

There Is a Jewish Hope for Palestinian Liberation. It Must Survive.; Guest Essay

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Body

ABSTRACT

Ethical resistance is the answer to grief and rage.

FULL TEXT

In 1988, bombs exploded at restaurants, sporting events and arcades in South Africa. In response, the African National Congress, then in its 77th year of a struggle to overthrow white domination, did something remarkable: It accepted responsibility and pledged to prevent its fighters from conducting such operations in the future. Its logic was straightforward: Targeting civilians is wrong. "Our morality as revolutionaries," the A.N.C. declared, "dictates that we respect the values underpinning the humane conduct of war."

Historically, geographically and morally, the A.N.C. of 1988 is a universe away from the Hamas of 2023, so remote that its behavior may seem irrelevant to the horror that Hamas unleashed last weekend in southern Israel. But South Africa offers a counter-history, a glimpse into how ethical resistance works and how it can succeed. It offers not an instruction manual, but a place - in this season of agony and rage - to look for hope.

There was nothing inevitable about the A.N.C.'s policy, which, as Jeff Goodwin, a New York University sociologist, has documented, helped ensure that there was "so little terrorism in the anti-apartheid struggle." So why didn't the A.N.C. carry out the kind of gruesome massacres for which Hamas has become notorious? There's no simple answer. But two factors are clear. First, the A.N.C.'s strategy for fighting apartheid was intimately linked to its vision of what should follow apartheid. It refused to terrify and traumatize white South Africans because it wasn't trying to force them out. It was trying to win them over to a vision of a multiracial democracy.

Second, the A.N.C. found it easier to maintain moral discipline - which required it to focus on popular, nonviolent resistance and use force only against military installations and industrial sites - because its strategy was showing signs of success. By 1988, when the A.N.C. expressed regret for killing civilians, more than 150 American universities had at least partially divested from companies doing business in South Africa, and the United States Congress had imposed sanctions on the apartheid regime. The result was a virtuous cycle: Ethical resistance elicited international support, and international support made ethical resistance easier to sustain.

In Israel today, the dynamic is almost exactly the opposite. Hamas, whose authoritarian, theocratic ideology could not be farther from the A.N.C.'s, has committed an unspeakable horror that may damage the Palestinian cause for decades to come. Yet when Palestinians resist their oppression in ethical ways - by calling for boycotts, sanctions and the application of international law - the United States and its allies work to ensure that those efforts fail, which convinces many Palestinians that ethical resistance doesn't work, which empowers Hamas.

The savagery Hamas committed on Oct. 7 has made reversing this monstrous cycle much harder. It could take a generation. It will require a shared commitment to ending Palestinian oppression in ways that respect the infinite value of every human life. It will require Palestinians to forcefully oppose attacks on Jewish civilians, and Jews to support Palestinians when they resist oppression in humane ways - even though Palestinians and Jews who take such steps will risk making themselves pariahs among their own people. It will require new forms of political community, in Israel-Palestine and around the world, built around a democratic vision powerful enough to transcend tribal divides. The effort may fail. It has failed before. The alternative is to descend, flags waving, into hell.

As Jewish Israelis bury their dead and recite psalms for their captured, few want to hear at this moment that millions of Palestinians lack basic human rights. Neither do many Jews abroad. I understand; this attack has awakened the deepest traumas of our badly scarred people. But the truth remains: The denial of Palestinian freedom sits at the heart of this conflict, which began long before Hamas's creation in the late 1980s.

Most of Gaza's residents aren't from Gaza. They're the descendants of refugees who were expelled, or fled in fear, during Israel's war of independence in 1948. They live in what Human Rights Watch has called an "open-air prison," penned in by an Israeli state that - with help from Egypt - rations everything that goes in and out, from tomatoes to the travel documents children need to get lifesaving medical care. From this overcrowded cage, which the United Nations in 2017 declared "unlivable" for many residents in part because it lacks electricity and clean water, many Palestinians in Gaza can see the land that their parents and grandparents called home, though most may never set foot in it.

