

The eighth front

British barrister Natasha Hausdorff is coming to Australia to arm us against the lawfare being waged on Israel – and on us. She tells **Bruce Hill** the fight is winnable, but only if we stop playing defence.



Natasha Hausdorff together with Douglas Murray on his Save the West Tour at Fort Lauderdale in Florida. Photo: LinkedIn.

EARLIER this week I was listening to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion and heard a non-Jewish educator describe a conversation in a staff room. A colleague was talking about a Jewish school nearby, and that it had very high walls. The walls, she explained to the room, were because the Jews did not want anyone finding out what went on inside. Because they don't really educate their children. Because they want to keep themselves separate from the rest of us, since they think they're better than us.

NOBODY BLINKED

A few hours later I put that story to Natasha Hausdorff, and she did not hesitate for a second before saying exactly what it meant.

"It harkens back, doesn't it, to this idea that the seder was viewed with suspicion because Jews came together in their houses and were suspected of committing these sorts of rituals that gave rise to the ancient blood libel – because they kept themselves separate," she said. "And when you think about the fact that they were so shunned from most societies that

they did stick to their communities and seek that sort of community for protection. You're seeing the same thing play out over and over again across the generations."

That combination – the long historical memory, the refusal to be shocked, and then the abrupt pivot to what can actually be done – is characteristic. Hausdorff, who headlines the Jewish National Fund's annual campaign events in Sydney on September 1, Melbourne on September 3 and Perth on September 6, is not in the business of lamentation. She is in the business of ammunition.

A London barrister specialising in international law, she is best known for the work she does for nothing: as legal director of UK Lawyers for Israel Charitable Trust she has made submissions to international courts and tribunals and given evidence to the House of Commons on the legal and military questions bearing on British arms exports to Israel. The American Jewish Committee's Moral Courage Award, which she received last year, described her as fighting on "the eighth front", the war against Israel conducted not with rockets but with legal terminology.



An Amnesty International office in Auckland, New Zealand.

Photo: chameleonseye/istock

'UNDER WHICH LAW?'

I began where she begins: with the people who describe themselves as international lawyers and experts on international law, and who deploy words like occupation and genocide with an air of academic respectability. It isn't really respectable, I suggested.

"It's worse than that," she said. "They're actually an abuse of these

very phrases and the concepts that they have defined for so long. And therefore their use in this respect is a threat to the concepts themselves. It waters them down when they are being deployed by formerly well-respected organisations like Amnesty International, like Human Rights Watch. It means that these organisations lose their credibility."



Natasha Hausdorff speaking with *The Australian Jewish News* from London. Photo: screenshot.



International Court of Justice president Judge Joan E. Donoghue presides over South Africa's genocide case against Israel. Photo: International Court of Justice



Natasha Hausdorff with her debate partner Douglas Murray at the Munk debate. Photo: X.

The damage doesn't stop at the NGOs. "It also means that the international courts and tribunals that are engaged with considering allegations advanced under these buzzwords also lose their credibility."

So what does an ordinary member of the community do when someone at a barbecue announces that the war in Gaza is illegal under international law, or that the settlements are, and says it the way you would say the sky is blue?

"One starting point might be to ask these people: under which law?" she said. "And I think you'll find invariably they will struggle to tell you."

The war Hamas began on October 7, she argues, sits squarely within the inherent right of states to self-defence – a right, she is careful to stress, that international law recognises rather than confers. It is acknowledged in Article 51 of the UN Charter.

"It is sometimes referred to as a God-given right, but it is so integral to the ability of states to protect themselves, to protect their people, to function as a sovereign."

The second limb of the allegation – that Israel is fighting unlawfully – rests, she says, on a misrepresentation of the law of armed conflict and its four core principles: military necessity, distinction, proportionality and precaution. Israel has not merely met them, in her assessment; it has gone past them, to a standard she says senior officers from six NATO countries told her their own armies would struggle to meet.

On settlements, the lawyerly restraint drops away slightly. What the canard of illegal occupation has cloaked in legitimacy, she says, is the position that Jews should not be permitted to live in certain areas because they are Jews. "That morally objectionable, horrendous position has been given a cloak of legitimacy because international law is being lied about."

THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

The tell, I said to her, is the definite article. People do not say a genocide. They say "the genocide", as though it were a settled matter of record, and they turn huffy and self-righteous if you suggest otherwise.

