

Jerusalem Letters

The Hamas Terror Tune That Became the Anthem of Israel's Soldiers in Gaza

By Yoram Hazony, August 11, 2014

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I.

A few days ago, I called a young relative who is serving in the Israeli air force and asked him: “Do you know that song — “*Kum, Aseh Piguim*”?”

Without missing a beat, he said: “You mean that song that’s a hit all over Israel? The song that all my friends are singing all the time?”



Original Hamas Video Clip

“Yeah,” I said. “That song. I wanted to know if you can explain to me why they are singing it?”

What I actually meant to ask was: Can you please explain to me why all the young people in Israel are singing a song entitled [“Up, Do Terror Attacks”](#) — a song recorded and released by Hamas in Gaza, which repeatedly calls for killing or expelling all the Jews from of Israel? But I didn’t have to say all that. He knew why I was asking.

“It’s because it makes us feel good,” he replied.

By then I wasn’t surprised. I had made several other calls, both to my own children and to other young people participating in different branches of the Israeli armed forces, and had gotten versions of this same answer from all of them: All their friends are singing it. It’s basically become the de facto anthem of the Israeli war effort. And they are singing it because it makes them feel good. The question, of course, is *why* Israeli soldiers, and their brothers and sisters at home, feel good to be singing a song about exterminating them and their families, along with the country they have sworn to defend.

I've been hearing about this song for a few weeks, now, almost since the Hamas posted it on its YouTube channel around July 11. I first heard about it from my teenagers, who were laughing about this song Hamas had recorded in Hebrew and how terrible their pronunciation is. Then it turned out there was a video clip being passed around. But I really wasn't interested. My son was fighting in Gaza. And the children of some of my closest friends. The casualties were mounting daily, and I was distracted by updates about soldiers in the field, and Israel's shifting political situation internationally, and the rising tide of anti-Semitic protests in Europe and elsewhere. It wasn't until dozens of Israeli soldiers had been killed, including soldiers in my son's unit and other friends of my children, that it finally dawned on me how very bizarre it was that Israeli young people were continuing to sing this Hamas song. And making their own recordings of it and posting them on social media. And playing it at parties. And dancing to it at night clubs. And using it as the ringtone on their phones.

A few days ago, I finally sat down and watched the video clip and listened to the song. YouTube had removed it from the Hamas channel saying that it is incitement to hatred (it sure is), but there were still plenty of copies floating around. In the video clip, what you see is scenes of Hamas soldiers building missiles and launching them at Israel, Hamas training for attacks on Israeli soldiers, and Hamas frogmen swimming offshore and entering Israel from the ocean bed to attack Israeli communities (an actual terror scenario that played itself out in recent weeks in southern Israel). Interwoven among these are shots of the twisted wreckage of burned out Israeli buses and cars—images not from the present war, but from earlier bombings and mass murders of Israeli civilians over the past fifteen years.

Superimposed on these images, the words "Death to Israel" are flashed time and again in large, red Hebrew letters.

While all of this is going on, what you are listening to is a catchy Mizrahi-style (that is, Middle Eastern) pop band singing the song "Up, Do Terror Attacks!" in a peculiar Arabic-accented Hebrew that you have to struggle to follow. But even on a first hearing, there are certain phrases that come through quite clearly—"eliminate all the Zionists," "burn bases and soldiers," "a country of weakness and delusion," "demolish her down to her foundations," "exterminate the nest of cockroaches," "turn their world into a scene of horrors," "they are being expelled and we are going to stay." And of course the refrain, returning time and again: "Up, do terror attacks!"

When the song was first released, there was much of it that Israelis couldn't understand. Partly, this is because the Gazans doing the singing can't pronounce all the letters in the Hebrew alphabet. So a crucial word like *piguim* (the Hebrew word for "terror attacks") comes out as *biguim*—a nonsense word that doesn't mean anything

at all in Hebrew. Imagine a song in English that calls dozens of times to mount horrific “terror attacks,” but in each case uses the expression “terror aggacks” instead, and you get the idea. The effect is a bit like the priest in *The Princess Bride* who keeps trying to get his audience to understand the sanctity of “mawwiage.”

