

OPINION

Don't Blame Israel First



WONDER LAND
By Daniel Henninger

As reports come out of the Biden administration about cease-fire talks between Israel and Hamas, bear in mind that the goal of one side in the discussions remains the elimination of the sovereign nation of Israel.

Hamas's 1988 charter continues to call for Israel's destruction.

Ali Khamenei, supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, whose wealth subsidizes Hamas's military operations, has said, "The perpetual subject of Iran is the elimination of Israel from the region." It remains so.

World opinion should impose more pressure on Hamas military leader Yahya Sinwar.

Despite the recent emergence of cease-fires as a means to end wars, active military conflicts on this scale typically don't end this way. More often, cease-fires occur when the opposition has effectively been defeated, as Germany and Japan were in World War II.

The debate over the terms of the current Israel-Hamas cease-fire proposals turns mainly on whether a stop to the fighting would be permanent or temporary, following a hostage and prisoner exchange. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says he wants to reserve the right to resume fighting against Hamas.

Pointedly, the Biden administration's proposal for a six-week cease-fire includes the withdrawal of Israeli forces from populated areas in Gaza. Such a departure surely would be interpreted as a victory for Hamas, and in particular for its military leader, Yahya Sinwar.

Mr. Sinwar, the primary architect of the Oct. 7 invasion, who presumably resides inside the Gaza tunnel system, should be seen as the central figure in the conflict, more important to its resolution than Mr. Netanyahu or President Biden.

Recent news reports have suggested that Hamas's so-called political leadership in Qatar is more amenable to ending the conflict than is Mr. Sinwar, though both insist that Hamas retain a primary governing role in Gaza. Mr. Sinwar apparently believes he has Israel bogged down in a quagmire and that international opinion has turned the Jewish state into a pariah, pushing the Israelis toward a settlement on his terms.

As with the airliner attacks on the U.S. mainland on Sept. 11, 2001, which live on simply as "9/11," the origin of the Israel-Hamas war has been reduced similarly to "Oct. 7." While the attack in 2001 was mainly about killing Americans, there is a danger in losing sight of the much broader political purposes of Mr. Sinwar's Oct. 7 invasion.

When it happened, the assault's events seemed incomprehensibly heinous—the point-blank shootings of innocents, rapes and the abduction of 252 hostages into Gaza (at least 43 of whom are believed to have died in captivity). It is



Yahya Sinwar

clear in retrospect that the barbarity was Mr. Sinwar's long-term strategy.

Hamas's intention was to force the Israel Defense Forces inside Gaza indefinitely, as it pursued Israel's longstanding policy of freeing hostages. With Hamas holding the captives inside its virtually impenetrable underground city of tunnels, the Sinwar political calculation was correct that images of Israel's inevitable assault on Hamas in the neighborhoods of Gaza to free hostages would in time transfer international blame onto Israel, aided, of course, by organized Palestinian-Hamas protest groups across the U.S. and Europe.

And finally by Joe Biden. Asked days ago in an interview if he thought Mr. Netanyahu was prolonging the war out of self preservation, the American president replied, "There is every reason for people to draw that conclusion." In March, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said in an astonishing floor speech that Mr. Netanyahu "no longer fits the needs" of Israel. A belief has emerged in what passes for world opinion that

if Mr. Netanyahu can be forced out of office, a "moderate" Israeli leadership will emerge, and somehow the war will end.

Rarely discussed, because it is so incredible, is the assumption that any successor Israeli government would allow the Sinwar-led Hamas to emerge intact, in Gaza, with whatever weaponry it has left. The more plausible reality is that if Hamas and its leadership is to avoid execution or assassination, it will have to plot its next steps somewhere other than the Gaza Strip. Perhaps Spain, Ireland or Norway, each of which has recognized a Palestinian state, would offer to take Hamas in.

An additional reality, which no cease-fire proposal can dispel, is that the elimination of Israel will continue as an active goal of Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah and some U.S.-based protest groups. On May 31, another anti-Israel divestment group invaded and closed the Brooklyn Museum, carrying signs with slogans such as "No Normalization of Settler Colonialism."

