

Report from the Home Front
Milken Institute Newsletter

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“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

First, heartfelt thanks from our Milken Innovation Center Team here in Jerusalem. I shared your concerns for us with my family and colleagues; we were all deeply moved. The Milken Institute Marketing and Communications team asked me to record some thoughts about the situation here. This gives me a chance to say thank you for thinking of us. I’ve tried to answer your emails, but the pace of the past week doesn’t ensure I didn’t miss thanking all of you. So, here we go:

We are about as safe as anyone can be in Israel these days and are very grateful for that. I know you are mostly used to hearing from me about our work here on solutions here in Israel, with our neighbors in the region, and in developing economies in Africa and Asia, and, of course, with our colleagues back in California and beyond. More on that another time.

There is a season

You may recognize the words above from one of the “books of wisdom” in the Old Testament *Ecclesiastes* (in Hebrew, *Kohelet* means Teacher or Preacher or collector of sayings). *Ecclesiastes* is also quoted later both in the New Testament by Jesus and the Apostles and in the Koran by the Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him. Bible scholars date the written version of this book to about 450 B. C. after Ancient Israelis (Judaeans) returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian Captivity (see Bob Marley, 1990), but is ascribed by tradition to King Solomon from the 10th Century B.C. Ancient Israel (other books attributed to him were the *Song of Songs* and *Proverbs*—other stunning literary reads).

Or you may recognize these words as being from the famous lyrics of, *The Byrds* rock and roll hit which was the cover of Pete Seeger’s folk classic “*Turn, Turn, Turn (To Everything there is a Season)*.” The Byrds’ version of this song has the distinction of being the only No. 1 hit record (1965) with the oldest lyrics (2500 years old), according to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (and performed by a bunch of much older and tougher *Byrds* in 1991 there—check out the video). Covers by everyone from Judy Collins to Nina Simone to Marlene Dietrich are also worth checking out, but enough already.

This is all relevant to current events since last week was the end of the series of Jewish high holidays including the Festival of Sukkot. This is our festival of happiness and joy where we sit, according to our faith tradition in Sukkot (booths/shelters), remembering our old tribes’ wanderings in the desert from Egypt to Israel on the journey to become a people (and incidentally, reminding us of our own mortality). The joy of sitting in those shelters with our friends, family, and other citizens is to contemplate the balance between the things that are transitory or permanent in a world that yearns for places that protect us and allow us to be.

During those holidays we read the book of Ecclesiastes and this “song of time” (3:1-8) which became this top of the charts hit in the 20th century and why it is invoked.

A Time of War

As you already know, the depravity and horror of last Saturday’s events and subsequent missile strikes radically changed our lives here. Our fellows, alumni, family, friends, and colleagues are now either directly mobilized to go to war or someone near to them is (spouses, partners, children, grandchildren, friends). It’s the largest mobilization ever. The shaken rest of us continue to work through the past week’s chaos and Jerusalem has taken on the look of a rather active ghost town—think 9/11 meets the Covid lockdown (though we are not locked down) with very busy and worried people and you get the picture. Very grateful for the Internet and the Iron Dome.

We are regaining our composure while operating under the Home Front Command’s emergency rules to stay no further than 30 seconds to 1.5 minutes away from protective shelter (safe rooms, bomb shelters, or stairwells) to respond to the not infrequent alarms from missile strikes from Hamas in Gaza and Hizballah in Lebanon that have noisily punctuated our week. Parts of the country are still closed military areas. All of us are equipped with a National Emergency Portal App on our smartphones that notifies us when bad things happen and tells us what to do.

In short, we’re not sleeping well.

But, despite this chaos and the obvious failure of politics, which doesn’t seem to be unique to Israel these days, the proven value of social cohesion and self-organization of this nation’s social capital: its people and communities—has proven once again to be its major source of resilience. This civilian mobilization of communities was nearly instantaneous across all flavors of the population by sectors, ethnicities, minorities, and the nearly infinite hyphenations that comprise our diverse demography and sometimes hyperactive, but beloved democracy here. No Israeli community—Bedouin, Druse, Israeli-Palestinian Arab, Circassian, or Jewish town is left untouched by this priceless connectivity of its people in one way or another. Truth be told, we all have more in common in this country than most people and enjoy each other’s company and time to have coffee together (with obvious exceptions).

I heard on the radio this morning that 150 percent more than the people who were mobilized by the IDF showed up for the war—they literally called themselves up for duty within 48 hours. That’s right—more people mustered than were called, despite our internal unresolved differences that everyone put on temporary hold to ensure the country acquits itself honorably in successfully concluding this war.

