

Iron Swords War

SNAPSHOT

November 7,
2023*

The Arab Society in Israel in Shadow of the War

Emergency Needs and Prevention of Escalation in Shared Spaces #3

The brief offers a current overview based on the information accessible to us at this time. For the previous reviews in English, including extensive background, please refer [here](#) and [here](#).

The Challenge: Providing immediate responses while developing tools to cope with the consequences of the war on Jewish-Arab relations in all regions, with emphasis on shared spaces and cities with a Jewish majority. As the war broke out a month ago, the needs are increasing alongside the provided responses and solutions.



Jewish Perspectives on Arabs through Socio-Psychological Studies – “Accord” Organization Insights

A recent in-depth study conducted by the “Accord” organization in the weeks since the outbreak of the conflict reveals a state of collective trauma. These unique conditions foster existential fear and association to prior collective traumas (Jews to the Holocaust and Arabs to the Nakba). Consequently, on the Jewish front, there exists a palpable sense of victimhood and an instinctive response to the overarching threat to personal and national existence, manifesting in heightened intolerance towards Arabs and, remarkably, support for violence against them. Surveys underscore a discernible surge in tensions, fear, animosity, and bias by Jews against Arabs. This is notwithstanding the fact that among the casualties in the Hamas attack on October 7th, there were also Arabs, and many actively involved in evacuation and rescue operations on the front lines are of Arab descent.

➤ Six Elements Delineating the Current Jewish Response to Arabs:

- Exceedingly elevated levels of fear, even extending to “Arabs in the supermarket”.
- Remarkably heightened levels of hatred.

1. This status report is based on information from the joint discussion involving IATF, SVF, and JFN on November 7, 2023. Key participants in the meeting included:

- **Ron Gerlitz**, Chief Executive Officer of “Accord”.
- **Attorney Susan Zehar**, Human Rights Clinic, Buchmann Faculty of Law, Tel Aviv University.
- **Attorney Amir Badran**, Head of “Kulanu Ha’ir” and a candidate for Head of the Tel Aviv Municipality elections that were scheduled for October 31, 2023 and postponed.

- A homogenized perception of the “other” – an incapacity to discern nuances between Palestinians supporting Hamas and those opposing it, Israeli Arabs, and even ascribing Arab colleagues who, until recently, shared collegial and amicable relations to the homogeneous group.
- Mounting apprehension about the day-to-day interactions between Arabs and Jews in the job market, hospitals, academia, and mixed cities.
- A deficit of confidence in state institutions poised to help – a sentiment prevalent not solely in the Arab community but increasingly acknowledged within the Jewish community as well.
- An orchestrated and systematic endeavor by the far right, including governmental representatives, to amplify fear, suspicion, and violence against Arabs. Within this framework, there is a prominent deployment of fake news, necessitating nuanced and thoughtful responses.

It is crucial to highlight that the initial five elements seem inherently natural, in stark contrast to the sixth element, which pertains to deliberate and conscious actions aimed at creating divisions and escalating violence. This element poses the greatest threat and holds the potential to culminate in a full-fledged conflict. The increasing prevalence of weaponry within the public sphere can result in substantial damage within this context.

Against this backdrop, the situation is volatile and there is persistent concern about the escalation of violence between Jews and Arabs. Two primary courses of action are being undertaken to prevent this:

1. The ongoing endeavors of social organizations operating tirelessly, characterized by professionalism and commitment, owing in part to extensive philanthropic backing.
2. Engaging with decision-makers and influential figures, including corporate leaders, university faculty, and government representatives, with the goal of helping them to understand the risk of escalation and provide tools to avoid this. In this framework, “Accord” collaborates with leaders in mixed cities, with a particular emphasis on academia and employment, aspiring to establish spaces for reconciliation in the future.

Twarak – A Model of Civic Society Activity

The coalition encompasses more than 20 organizations operating nationwide for over two decades, including women’s and children’s rights groups, urban planning and construction entities, and others. Filling the governmental void in addressing various on-the-ground issues, the coalition essentially presents an alternative to a faltering and divisive governmental approach. The coalition organized itself in response to the ascent of the extreme right-wing government led by Netanyahu, Smotrich, and Ben Gvir, driven by explicit concerns about the recurrence of incidents following the May 2021 events. This apprehension intensified, particularly after the passage of the Basic Law: Israel – The Nation-State of the Jewish People, perceived as endorsing discrimination and racism. Of course, no one foresaw that the emergency would materialize in its current form of widespread aggression as it has. The organizational coalition operates as a network, engaging in various domains:

- Establishing networks of volunteers in Arab towns and mixed cities, training them to handle violent situations, including the establishment of “situation rooms” and local defense teams.
- Monitoring and countering “fake news” on social media regarding violence and attempts to incite violence.
- Providing legal assistance to Arab students on various campuses exposed to close surveillance and complaints regarding different expressions, particularly emphasizing posts on social media; numerous complaints have been filed by authorities, right-wing activists, colleges, workplaces, and even fellow students. This occurs even when the expressions do not endorse or show solidarity with Hamas. Rather, they signify solidarity with citizens in Gaza and expressions embodying Palestinian or Islamic religious identity.
- Assisting Arabs in workplaces and the free market concerning cases of dismissals and layoffs, sometimes triggered by political conversations, arrests, surveillance, and more.
- Offering assistance and legal representation to Arab activists, providing mental health support, and training representatives in various forums.
- It’s critical to emphasize that, even in the Arab community, there exists a state of collective trauma, evident in foundational cracks in the perception of shared life and society. This is reflected in concerns about returning to

mixed workplaces and academic studies, as well as an overarching fear of venturing into public spaces, given that the Arabs are perceived as the “enemy.”

Jaffa Defense Teams

In the aftermath of the events in May 2021, particularly in cities like Jaffa, the significant concern stems from law enforcement’s conspicuous absence during critical moments in which they were needed to minimize violence and prevent attempts by non-local Jewish extremists to incite locals. Due to this situation, city residents had no choice but to organize their own defense teams. The involvement of these youth-led defense teams resulted in a cascade of consequences, including investigations, arrests, legal proceedings, and even convictions—all undertaken to shield the community from external threats.

The events of May 2021 left an enduring impact on the longstanding partnership in Jaffa, creating an atmosphere of heightened tension. Today, after the outbreak of the war, there is a sense of relief every day that passes without a case of violence.

An emergency committee was swiftly established on October 7, 2023, to create a collaborative response throughout the city of Jaffa:

- On October 7th, the committee hosted a webinar which drew the participation of approximately 500 activists and volunteers. Within a mere three days, the coalition network expanded to encompass 3,000 participants.
- Each participating organization in the coalition was assigned the responsibility of **disseminating messages to prevent provocation and encourage a sense of calm** among the implicated youth.
- A notable aspect of this initiative was the **collaboration between Jewish and Arab organizations within the city**—a strategic alliance seen as a bulwark against the potential for escalation, defamation, and violence. Emphasis was placed on preventing the establishment of “preparedness classes” in Tel Aviv, driven by concerns that Arab citizens might be unfairly targeted as vulnerable and convenient victims.
- The coalition instituted a “hotline” dedicated to addressing community concerns, ranging from the fear of being home alone to apprehension about going to the supermarket. The hotline actively monitors potential attacks circulated in social media posts, subjecting them to thorough evaluation.
- Public display of solidarity posters as a visible manifestation of unity.
- Collection of donations, food, and medicine to be distributed among the families in Jaffa facing economic hardship.
- To ensure a proactive response to potential violent outbreaks, the coalition established and trained “presence and de-escalation teams.” These teams are strategically positioned to intervene in locations susceptible to violence, not only to calm situations but also to promptly report incidents to law enforcement and call for assistance when necessary.

Other Needs and Important Notes

1. Financial support is essential for the sustained implementation and expansion of the joint initiative in Jaffa and potentially in other shared spaces.
2. Establishing and reinforcing infrastructure, along with training, to combat the dissemination of “fake news” that incites violence; a crucial area for engagement and activism.
3. Recognition and support from local authorities, the police, and the Israeli media. Despite global media interest in community initiatives like the one in Jaffa, there is a notable lack of recognition and support from local media, municipal authorities, and, in some cases, even the police.
4. While there are noticeable efforts in leadership within social organizations, coalitions, and engaged authorities, there is insufficient initiative from civil society organizations in Jewish cities, where the current hostile situation may lead to violent outbreaks. A recent incident in Netanya, in which Jews targeted Arab students, highlights the need for inclusive leadership. The mayor’s suggestion that Arab students leave the city contradicts the principles of civil society and philanthropy.
5. Some government actions are fostering tension and violence between Jews and Arabs, contributing to the marginalization and degradation of Arabs, and cultivating a climate of hatred and fear. These actions negatively impact the sociopolitical environment, fueling further division and conflict.