The debate over the Israel-Hamas war has fallen deeply into a moral imbalance. The conflict's grinding status quo—with Palestinians and the Israeli hostages continuing to die—has little hope of changing until the statements of foreign leaders, analysts, the media and not least Mr. Biden and his many translators begin to impose serious political and moral pressure on the man who put this horror in motion: Hamas military commander in chief Yahya Sinwar. Blame him first.

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BOOKSHELF | By Adrian Woolfson

The RNA Renaissance

The Catalyst

By Thomas R. Cech
Norton, 304 pages, \$28.99

Initially dismissed as a wealthy and frivolous socialite, Charles Swann in Marcel Proust's "In Search of Lost Time" eventually transforms from a figure of minor significance to an important one. Were biology a novel, ribonucleic acid (RNA) would be the Charles Swann of living systems.

For decades the biological sciences barely acknowledged the existence of RNA, consigning it to relative obscurity. Researchers accepted that it performed some important functions—messenger RNA, for instance, carries genetic information from the nucleus to the cell cytoplasm, while transfer RNA transports amino acids to the ribosomes that assemble them into proteins—but it was not considered to be of general importance beyond these discreet cameo roles.

It was RNA's attention-seeking cousin, DNA, that long held center stage, bathing in celebrity indulgences while RNA skulked around uncomfortably and awkwardly in the shadowlands. And then suddenly, catching us all unaware, RNA stormed into the spotlight. It now appears as the apotheosis of everything essential to life, with an unexpected versatility and ubiquity.

In Thomas Cech's lively and entertaining "The Catalyst: RNA and the Quest to Unlock Life's Deepest Secrets," the Nobel laureate and professor of biochemistry describes the story of how RNA intersected with his own personal scientific journey, and recounts the important role he played in elevating this modest character to its rightful place within the pantheon of biological molecules. In the RNA renaissance he describes,

the molecule emerges as both the colorful and mercurial protagonist of biology and as a "wondrous molecule of limitless possibilities." Mr. Cech, who has made it his mission to "demystify" this elusive molecule, counsels us to "never underestimate RNA."

DNA has been likened to the source code of a computer program, containing the basic chemical building material of genomes and encoding life's core information. RNA performs its functions using a near-identical language. It is made in part from a sugar called ribose, whereas DNA uses deoxyribose. This is significant, we learn, as the extra oxygen atom incorporated into ribose "makes RNA chemically much less stable than DNA." This inherent instability confers RNA with an ephemeral nature, enabling it to perform its regulatory and information-transfer functions.

While DNA is double stranded and locked into a double-helical structure, RNA contorts itself into a plethora of "origami-like shapes." This ability to generate a structurally diverse and stable repertoire of three-dimensional architectures allows RNA to function—like proteins—as the components of molecular machines. RNA is used, for example, to build the "mothership" ribosome machines that make "all the proteins in all living things."

While only 1% of the human genome codes for proteins, we now know that almost all the rest of the genome, sometimes referred to as its "dark matter," acts as a template for the synthesis of special types of RNA molecules. These so-called long noncoding RNAs outnumber the protein-encoding genes and, we learn, appear to transact a diverse range of essential functions. Many of these relate to gene regulation, while others are still being discovered. The agency of long noncoding RNA molecules explains in part how near-identical gene kits are able to produce organisms as different as, say, a human and a mouse, or a fish and a fly.

Perhaps most striking is how Mr. Cech demonstrates that nearly all the key RNA discoveries of the past have been the product of curiosity-driven research on esoteric species. The examination of *Tetrahymena thermophila*, found in pond scum and shaped like a "minuscule watermelon," for instance, led to the discovery in 1982, by Mr. Cech and his colleagues at the University of Colorado Boulder, that some RNAs have enzyme-like functions once thought to be the exclusive domain of proteins. Such catalytic RNAs, with dual informational and structural functions, known as ribozymes, may have played a key role in the origin of life. They also, among other things, allow genes to be cut and spliced, in a process known as alternative splicing, that diversifies the genome's information content.