Palestinians in the West Bank are only slightly better off. For more than half a century, they have lived without due process, free movement, citizenship or the ability to vote for the government that controls their lives. Defenseless against an Israeli government that includes ministers openly committed to ethnic cleansing, many are being driven from their homes in what Palestinians compare to the mass expulsions of 1948. Americans and Israeli Jews have the luxury of ignoring these harsh realities. Palestinians do not. Indeed, the commander of Hamas's military wing cited attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank in justifying its barbarism last weekend.

Just as Black South Africans resisted apartheid, Palestinians resist a system that has earned the same designation from the world's leading human rights organizations and Israel's own. After last weekend, some critics may claim Palestinians are incapable of resisting in ethical ways. But that's not true. In 1936, during the British mandate, Palestinians began what some consider the longest anticolonial general strike in history. In 1976, on what became known as Land Day, thousands of Palestinian citizens demonstrated against the Israeli government's seizure of Palestinian property in Israel's north. The first intifada against Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which lasted from roughly 1987 to 1993, consisted primarily of nonviolent boycotts of Israeli goods and a refusal to pay Israeli taxes. While some Palestinians threw stones and Molotov cocktails, armed attacks were rare, even in the face of an Israeli crackdown that took more than 1,000 Palestinian lives. In 2005, 173 Palestinian civil society organizations asked "people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era."

But in the United States, Palestinians received little credit for trying to follow Black South Africans' largely nonviolent path. Instead, the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement's call for full equality, including the right of Palestinian refugees to return home, was widely deemed antisemitic because it conflicts with the idea of a state that favors Jews.

It is true that these nonviolent efforts sit uncomfortably alongside an ugly history of civilian massacres: the murder of 67 Jews in Hebron in 1929 by local Palestinians after Haj Amin al-Husseini, the grand mufti of Jerusalem, claimed Jews were about to seize Al Aqsa Mosque; the airplane hijackings of the late 1960s and 1970s carried out

primarily by the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Yasir Arafat's nationalist Fatah faction; the 1972 assassination of Israeli athletes in Munich carried out by the Palestinian organization Black September; and the suicide bombings of the 1990s and 2000s conducted by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Fatah's Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, whose victims included a friend of mine in rabbinical school who I dreamed might one day officiate my wedding.

And yet it is essential to remember that some Palestinians courageously condemned this inhuman violence. In 1979, Edward Said, the famed literary critic, declared himself "horrificed at the hijacking of planes, the suicidal missions, the assassinations, the bombing of schools and hotels." Rashid Khalidi, a Palestinian American historian, called the suicide bombings of the second intifada "a war crime." After Hamas's attack last weekend, a member of the Israeli parliament, Ayman Odeh, among the most prominent leaders of Israel's Palestinian citizens, declared, "It is absolutely forbidden to accept any attacks on the innocent."

Tragically, this vision of ethical resistance is being repudiated by some pro-Palestinian activists in the United States. In a statement last week, National Students for Justice in Palestine, which is affiliated with more than 250 Palestinian solidarity groups in North America, called Hamas's attack "a historic win for the Palestinian resistance" that proves that "total return and liberation to Palestine is near" and added, "from Rhodesia to South Africa to Algeria, no settler colony can hold out forever." One of its posters featured a paraglider that some Hamas fighters used to enter Israel.

The reference to Algeria reveals the delusion underlying this celebration of abduction and murder. After eight years of hideous war, Algeria's settlers returned to France. But there will be no Algerian solution in Israel-Palestine. Israel is too militarily powerful to be conquered. More fundamentally, Israeli Jews have no home country to which to return. They are already home.

Mr. Said understood this. "The Israeli Jew is there in the Middle East," he advised Palestinians in 1974, "and we cannot, I might even say that we must not, pretend that he will not be there tomorrow, after the struggle is over." The Jewish "attachment to the land," he added, "is something we must face." Because Mr. Said saw Israeli Jews as something other than mere colonizers, he understood the futility - as well as the immorality - of trying to terrorize them into flight.

