows what kind of disease might be festering there," Witkoff [told](#) reporters in a briefing after the Trump-Netanyahu news conference.

As a journalist and brand positioning strategist who has covered terrorism as a former correspondent for NPR and U.S. News and World Report, I've studied the prolific news footage of Hamas's highly choreographed release of Israeli hostages and can see that Trump, Witkoff and also the media, fail to see a disturbingly strong Hamas Inc. brand not

only “festering” in the rubble but surviving and thriving. Netanyahu may have pulled off a devastating refashioning of Gaza real estate by demolishing a large percentage of homes. But he appears to have done little to truly diminish Hamas’ capacity. The proverbial Phoenix has risen from the rubble.

The videos [show](#) troubling trends of a violently resurgent and triumphant Hamas, which has used the Israeli massacre it instigated on Oct. 7, to become [immensely sophisticated at propaganda](#). They convey a cohesive, synchronized and choreographed narrative. And the message is clear: “We are strong, we have survived, we will prevail.”

Asra Nomani, editor of a non-profit, the Pearl Project for investigative reporting, has [studied](#) the role of Islamist propaganda, misinformation and violent instigation since the 9/11 attacks on America, and she refers to Hamas’ elaborately videographed productions of the Israeli hostage releases as “propaganda porn.”

“Hamas is staging these hostage releases as public relations stunts with well-scripted, choreographed theatrical productions in the town square, festively emblazoned with Hamas flags and banners,” Nomani observes. “They use sophisticated hand-held and drone-operated cameras, shooting these ‘events’ from multiple angles.” Set and wardrobe managers dress the militants in identical camo fatigues and face masks and matching green balaclavas.”

Nomani likens this elaborate stage and intentional backdrop to those of classic grip-and-grin photos you would see at the Oscars or Academy Awards. “They blare music in the background as they parade the hostages on stage and hand them pre-printed certificates and pre-packaged gift bags with stage commands on when to wave and say, ‘Thank you,’” says Nomani. “They’re deploying strategic humiliation to an art form. The hostages have a final word of courage in their departure from custody but Hamas leaves its imprint with its trademark upside-down red triangle as its brand logo for death and destruction.”

Hamas laid the groundwork for its powerful propaganda strategy years before the Oct. 7 attacks, when the militant group built tunnels for most of its operations under homes, schools, hospitals and other critical infrastructure in Gaza.

They knew that every time an Israeli explosive landed on one of those targets to destroy the tunnels, their time bomb for “propaganda porn” would also go off when innocents were killed. Israel couldn’t adequately defend itself against that type of offensive weapon. “Israel lost the PR battle worldwide and, with it, their moral high ground,” Nomani says. “Hamas has cast Israelis and Jews as the villains when, in fact, they instigated Oct. 7 and is now reaping tens of millions of dollars in propaganda value and earned media,” or the free coverage that would cost companies a lot in paid ads.

As a strategic advisor and executive coach to CEOs and leaders, I always urge my clients to read the subtext and not ignore the obvious. That applies here, too.

In the rubble, Hamas Inc. has built a hidden logistical infrastructure to support these militants, reflected in the terrorists’ crisp-pressed uniforms and polished belt buckles, with berets angled just so. There are buildings where someone is washing, drying and ironing their uniforms. Unlike the tired, emaciated Israeli hostages, many of whom have subsisted on [one pita bread a day](#), Hamas soldiers look well-fed, strong and energized, able to meet, organize, plan and fight.

And clearly, they’re well-rested. Somewhere, they sleep while Israeli families pace and grieve. Somehow, food supplies are getting through. In hidden kitchens, someone cooks vast quantities of food daily to nourish these militants in support of the movement. There are storage facilities still untouched that house the guns, cameras, drones, explosives, uniforms, cell phones and other communications devices and propaganda, including the militant flags and “released by Hamas” certificates issued to the Israeli hostages, along with the criminally offensive gift bags.

The bottom line is that when reporters do their standups or ask questions of Trump, Witkoff, Netanyahu, et. al., they need to ask, "Have you looked past the rubble?"

On Feb. 17, State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce lauded Trump for his speed in tackling two major global crises, Israel and Ukraine. "It's a unique situation, involving unique men, and certainly as we've already seen with President Trump and this administration, things that maybe normally would take six months or a year or two years are taking a matter of weeks," she told reporters in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, on the eve of U.S.-Russia talks to end the Ukraine war.

One of my former bosses once gave me wise advice that I always pass along to my coaching clients. "Your biggest strength," he said, "can also be your biggest weakness." That's playing out now with Trump in Gaza.

Right now, one could argue that Hamas is primarily an Israeli problem. In his haste to be seen as a rapid history-making problem-solver, Trump could arm-twist key Mideast countries like Jordan and Egypt to accept civilian Palestinians.

But there would be *no* way to identify and exclude militant Hamas in this transfer. If Mar-a-Gaza is to undergo development, *all* Palestinians would have to be removed to clear the debris and rebuild. This would include militants in the Hamas Inc. empire. Then we should all worry. That would mean that, with the help of the U.S. and Israeli military, Trump would be *exporting* to other countries Hamas Inc. terrorists, who will undoubtedly instigate violence, hostage-taking and propaganda porn around the world.

There are no tariffs that Trump could impose to stop the long-term consequences of the global expansion of Hamas Inc.