Once dismissed as a molecule of minor importance, RNA now appears to be the apotheosis of everything essential to life.

There is a hidden treasure trove of useful biology residing within the genomes of even the humblest species. The study of a transparent worm barely 1 millimeter long, for example, led to the discovery of the phenomenon of RNA interference, which has been harnessed to therapeutically silence genes. The unassuming bacteria *E. coli*, similarly, led to the discovery of the Crispr system that has since been used to develop techniques for gene editing and manipulating gene expression for therapeutic purposes. Who would have imagined that the apparently insignificant microscopic bacteria living in, on and all around us would have played such a pivotal role in unlocking the secret of how to engineer human genomes and alter their regulation?

Mr. Cech wistfully reminds us of the importance of preserving life's biodiversity, as "yet-to-be-discovered RNAs" are likely lurking within their genomes and have the potential to unlock new opportunities. He reminds us that "the biggest breakthroughs in biomedicine almost always come from fundamental research that's being done to understand how nature works, without any medical application in mind."

The author also teaches us some of the trade secrets of successful scientists, demonstrating, for example, the importance of selecting the right model systems. The discovery of telomerase would not have been possible were it not for the decision to study *Oxytricha nova*, another pond-scum species, which has tens of millions of chromosomes.

In this "educated citizen's guide" to this intriguing molecule, the machinations of RNA emerge as a core feature of what makes us human. We appear to be at the beginning of a conceptual enlightenment in biology—an "age of RNA," as Mr. Cech calls it. Biology will never be the same.

Mr. Woolfson is the author of "An Intelligent Person's Guide to Genetics."

Trump Verdict Makes Everyone Look Bad

By Karl Rove

Both the Trump and Biden campaigns seem to believe the former president's conviction Thursday helped them. Both would be smarter to emphasize the New York verdict a lot less.

As expected, Donald Trump declared he was the victim of "a rigged trial" that was "very unfair" and presided over by "a conflicted judge." The outcome galvanized his supporters: His campaign and the Republican National Committee raised a record \$53 million in the first 24 hours after the verdict.

Also unsurprising, Joe Biden seemed delighted to be able to call Mr. Trump "a convicted felon," a phrase Democrats will repeat endlessly. When asked about the verdict as he left a White House press conference, Mr. Biden silently gave the cameras a lengthy smirk. Not a smart move unless you want to leave the impression you were responsible for the conviction.

It'll take time for public opinion to sort itself out. The initial polls weren't great for Mr. Trump. A May 31 Reuters/Ipsos poll found that about 10% of Republicans were less likely to support the former president after his conviction. A June 1 ABC/Ipsos survey found 52% of independents believe he should end his campaign, while a May 31 Morning Consult poll found 49% of independents and 15% of Republicans felt the same. If this doesn't im-

prove, it could sink his presidential bid.

Still, a May 31 I&I/TIPP poll had the race tied at 41%, virtually unchanged since the same pollsters' May 3 survey gave Mr. Biden 42% to Mr. Trump's 40%. And it's likely the verdict will be overturned on appeal.

Falsifying business records is a misdemeanor in New York state. Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg turned it into a felony by usurping the federal government's prerogatives and prosecuting what he called a federal campaign finance violation. The case's convoluted construction has led many voters to see the prosecution as politically motivated. A successful appeal would reinforce that perception.

Still, it doesn't help Mr. Trump's campaign to make the race about his rage rather than voters and their concerns. He should realize that Democrats likely want to sucker him into obsessing over his conviction. The more he talks about the trial, the more swing voters might see his fury and resentment as weakness. The less he talks about being a victim and the more confidently he dismisses the verdict as likely to be overturned on appeal, the stronger he'll appear.

Mr. Trump's campaign can keep raising money and motivating the faithful with emails and texts railing against the prosecutor and judge, but his public appearances should be devoted to converting undecided voters.