The failure of Hamas and its American defenders to recognize that will make it much harder for Jews and Palestinians to resist together in ethical ways. Before last Saturday, it was possible, with some imagination, to envision a joint Palestinian-Jewish struggle for the mutual liberation of both peoples. There were glimmers in the protest movement against Benjamin Netanyahu's judicial overhaul, through which more and more Israeli Jews grasped a connection between the denial of rights to Palestinians and the assault on their own. And there were signs in the United States, where almost 40 percent of American Jews under the age of 40 told the Jewish Electoral Institute in 2021 that they considered Israel an apartheid state. More Jews in the United States, and even Israel, were beginning to see Palestinian liberation as a form of Jewish liberation as well.

That potential alliance has now been gravely damaged. There are many Jews willing to join Palestinians in a movement to end apartheid, even if doing so alienates us from our communities, and in some cases, our families. But we will not lock arms with people who cheer the kidnapping or murder of a Jewish child.

The struggle to persuade Palestinian activists to repudiate Hamas's crimes, affirm a vision of mutual coexistence and continue the spirit of Mr. Said and the A.N.C. will be waged inside the Palestinian camp. The role of non-Palestinians is different: to help create the conditions that allow ethical resistance to succeed.

Palestinians are not fundamentally different from other people facing oppression: When moral resistance doesn't work, they try something else. In 1972, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, which was modeled on the civil rights movement in the United States, organized a march to oppose imprisonment without trial. Although some organizations, most notably the Provisional Irish Republican Army, had already embraced armed resistance, they grew stronger after British soldiers shot 26 unarmed civilians in what became known as Bloody Sunday. By the early 1980s, the Irish Republican Army had even detonated a bomb outside Harrods, the department store in

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London. As Kirssa Cline Ryckman, a political scientist, observed in a 2019 paper on why certain movements turn violent, a lack of progress in peaceful protest "can encourage the use of violence by convincing demonstrators that nonviolence will fail to achieve meaningful concessions."

Israel, with America's help, has done exactly that. It has repeatedly undermined Palestinians who sought to end Israel's occupation through negotiations or nonviolent pressure. As part of the 1993 Oslo Accords, the Palestine Liberation Organization renounced violence and began working with Israel - albeit imperfectly - to prevent attacks on Israelis, something that revolutionary groups like the A.N.C. and the Irish Republican Army never did while their people remained under oppression. At first, as Khalil Shikaki, a Palestinian political scientist, has detailed, Palestinians supported cooperation with Israel because they thought it would deliver them a state. In early 1996, Palestinian support for the Oslo process reached 80 percent while support for violence against Israelis dropped to 20 percent.

The 1996 election of Benjamin Netanyahu, and the failure of Israel and its American patron to stop settlement growth, however, curdled Palestinian sentiment. Many Jewish Israelis believe that Ehud Barak, who succeeded Mr. Netanyahu, offered Palestinians a generous deal in 2000. Most Palestinians, however, saw Mr. Barak's offer as falling far short of a fully sovereign state along the 1967 lines. And their disillusionment with a peace process that allowed Israel to entrench its hold over the territory on which they hoped to build their new country ushered in the violence of the second intifada. In Mr. Shikaki's words, "The loss of confidence in the ability of the peace process to deliver a permanent agreement on acceptable terms had a dramatic impact on the level of Palestinian support for violence against Israelis." As Palestinians abandoned hope, Hamas gained power.

After the brutal years of the second intifada, in which Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups repeatedly targeted Israeli civilians, President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority and Salam Fayyad, his prime minister from 2007 to 2013, worked to restore security cooperation and prevent anti-Israeli violence once again. Yet again, the strategy failed. The same Israeli leaders who applauded Mr. Fayyad undermined him in back rooms by funding the settlement growth that convinced Palestinians that security cooperation was bringing them only deepening occupation. Mr. Fayyad, in an interview with The Times's Roger Cohen before he left office in 2013, admitted that because the "occupation regime is more entrenched," Palestinians "question whether the P.A. can deliver. Meanwhile, Hamas gains recognition and is strengthened."