Meanwhile, the home front continues to bolt into action. My neighborhood café is now a collection point for gifts, treats, and supplies for soldiers, first responders, and others at risk. Pop-up “Civilian War Rooms” appeared everywhere so people could find ways to help. All the social protest websites that sprung up over the past 40 weeks pivoted to networks delivering social services for survivors and or current or anticipated ground zeroes or job matching for volunteers for everything from civil defense to childcare. The list goes on.

A Time to Mourn

We still haven’t identified, much less buried or concluded the final count of all who were murdered last Saturday in the shattering destruction and unspeakable deeds we have now witnessed. As Secretary Blinken said yesterday, this represents **ten** 9/11s.

I can barely write about the destroyed beauty of this stretch of land in Israel where colorful poppies rise each Spring and the agricultural Garden of Eden landscapes created by pioneers, even in our own generation, who built collective farms, dining halls, agricultural

cooperatives, businesses, towns and villages. They were our friends and comrades. Those communities lost 15-20 percent of their members who were either murdered or are now held hostage. You've all probably seen the satellite images of fire and destruction and finer resolution, stomach-turning images from the terrorist Hamas Hell this region became inspired by other mass murderers from the Holocaust to ISIS in one day.

This desecrated what had started as a daringly beautiful, quiet, and hopeful day ending this period of holidays that Autumn usually delivers in this land marking when the blessing of rain begins.

I have no idea how big the effective range of this fiasco and subsequent explosions will be of what our national poet Yehuda Amichai called the "circle of pain, anger, and time." I do know that the memory of this week and the universes of the future we have lost with these precious lives will remain forever. We must also remember the lesson from Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish who wrote, "As you think of others far away, think of yourself (say: If only I was a candle in the dark.)" We can only hope we can become candles in these dark times and close Amichai's circles of pain and anger. That will be the repair that is required of us. To get there, we must win this war.

Most people I talk to mark two points of realization of when this one of too many wars started: 1) when you knew something had happened and 2) when you understood what had happened. This is an important practical thought exercise for all of us.

This is a time of mourning in this Land. This is not the time to report on our work. I appreciate all of your kind words, but please note: none of us are heroes by just being here doing our work, but we are privileged to live amongst them. You've probably read about those heroes who are still with us. Those we've lost that we didn't know (the dense nodes of social networks here in Israel pretty much limit us to 1-3 max degrees of separation), we meet them each evening on the news or see their faces in the paper the next morning after their families have been informed and their death notices posted. They are all names that will be blessed.

The immediate (but not ultimate) defensive phase of the war is ending, and the offensive phase of this Gazan War has begun. Other fronts may open and it's hard to evaluate the length of uncertainty and high volatility of risks that abound. The best-case scenario (which seems unlikely now) is that this Gazan War will take at least a month. But who knows given the geopolitical factors in play.

True, this was the largest massacre of Jews on a single day since World War II. But, it's important to remember that Israel was not the only target of this day of infamy. Regrettably, you should simply consider us the world's proverbial canary in the coal mine. The other major historical target identified by the totalitarian Gazan State of Hamastan and its Iranian sponsor was the shared longing for normalcy in our region between Arabs and Jews and an end to conflict. Last week was very much an attempted assassination of the hopes and dreams of people in the Middle East, North Africa and beyond to build normal, workable, and productively rewarding lives, homes, communities, and nations. The Hamas-Hezbollah-Iranian objective remains to destroy options for an inclusive and regenerative environment for this region. They are fine with having the 21st Century be held hostage by the failures and the last century. They are more invested in the problems of this region than solutions.

The working group on regional economic integration we're part of under the auspices of the Negev Summit (which took place at Kibbutz Sde Boker in March 2022) was to have reconvened in Tel Aviv this week and was promptly postponed for obvious security reasons alone. It comprised the six brave Arab countries in the Abraham Accords plus Israel and the U. S. evolving with broad bipartisan/ post-partisan support. We were anticipating

participation at these working sessions from future terrific and talented partners to this process from Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Palestinian Authority. I can report that I received instantaneous emails of concern and comfort (like yours) from these colleagues seeking to cooperate in building bridges to an alternative reality and, yes, sort out how to finance the future forward (attaching my column in *Times of Israel* on this [here](#)).

Will we witness a time to heal and a time for peace (and even a time to dance)? I'll invoke Pete Seeger and the Byrds' coda and prayer from the only modern verse added to the ancient voice of Ecclesiastes: "I swear it's not too late."