That requires focusing on issues voters care about: the rising cost of living, illegal immigration, energy prices and crime.

The New York verdict is an even more dangerous distraction for Mr. Biden. To win reelection, his campaign has to defend his many unpopular first-term actions, lay out a forward-looking agenda, and attack Mr. Trump effectively. He hasn't done well on any of these so far. The more time he harps on the conviction, the less time he has for topics that undecided voters and unenthusiastic Democrats care about.

It only further annoys the 'double haters' whom both sides need to win the election.

Team Biden also needs to realize that Mr. Bragg's prosecutorial shenanigans have caused some GOP Trump skeptics to flip. One such Trump doubter told me the verdict was "the last straw," convincing her that Democrats "do not respect anyone who disagrees with them." She's now voting for Mr. Trump.

The more Mr. Biden harps on the conviction, the more it could cause voters to focus on his son Hunter's trials on gun charges and tax evasion. That could reflect badly on the president by reinforcing the idea that all politicians are dirty,

while exacting a major psychological price from him.

Focusing too much on the Bragg case takes both campaigns away from what should be their main goal: winning over voters disenchanted with both candidates. These so-called double haters comprise as many as 1 in 5 voters and will probably decide the race. To win them over, either candidate needs to avoid becoming more detestable.

Double haters are the opposite of hard-core partisans. Many lack a well-defined ideology. Most pay little attention to campaigns: One well-known Democratic strategist told me his group's work showed that these voters spend four minutes a week following politics. The cumulative effect of conventions and debates, what little they read about the race in the paper or see on TV or consume from their news feed, will lead them to decide, probably close to the end.

As the summer begins, the presidential race is tight. Voters who are already disenchanted will become more so. Each campaign will try toxfify the other, but both would be smarter to leave last week's verdict out of it. The election may depend on who better understands this counterintuitive notion.

Mr. Rove helped organize the political-action committee *American Crossroads* and is author of "The Triumph of William McKinley" (Simon & Schuster, 2015).

Envy the Old Codger

By Danny Heitman

Shortly after my wife and I moved into our house nearly three decades ago, I saw our retired neighbor, Bobby Hamilton, fetching his newspaper from the driveway. His outfit got my attention.

Since dawn had just broken, Mr. Hamilton was still in his pajamas, but he'd met the morning chill with a denim jacket slipped over his flannel night clothes. A baseball cap completed the ensemble, creating a fashion statement that was, to put it mildly, not in tune with the latest trends from Paris and Milan.

I wasn't ready to embrace Mr. Hamilton's sartorial non-

chalance, though I admired his willingness to flout convention. "What an old codger," I said to myself as my neighbor shuffled back to his house in slippers.

They're a liberated lot, no longer caring what others think.

The years flew by. My wife and I raised two children, and Bobby Hamilton died. My hair thinned, and my worries over keeping up appearances diminished.

The other day, braving a brisk morning to collect the paper, I reached for my wind-

breaker and ball cap. My weather gear made for quite a mash-up with my cotton sleepwear and leather moccasins—a contrast I didn't notice until I'd returned inside and spotted the hall mirror. There, staring back at me, was the affable ghost of Mr. Hamilton. After a blink or two, I saw it was only me, dressed in the Bobby Hamilton Line, circa 1997.

"What an old codger," I told my reflection. A codger, I learned from Merriam Webster, is "an often mildly eccentric and usually elderly fellow." It's possibly a variation of "cadger"—a kind of beggar who, like most folks shaking the tin cup, looks more unkempt than those gracing the cover of *GQ*.

Codgers rest near the margins of popular culture—partially out of it and perhaps happily so. They're village dissidents, reminding us that staying au courant with the latest dictates in clothing, music and political opinions is an exhausting enterprise best left to the young. That's why the smile one offers a codger might have a trace of envy. They're a liberated lot, no longer concerned with what other people think.

At 60, I seem to have joined their ranks. I think I'm going to like it.

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