As Palestinians lost faith that cooperation with Israel could end the occupation, many appealed to the world to hold Israel accountable for its violation of their rights. In response, both Democratic and Republican presidents have worked diligently to ensure that these nonviolent efforts fail. Since 1997, the United States has vetoed more than a dozen United Nations Security Council resolutions criticizing Israel for its actions in the West Bank and Gaza. This February, even as Israel's far-right government was beginning a huge settlement expansion, the Biden administration reportedly wielded a veto threat to drastically dilute a Security Council resolution that would have condemned settlement growth.

Washington's response to the International Criminal Court's efforts to investigate potential Israeli war crimes is equally hostile. Despite lifting sanctions that the Trump administration imposed on I.C.C. officials investigating the United States's conduct in Afghanistan, the Biden team remains adamantly opposed to any I.C.C. investigation into Israel's actions.

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, or B.D.S., which was founded in 2005 as a nonviolent alternative to the murderous second intifada and which speaks in the language of human rights and international law, has been similarly stymied, including by many of the same American politicians who celebrated the movement to boycott, divest from and sanction South Africa. Joe Biden, who is proud of his role in passing sanctions against South Africa, has condemned the B.D.S. movement, saying it "too often veers into antisemitism." About 35 states - some of which once divested state funds from companies doing business in apartheid South Africa - have passed laws or issued executive orders punishing companies that boycott Israel. In many cases, those punishments apply even to businesses that boycott only Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Palestinians have noticed. In the words of Dana El Kurd, a Palestinian American political scientist, "Palestinians have lost faith in the efficacy of nonviolent protest as well as the possible role of the international community." Mohammed Deif, the commander of Hamas's military wing, cited this disillusionment during last Saturday's attack. "In light of the orgy of occupation and its denial of international laws and resolutions, and in light of American and Western support and international silence," he declared, "we've decided to put an end to all this."

Hamas - and no one else - bears the blame for its sadistic violence. But it can carry out such violence more easily, and with less backlash from ordinary Palestinians, because even many Palestinians who loathe the organization have lost hope that moral strategies can succeed. By treating Israel radically differently from how the United States treated South Africa in the 1980s, American politicians have made it harder for Palestinians to follow the A.N.C.'s ethical path. The Americans who claim to hate Hamas the most have empowered it again and again.

Israelis have just witnessed the greatest one-day loss of Jewish life since the Holocaust. For Palestinians, especially in Gaza, where Israel has now ordered more than one million people in the north to leave their homes, the days to come are likely to bring dislocation and death on a scale that should haunt the conscience of the world. Never in my lifetime have the prospects for justice and peace looked more remote. Yet the work of moral rebuilding must begin. In Israel-Palestine and around the world, pockets of Palestinians and Jews, aided by people of conscience of all backgrounds, must slowly construct networks of trust based on the simple principle that the lives of both Palestinians and Jews are precious and inextricably intertwined.

Israel desperately needs a genuinely Jewish and Palestinian political party, not because it can win power but because it can model a politics based on common liberal democratic values, not tribe. American Jews who rightly hate Hamas but know, in their bones, that Israel's treatment of Palestinians is profoundly wrong must ask themselves a painful question: What nonviolent forms of Palestinian resistance to oppression will I support? More Palestinians and their supporters must express revulsion at the murder of innocent Israeli Jews and affirm that Palestinian liberation means living equally alongside them in safety and freedom.

From those reckonings, small, beloved communities can be born, and grow. And perhaps one day, when it finally becomes hideously clear that Hamas cannot free Palestinians by murdering children and Israel cannot subdue Gaza, even by razing it to the ground, those communities may become the germ of a mass movement for freedom that astonishes the world, as Black and white South Africans did decades ago. I'm confident I won't live to see it. No gambler would stake a bet on it happening at all. But what's the alternative, for those of us whose lives and histories are bound up with that small, ghastly, sacred place?

