

A Time Exclusive Report on Google & Israel

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It has been a while since I last touched on the international affairs, but this exclusive report from the Time Magazine makes me realize that international affairs are not far away from home. In this Google event promoting Israel Tech industry in Manhattan, Eddie Hatfield, a 23-year-old software engineer at Google Cloud, stood up and declared that “I refuse to build technology that powers genocide, apartheid, or surveillance.”

Look at what happened to Hatfield. While Google’s managing director for Israel, Barak Regev, took it lightly, “One of the privileges of working in a company which represents democratic values is giving space for different opinions,” it turns out that the “space for different opinions” is not that big at Google: 3 days later, Google fired Hatfield.

I admire the bravery of Hatfield for expressing his opinion (although the way he did it may not be the most appropriate) and believe Google overreacted. Their official comment is that Hatfield had damaged the company’s public image. “This employee disrupted a coworker who was giving a presentation – interfering with an official company-sponsored event,” the Google spokesperson said in a statement to TIME.

“This behavior is not okay, regardless of the issue, and the employee was terminated for violating our policies.”

But the charge does not match the verdict. If interrupting a coworker during a presentation is sufficient for terminating the employment, perhaps we will see hundreds losing jobs every day.

Nancy Pelosi and the 30+ House Democrats did the right thing to urge Biden to reconsider unconditional weapon sales to Israel. I feel sorry for those who still stick to the notion of Israeli's self-defense right, and question their capability of making common sense based judgments and decisions. Most Americans, myself included, strongly supported Israeli's right to fight back against Hamas. We still do today — but the question is to control the civilian casualty in Gaza.

Israel is the only country in the world that can intimidate the US, despite its small size. I am still puzzled why and how the country has managed to do that. But the important thing is that Israeli leaders know they are treated differently by the US, and always expect the Americans to cover their back.

Such an expectation is troublesome. Too often, the US friendliness and assistance have been taken for granted, to the extent that Israel has become the largest US overseas liability — not always by intention from the Israeli side but more by facts. It has been the “ally of allies,” and more or less the unconditionally loved one. Its extremist leaders have acted like a spoiled child, paying little attention to international law and international institutions like the UN and WHO.

I can't help but think that if any other country in the world had done just 1/10 of the killings of civilians — under the broad sunlight, including children and women — as Israel has done, the US would have labeled it “Genocide.” Just think of Xinjiang, China.

Yet, the Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III did not want to wait, and he told a Senate committee that the Pentagon had no evidence that Israel was carrying out a genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

I am not claiming Israel has done genocide — it is not up to me to decide. We

can wait for the legal due process — I hope there is one, although I am not betting on it — to decide. On the other hand, with so many openly reported deaths of children and women in Gaza, plus other humanitarian crises like hunger, nobody, even the American leaders, can stop some people from making their unfavorable opinions.

This may be a strange analogy, but think of O.J. Simpson, who died today. Although he was tried — and acquitted — for the murders of Nicole Brown Simpson, his ex-wife, and her friend Ronald Goldman, there are millions of Americans believing Simpson “did it.”

You can't stop people from believing what they believe, even by firing them. The right thing to do is simply to allow people (e.g., Hatfield) to hold their opinions.

Although I am willing to wait for the court to decide on the genocide charge, I won't wait in this year's election. Instead, I will prioritize candidates' stance on the Gaza deaths: Those who remain silent cannot be relied upon, as they have demonstrated, loud and clear, a lack of concern for human rights and human welfare — even though those people have no right to vote in this country.

I know I am not anti-Semitism because I have a lot of respects to most if not all American Jews, including those in the leadership positions like Schumer, Sanders, Blinken and Sullivan. American Jews have made tremendous contributions to this country despite its small size, and we all should appreciate and honor that. Regardless of contributions, all religions and cultures, including Judaism, should be respected and accepted.

On the other hand, extremist Israeli leaders like Netanyahu should be held accountable — like any other political leaders. I also wish more Israeli Jews would show signs of remorse for the deaths of Palestinian civilians, though that is ultimately beyond our control.

But above all, the best thing Israel can do for itself is to set a higher goal of

winning international sympathy and respect by showing signs of self-constraints in light of international law. This is like in the movie “Air,” when Matt Damon as “Sonny Vaccaro” told Michael Jordan to aim for “eternity” rather than money.