"It's not just false, it has been deployed for a particularly strategic objective, and that is to shut down debate," she said. The point is to paint the Jew as the other, as so morally reprehensible that argument becomes unnecessary.

"We are familiar with this in the Jewish community. It used to be that Jews killed Christian children to use their blood, because the killing of a child was so repugnant and morally objectionable. A child

targeted Jews for torture, rape, slaughter and kidnap because they were Jews.

"That intention is at the core of the definition of genocide. And that is ultimately what is now being projected onto the very victims of it."

Which is why she is impatient with the defensive crouch. "There are so many instances in which I hear debates about this, or people trying to explain why Israel is not committing genocide in Gaza. But of course, the objective of those who were putting forward this false claim was simply to shift the Overton window."

She watched it happen in real time. The day after the ICJ's first provisional measures order, she was in a South African television studio debating what the court had actually

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British barrister and international law expert

is the definition of innocence, and the portrait of Jewish slaughter of innocent children is meant to get a guttural reaction, a response from people where logic, reason, analysis, all of that goes out of the window. And it's exactly the same here, accusing the Jews of the crime of crimes."

There is a psychological dimension too, she says: projection. Genocide was a word coined by Raphael Lemkin in the aftermath of the Shoah, to give legal shape to the Jewish experience of being marked for extermination for being Jews. On October 7, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, members of Fatah and a good many apparently ordinary civilians crossed the border and

said. "My counterpart was celebrating the fact that now we could finally use Israel and genocide in the same sentence and nobody could tell us otherwise. That was the objective. And it has been entirely successful."

WHAT SHE EXPECTS TO FIND HERE

Hausdorff was last in Australia around two years ago. She has been watching what has happened since from London, and she is not happy about it.

"Certainly, looking from the outside in, following what has been happening on the ground for so long now, especially since the Bondi massacre, watching extracts from the Royal Commission, the situation does appear to have deteriorated so dramatically."

She reaches for Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks and his description of antisemitism as a mutating virus. The modern mutation attaches itself to the Jewish state, and the vector is legal vocabulary: occupation, ethnic cleansing, colonialism, apartheid, genocide. But the symptoms are entirely familiar. "Jews are being attacked in the streets. They're not safe in their hospitals, within the healthcare system, in schools, in synagogues."

The message she brings for the JNF and for the wider community is about individual responsibility. The campaign of lawfare has succeeded partly because general liter-

acy on international law is low, which leaves the field to bad actors.

"It is on each of us to educate ourselves, to arm ourselves with the ammunition, to push back on the falsehoods, to fight for the truth, both the facts on the ground and the reality under international law."

Creating that sense of community, she says, is what gives other people the confidence to put their heads above the parapet. The objective, delivered without irony: "building an army to fight this eighth front – with the truth, with the knowledge, with the facts and with the law."

ARE WE WINNING?

I quoted Churchill at her – "If you're going through hell, keep going," – and asked the question everyone actually wants answered. Are we winning, or are we getting our heads kicked in?

"I think it depends how you look at it." Measured from October 7 to now, she says, the achievements across the seven kinetic fighting fronts are real and should not be waved away – bought, she is quick to add, at enormous cost in lives.

The eighth front is the one still open. And on that, she thinks the sandbagging has at least stopped. Diaspora communities thrived for so long, and contributed so much, that a certain complacency was inevitable – the old refrain that it couldn't possibly happen here.

"That is something that I think more people today are alive to. It has come at a great cost, including the tremendous loss of life in the Diaspora from antisemitic attacks. But I think people are awake. Forewarned is forearmed."

Which brings us to the question being asked at every Shabbat table in this country, and in Britain and America too: is it time to go?

She won't prescribe. "It's a personal matter for each individual. Not everyone feels in a position to go to Israel but the fact that it is there, and remains there as an option, is critical in my mind. There is an inextricable link between a strong Israel and a strong Jewish Diaspora, and each needs the other."

And for those of us staying? The war she is describing, she says, can be fought from anywhere.

"If people are committed to remaining in Australia and keeping that Jewish community strong, I wish them every success and more strength to their elbow."

Natasha Hausdorff is the guest speaker at the JNF Australia annual campaign events in Sydney on September 1, Melbourne on September 3 and Perth on September 6. Bookings: jnf.org.au/events



Fans hold a giant banner reading 'Stop genocide in Gaza' during a soccer match between Paris Saint-Germain and Inter Milan in Munich in May, 2025. Photo: Odd Andersen/AFP