Like many others who care about the lives of both Palestinians and Jews, I have felt in recent days the greatest despair I have ever known. On Wednesday, a Palestinian friend sent me a note of consolation. She ended it with the words "only together." Maybe that can be our motto.

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White House Backs First Amendment Protections for Student Protesters

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Body

Citing the First Amendment, the White House Tuesday rejected calls to pull the visas of students who express support for Hamas while Republicans rolled their eyes at what they see as suspicious and sudden conversion to free speech absolutism.

This includes Sen. Eric Schmitt, who sued the Biden administration as Missouri attorney general on First Amendment grounds for their policing of social media posts during the pandemic. The idea that President Biden was a "staunch defender" of free speech, he said was "laughable."

"Biden and his administration have engaged in the largest censorship enterprise in American history," Schmitt told RealClearPolitics. "Don't believe for a second this administration has found religion on free speech as Biden continues to battle in court to censor Americans."

The case in question: *Biden v. Missouri*.

And as that state's attorney general, Schmitt argued that the administration had pressured tech companies to delete controversial social media posts concerning the origins of COVID-19, administration pandemic policies, and the Hunter Biden laptop.

The Supreme Court temporarily blocked an order by the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans last week prohibiting the executive branch from contacting social media companies about potential misinformation online. The lower court previously ruled this summer that the administration had cultivated a vast "federal censorship enterprise" and likely violated the First Amendment.

The current controversy: whether or not First Amendment protections apply to non-citizens who express support for a terrorist organization, such as Hamas. It was Sen. Marco Rubio who first argued that, in this case, those protections do not apply.

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In a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken earlier this month, the ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee called on the administration "to revoke the visas of those who have endorsed or espoused Hamas' terrorist activity."

Across the country, demonstrators protested the Israeli military response to the Oct. 7 Hamas terror attack in Israel that killed 1,400 people, including 39 American citizens. While most condemned violence and called for a cease-fire, other demonstrators went a step further.

The Harvard Palestine Solidarity Groups, for instance, released a statement signed by about 30 student organizations that read, "We, the undersigned student organizations, hold the Israeli regime entirely responsible for all unfolding violence."

Protestors gathered on the national mall last week with signs that read "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free." The slogan calls for a Palestinian state from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, a development that Jewish leaders say would necessarily mean erasing Israel itself and its people. Elsewhere in Minneapolis over the weekend, protestors shut down a city street and two men were spotted hoisting the green and white flag of Hamas.

The White House quickly drew a red line after the terror attack and denounced any effort to equate the Hamas attack with previous actions taken by Israel. "Our condemnation belongs squarely with terrorists who have brutally murdered, raped, and kidnapped hundreds of Israelis," Biden spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre told RCP. "There can be no equivocation about that. There are not two sides here."

When asked about the proposal advanced by Rubio, however, the president's national security spokesman, John Kirby, pointed to protections in the U.S. Constitution.

"I would just tell you, you don't have to agree with every sentiment expressed in a free country like this to stand by the First Amendment and the idea of peaceful protest," Kirby told RCP. "I'll leave it at that."

Rubio found that answer wanting. "This is a ridiculous excuse," he replied, telling RCP that there is "no First Amendment right to a visa and all we ask is they apply current law." According to the senator, "The First Amendment has nothing to do with it."

He was also quick to allege a double standard. "This is the same administration that worked with social media companies to censor American citizens," Rubio continued. "They provide First Amendment protections more rigorously to foreigners than Americans."

The proposal has quickly become GOP orthodoxy, especially among candidates now seeking the Republican presidential nomination.

"As president, if you're on a student visa and you're a foreigner and you're out there celebrating terrorism, I'm canceling your visa and I'm sending you home," said Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis at a campaign stop last week, expressing a sentiment that former President Trump would later echo.