As if this weren't enough, many of the Hebrew phrases used in the song are ornate to the point of being incomprehensible to young Israelis. I asked one of the soldiers I talked to for examples, and he immediately began rattling off verses from the song by heart to make his point: “*Avad alav hakelah venilach* [‘Its time has passed, it is polluted’],” he said to me. Where did they get those words? *Venilach*? What kind of a word is that? I mean it's Hebrew and everything. But no one talks like that. It's like they were sitting there and looking up words on Google Translate.”

So “Up, Do Terror Attacks!” began its phenomenal rise in Israel as something people could only half understand. But it didn't stay that way for long. Almost instantly, Israeli soldiers and their brothers and sisters at home began collaborating to try to piece together the lyrics. Versions were posted and then counter-versions, complete with talmudic disputes over the intended meaning of this or that verse, until a consensus finally emerged as to what Hamas' songwriters were in fact saying. Here's my translation based on the current state of the online scholarship:

[Chorus:]

Up, do terror attacks,
Rock them, inflict terrible blows,
Eliminate all the Zionists,
Shake the security of Israel!

Aim to make contact with the Zionists,
To burn bases and soldiers,
Shake the security of Israel,
Reveal volcanic flames of fire!

A country of weakness and delusion,
When it comes to war, they cannot hold out,
They blow away like spider's webs,
When they meet the valiant!

Shake the security of Israel,
Set the heart of her [i.e., Israel] on fire like spider's webs,
Demolish her down to her foundations,
Exterminate the nest of cockroaches,

Expel all the Zionists!
The hearts of the Zionists, each one turns,
In a different direction, and does not identify,
They are frightened by death, and they run to hide,

Behind walls and in reinforced rooms!
It is an illusion, it will not succeed,
Its time is past, and it is polluted,
Gone, like mice in a parched field,

Get close then open fire, all at once!
Rock them, now, multitude of missiles,
Turn their world into a scene of horrors,
Burn into their minds a great miracle:

That they are being expelled, and we are going to stay!

This is pretty extreme stuff. Remember, we are not talking about the private initiative of some nut with some studio time. This song was released by the current government of Gaza. It calls for laying waste to Israel down to its foundations. And it alternates between proposing that the Jews of Israel (“Zionists,” as the song calls them) be exterminated like cockroaches, and that they be expelled from their country. It’s a little dizzying to think that this unblushing call to genocide—to killing me, my family and everyone I know—was written, recorded and released by a government in power 50 miles from my house here in Jerusalem. But it is what it is.

II.

Before “Up, Do Terror Attacks!” became an instant sensation in Israel, it already had an impressive history as an Arabic-language single produced by the military arm of the Hamas back in 2012. That recording has been played millions of times in the Arab world (here’s [one link to it with more than 1.5 million hits](#)). And I suppose it was the enthusiastic reception of the Arabic version that goaded the Hamas leadership into thinking they had something really good to hit the Israeli public with in Hebrew. After all, why shouldn’t Israelis get it through their heads that countless Arabs in Gaza and throughout the Middle East are thinking quite a bit



Lion King Version

about exterminating Jews these days? If the goal is to “turn their world into a scene of horrors,” then letting the Jews know just what their neighbors are singing about could certainly contribute to achieving this aim.

This is actually quite a concept, if you think about it. A whole new genre, really. Hamas has invented terror pop.

But unfortunately for Hamas, the reception of the new Hebrew-language version of “Up, Do Terror Attacks!” didn’t go quite as planned. Within days of the song’s release, Israelis, and especially soldiers, began posting rejoinders they had produced and performed. There are by now dozens of these on the internet. Some of the early responses involved adding some new lyrics to the song, like a clip of a group of Israeli reservists, who intersperse the stanzas of the Hamas song with the refrain [*lekol ha’olam, salam, salam*](#) (“*To the whole world, peace! peace!*”).

But almost immediately, young Israelis began to realize that they didn’t need to change the lyrics to take ownership of the song. One of the first clips just played the Hamas soundtrack as is, but taunted the Hamas by showing dozens of Israelis of all ages [*happily dancing in the streets of Tel Aviv to the strains of the song*](#). Another has a Mr. Rogers-like intro in which children are introduced to the song as teaching important [*lessons about how to live that their parents somehow forgot to teach them*](#). Then there is the famous Lion King version, in which the soundtrack of “Up, Do Terror Attacks!” was [*fed into the mouths of hundreds of tunnel-digging prairie dogs*](#) borrowed from Disney, in a stroke revealing the Hamas song to be an anthem better suited to a fictional army of animated rodents than to Israel’s real-life human neighbors. There is a soulful piano-only version, which turns the Hamas call to arms into [*a tool for meditative introspection*](#). My favorite, so far, is [*a free-spirited a cappella version*](#)—the kind of thing university students might perform in an archway on a warm evening right before exams. The kind of thing that Gaza itself might have aspired to in a world very different from our own. As I say, there are many more of these.