True, from a pure utilitarian point of view, international sympathy does not do much. It won’t bring national security nor replace the military power Israel now holds. Like it or not, with the US being the strongest country in the world as their ally, Israel can afford not to care much about its image and reputation.

If the only way for power or strength to express itself is by silencing criticism, Israel has had great successes. Some Americans won’t think twice before criticizing the president or any other politicians, yet they may still be wary about the label of anti-Semitism.

But a country is just like a person, where criticism can be healthy and constructive. This I learned from Microsoft Copilot, which is surprisingly good by providing up to a dozen or even more sources. Its answers are generally better than Perplexity, and its response speed is much faster than Gemini.

Copilot starts by saying that “Criticism plays a vital role in the growth and development of a country.” It then lists several good points:

- Feedback and Learning.
- Strengthens Products and Services.
- Guidance Away from Bad Practices.
- Accountability.
- Competitive Edge.
- Fosters Creativity and Innovation.

I also ask this question: “What benefits would bring to a country if they care about international sympathy?”

Copilot begins by saying that, “International sympathy plays a significant role in shaping the dynamics of international relations.”

I will cite the entire answers below, with my comments in parentheses:

1. Diplomatic Relations and Alliances:

- When a country is perceived positively by other nations, it is more likely to form strong diplomatic ties and alliances. **(My comment:** Israel would probably argue that national security goes before diplomatic ties, and they would be right, except sometimes diplomatic ties and national security go together rather than being mutually exclusive.)
- International sympathy can lead to cooperation on various issues such as trade, security, and cultural exchange. **(My comment:** The same argument above applies here.)

2. Economic Opportunities:

- A favorable international image attracts foreign investment, trade partners, and tourists. **(My Comment:** I was really interested in visiting Israel, as I heard so many good things about the country. Unfortunately now I have lost my desire.)
- Countries that are well-regarded globally often experience economic growth due to increased business opportunities. **(My Comment:** This one may last only for a while).

3. Humanitarian Aid and Assistance:

- Sympathy from other nations can result in humanitarian aid during times of crisis (natural disasters, conflicts, etc.). **(My Comment:** For Israel, this is not to be worried, as the US will always come to their rescue.)

- International organizations and countries may provide financial, medical, or logistical support. (**My Comment:** Israel is a developed country, and it can afford losing supports from international organizations).

4. Soft Power and Influence:

- A positive reputation enhances a country's soft power—its ability to influence others through culture, values, and attraction.
- Soft power can be more effective than military or economic coercion in achieving national goals. (**My Comment:** I totally agree with this one. Israel has paid too much attention to military power and too little to leveraging soft power.)

5. Cultural Exchange and Tourism:

- International sympathy encourages cultural exchange programs, educational collaborations, and tourism. (**My Comment:** Israel would argue that compared to national security, cultural exchanges are trivial, and I would agree. But the power of cultural exchange is at its peak *before* military clash. If done right, it can preemptively kill a war.)
- People-to-people interactions foster understanding and goodwill. (**My Comment:** My impression is that the people-to-people interactions were very limited between Palestinians and Israeli Jews, even before the war.)

6. Global Cooperation on Shared Challenges:

- Countries that are seen as compassionate and empathetic are more likely to collaborate on global issues. (**My comment:** Imagine Israel uses its more advanced technologies to help neighbors develop alternative energies and control climate change.)

- These issues include climate change, public health, poverty alleviation, and human rights.

7. Enhanced Reputation and Trust:

- A country with international sympathy gains trust from other nations. **(My comment:** Trust is at the core of international relations.)
- Trust is crucial for successful negotiations, peacekeeping efforts, and conflict resolution.

At the end of the day, international sympathy and respect have to be desired by the people within each country. They are the “beauty in the eyes of beholders.” The general pattern has been that when economic development has reached a certain income level, people tend to ask for more soft, intangible and subjective goals.

But there are exceptions, and I would count both China and Israel in that exceptional category. Unlike China, Israel has the solid support and constant protection of the US, which means it can get by with little care of international respect.

That said, the fact remains that in certain circumstances, sympathy and respect can work magic and save lives and properties.