South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott expressed a similar idea, arguing that "foreign national students on visas who are protesting against our ally Israel should be sent back to their country."

While Republicans argue that the issue is simple, and Rubio cites existing federal law that bars admission into the U.S. an alien who "endorses or espouses terrorist activity or supports a terrorist organization," separating pro-Palestine from pro-Hamas rhetoric could be challenging and would almost certainly invite legal challenges.

The Supreme Court "has at least twice said that the First Amendment applies to non-citizens in the country," according to Michael Kagan, a law professor at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and director of the UNLV Immigration Clinic.

Writing in a 2015 California Law Review article, Kagan added, however, that "no Supreme Court case has squarely reached the question of whether free speech rights apply to immigrants that entered unlawfully." As it applies

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specifically to foreign students, the scholar continued, the federal government had "a lot more discretion" given that a student visa "could be canceled," noting also that the Supreme Court has previously found that the government's "vast plenary power to control entrance into the United States overcame any First Amendment objections."

As academics debate that thorny constitutional question and Republicans allege hypocrisy on the part of an administration that was willing to flag certain speech as disinformation, public opinion, particularly among young people, is evolving on the larger issue.

A recent Harvard-Harris poll found that 51% of 18- to 24-year-olds believe the Hamas terror attacks "can be justified by the grievance of Palestinians."

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In this conflict, context is everything

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Body

The truth of the matter is that Western Governments bear the primary responsibility for both the carnage in Israel and the genocide in Gaza.

A historical appraisal of events over the last 100 years shows western governments, responsible for the monstrous inhumanities currently affecting Palestinians and Israelis. Without such an appraisal, it is easy and dangerous to rush to judgement on the basis of stereotypes - Israel the victim, Palestinians the terrorists. In this conflict, context is everything. The following precis aims to educate. Personal reactions should also be acknowledged, in my case a perspective which says, if we are not outraged by injustice, we lose touch with our own humanity.

What prompted public interest in the longstanding conflict?

The October 7 Hamas attack on Israel, Israeli bombing and the life destroying siege of Gaza have resulted in horrendous loss of life. One thousand four hundred Israelis were slaughtered in the Hamas attack, over 200 taken hostage. By October 28, 7,703 Gazans had been killed by Israeli bombing. The Israeli Defence Minister's threats to 'eliminate Gaza' sound like incitement to commit genocide. On the West Bank, murder is the order of the day. Israeli soldiers and settlers have killed 70 Palestinians, injured 1,300, carried out 77 attacks on health care facilities.

What contributed to these events?

These fatalities were preceded by 75 years of ethnic cleansing, persecution, retribution, loss of life, fear and unimaginable misery. Perhaps unaware of the details of those 75 years, Australian citizens may be motivated to take ill-informed partisan stands, hence the need to reflect on the massive loss of life of Palestinian children over decades. No western government became outraged by such killings. Awareness of such indifference and inhumanities might affect reactions to the awful slaughter of Israelis, women and children, on October 7.

What are the sources of conflict?

In 1917 the British Balfour Declaration promised a homeland for Jews but not at the expense of the Indigenous people of Palestine. Yet in published correspondence, Balfour discounted the rights and wishes of Palestinians. In 1947, UN Resolution 181 called for the partition of Palestine into 56 percent for a Jewish state which Palestinians

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rejected on grounds that they owned 94 percent of historic Palestine and comprised about 70 percent of the population. In 1948, the Israeli War of Independence resulted in 'The Nakba': 15,000 Palestinians were killed, 750,000 driven from their homes, and within two years 500 Palestinian villages towns and cities were completely destroyed.

Wars and the creation of a Jewish State

Between 1948 and 2006, six wars were fought between Israel and Arab states. The significant 1967 Yom Kippur war left Israel in control of territory four times its previous size. Military occupation of Palestinian lands began. The Israeli Knesset built a Jewish only state: the 1950 Law of Return established that Jews who were not born in Israel could return 'to the land of their birth.' By contrast, Palestinians who retained keys to their homes and papers confirming ownership are not allowed to return. August 2018 the Jewish Nation State Law said, 'the actualisation of the right of national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people' despite 20 percent of Israeli citizens being Palestinian. These policies are supported by billions of dollars of arms from the US which wants to maintain military influence in the Middle East.