Within two weeks of the release of “Up, Do Terror Attacks!” in Hebrew, these clips were getting air time on national television in Israel. But in this, the media were following the example that had already been set by soldiers in the field, who were singing the song as they worked their way through the outskirts of Gaza, hunting for concrete tunnels dug into Israel, disarming booby-trapped apartment buildings, enduring a rain of mortar fire, steeling themselves against the next attack out of the ground.

III.

So why are they singing it?

A large part of it is that young Israelis see “Up, Do Terror Attacks!” as an unintended display of weakness. My son in Gaza told me over the phone: “The thing is, it’s supposed to be this powerful song. It’s supposed to motivate them to do what they think are great, impressive things. But when you listen to it, it’s not like that at all. It sounds like a wedding song. It makes you think: Really, these guys are weak if they are singing songs like that.”



A Cappella Version

Another soldier told me something similar. “We all know that they are trying to scare us. That’s what all this is about. But the truth is that they can’t even put together a song in our language. When you see that they can’t even find somebody who can pronounce the words, the feeling is: You’re trying to scare us and that’s all you can do?”

Many soldiers say things like this when they talk about the Hamas song. Perhaps this will come as a surprise to some. Don’t Israeli soldiers already know that Hamas is weak? Do they really need this botched pop song to teach them that?

But the truth is that no young person in Israel thinks the openly genocidal Muslim armies that are now entrenched on Israel’s borders are weak in the way Americans or Europeans often take them to be. True, Hamas’ daily missile bombardment of Israel’s cities is mostly being intercepted by Iron Dome batteries for the moment. And thank God for that.

But those pictures of burned out buses in the video are for real, each one a reminder of tens of Israelis left dead and maimed on the main streets of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem at the hands of these very same Hamas operatives just a few years ago. Also quite real is the missile threat, which has alternated for a decade now between Hizballah in the north and Hamas in the south, driving the families of some of these soldiers running for bomb shelters not tens of times, but hundreds of times, as they were growing up. The truth is that this summer is the first time Israel has ever had effective missile defenses that could be deployed across much of the country. Before that, Israeli cities and towns just took the hits, and whoever died, died. These soldiers understand that with the help of Iran, Turkey and Qatar, a new generation of missiles will be on their

way soon. Missiles with better guidance systems, multiple warheads, and sophisticated countermeasures. Whether these will overwhelm Israel's defenses in the next round is anyone's guess.

No, no one here thinks Hamas is weak. Not when Hamas's fellow jihadis are rampaging across Iraq and Syria, slaughtering as they go, and driving hundreds of thousands of Christians, Kurds, and others from their homes. Not when Hamas' buddies in the Muslim Brotherhood actually succeeded in taking control of next-door Egypt in democratic elections just two years ago—even if only for a few months. For Israelis in their twenties and teens, Hamas is just the advanced force of a radical Islamic tide that is chewing its way through one country after another in our part of the world. No one doubts it is on the rise. No one doubts it is getting closer. And it's a tide that specializes in turning people's world into a scene of horrors. These young men and women have been seeing previews for this horror show their whole lives.

My 24-year-old daughter in Tel Aviv, who had a piece of missile-shrapnel land in her apartment a couple of weeks ago, tells me bluntly: "You notice that it's particularly soldiers that are in the lead in making these videos and singing this song. You can see why that is. It's a way of coping with the job they are being asked to do. It's a way of turning this around so that these people coming at us aren't scary, but ridiculous. That way they can go into this feeling strong. There's no choice but for them to do that."

So is that it, then? Israelis laugh at Hamas' incompetence in song-writing, because by turning this menace into something funny, they also turn it into something they can handle—a threat we can defeat.

This must be true. But it's only a part of the truth. My young relative in the air force points to something else. "The fact is that this song is about what they [Hamas] love the most—they really want to see everyone dying and lying bleeding in the street like in the video. Which also happens to be what we hate the most. When people sing the song, they are looking that culture straight in the eye. They see the difference between them and us, and they know what this war is about and what they're fighting for."