The Palestinian resistance

In the first Intifada, for six years from 1987, Palestinians protested military occupation which included beatings, shootings, killings, house demolitions, extended imprisonments & detention without trial. Israel deployed 80,000 troops. An estimated 1,200 Palestinians and 60 Israeli soldiers were killed.

The Second Intifada uprising, from September 2000, sparked by Ariel Sharon's visit to Temple Mount, was much more violent: 6,371 Palestinians killed including 1,317 children. Following suicide attacks by Hamas, Islamic Jihad & Fatah, 1,083 Israelis were killed of whom 741 were civilians. From March 2018, Gazans' peaceful protest 'The Great March of Return,' included calls to lift the blockade of Gaza. Data from the UN Commission of Inquiry and the Israeli Yesh Din Association of Civil Rights records that during these marches, 214 Palestinians have been killed including 46 children, mostly from live ammunition. Over 36,000 Palestinians including 8,800 children were injured. These figures say nothing of the trauma which follows life shattering events. One example illustrates cruelty leading to human tragedy. Razan a-Najjar, a 21 year-old para medic, visible in a medical personnel white coat was shot dead by an Israeli sniper as she made her way to tend wounded by the Gaza fence.

The loss of life in invasions of Gaza prior to 2023

Invasions of Gaza have been called wars, but 'war' presupposes relatively equal resources between combatants. It does not mean a slaughter of one side by the massive military strength of another. Casualties from only a couple of Israeli operations show deaths and the destruction of crucial resources. In the 2008/9 Operation Cast Lead, 1,400 Palestinians were killed, incl. 400 children. Three Israeli civilians & 10 Israeli soldiers were killed. In the 2014 Operation Protective Edge 2,251 Palestinians were killed including 551 children. Six Israeli civilians and 67 Israeli soldiers were killed. Destruction in these operations included the loss of thousands of Gazan homes, schools, health care facilities, sewage, power and water supply facilities, at which point the UN predicted that Gaza would be uninhabitable by 2020.

Defining and demystifying Hamas

The destruction of Palestine and Palestinians has been underway for 75 years. The Islamist fundamentalist government of Gaza, Hamas, came to power following the election of 2006, their influence bolstered by the hypocrisy of the US and Israel supported by compliant western governments. In 2006, the United States insisted that democracy was the world's panacea, hence their support for a scrupulously fair Palestinian election for which they invested financial resources to ensure the election of the secular Fatah not the religious Hamas. Hamas won the election with 76 seats and Fatah 43. The West supported democracy but not if it resulted in outcomes not to their liking. Hamas was boycotted. Collective punishment via the siege of Gaza began. Former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair now admits that he and other world leaders were wrong to yield to Israeli pressure to impose an immediate boycott of Hamas. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has been supporting the rule of Hamas and

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weakening the Palestinian Authority. He has funded Hamas apparently in order to hurt Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas and prevent the division of Israel into two states.

You reap what you sow?

Peace process and illegal settlers

A stereotype view might claim that Israel's olive branches for peace have been rejected by Palestinian authorities. A more accurate evaluation shows that in talks about peace, the Palestinians were badly represented, the Israelis not really interested and biased Americans were never honest brokers. The Oslo Accords signed by Israel and the PLO in Washington in 1993 gave hope. The PLO recognised the state of Israel which allowed Palestinians a limited form of self-governance but the benefits of Oslo were short lived. After 1993, Palestinian residents of the West Bank identified 500 more military checkpoints. The extremist Israeli settlement movement grew despite rules of international law forbidding the population of invaded lands. In December 2016, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2334: 'Israeli settlements have no legal validity and constitute flagrant violation of international law.' Israel took no notice. The international community, largely the US and EU, supported by successive Australian governments, never bothered to hold Israel to account. Israeli forces have acted with impunity since 1948. Since that time, Palestinian lands have been occupied by 750,000 Israeli settlers protected by Israeli police and army. When there are no consequences, the crimes of perpetrators continue.

Defining apartheid, holding Western governments' accountable

In 2021, distinguished international organisations, the Israeli Human Rights Centre B'tselem, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, ruled Israel to be an apartheid state, namely a regime that uses laws, practices and organised violence to cement the supremacy of one group over another. Some may allege that this assessment was in some way influenced by 'anti-Semitism'. But there is no ethnic prejudice involved in criticising the policies of a government.

A more important conclusion emerges from analysis of the events of the past 100 years, including the Hamas carnage of October 7 and the unimaginable destruction of Gaza and its people by Israeli forces. These tragedies are the responsibility of western governments, in particular the US, which on 43 occasions has vetoed Security Council resolutions condemning Israel, the latest on October 22 when the US, in deference to Israel's desire to keep bombing Gaza vetoed a resolution calling for a ceasefire. The US and its allies have mouthed respect for international law but ignored such principles if they affected Palestinians' Geneva based rights to self-determination.

Instead, might was right. Terrible consequences followed.

You reap what you sow.

Towards a consensus for a common humanity?

All mainstream media have been fascinated by violence, by views that Palestinian extremism is entirely to blame for all inhumane events. From 1917, Western politicians and their media acolytes have fed the fatalism that Jews, Muslims, Christians, believers and non-believers will never agree.

Yet protesters world-wide show the potential for co-existence. They remind that violence begets violence, that a common humanity is at stake.

In New York on Saturday Oct 21, American Jews pleaded, 'End the Zionist government of Israel, stop the genocide in Gaza, respect the sovereignty of the Palestinian people, end the occupation, no more killing and stealing in our name.'

On the same day, in cities around the world, including 15,000 demonstrators in Sydney, and similar numbers in other cities, the same cries: 'End the Occupation, Free, Free Palestine.'

In this conflict, context is everything

We live in hope.

Stuart Rees AM is Professor Emeritus at the University of Sydney & recipient of the Jerusalem (Al Quds) Peace Prize.

The article was first published at PEARLS & IRRITATIONS,

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Brooklyn Bridge is shut down Hundreds of pro-Palestinian protesters trek into Manhattan

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Byline: Rebecca White and Emma Seiwel New York Daily News

Highlight: Pro-Palestinian marchers force the shutdown of the Brooklyn Bridge on Saturday, the latest in a series of demonstrations in the city following attack on Israel by Hamas and Israel's response. rebecca white for nydn

Body

The Brooklyn Bridge was shut down Saturday evening as hundreds of pro-Palestinian protesters trekked across its westbound lanes into Manhattan.

Police also blocked cars from using the eastbound lanes during the march.

During Friday night rush hour, Grand Central Terminal was partially shut down for several hours as hundreds of pro-Palestinian activists sat down in the train hall.

On Saturday, protesters met in front of the Brooklyn Museum on Eastern Parkway about 3 p.m., marched to the Barclays Center and went to the bridge from there.

As they reached the Brooklyn Bridge just before 5 p.m. cops were seen handcuffing one person and placing the individual in the back seat of a police car.

Protesters unsuccessfully attempted to block the vehicle from driving off while shouting, "Shame!"

"I'm here because we can't stand in the face of genocide and not do anything," said Hala Boustany, 44, of Brooklyn. "We need to take a stand for the policies to change. People are dying every single moment and nothing is happening while we are going on with our regular lives."

On Friday night, cops took 335 protesters into custody, and they were all released with Criminal Court summonses for disorderly conduct and criminal trespass, according to police.

The weekend demonstrations were the latest in a series of protests since Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, prompting a huge military response.

On Oct. 13, a protest over Israel's plans to invade Gaza drew hundreds of people to the area near Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn, resulting in 57 arrests, according to cops. That day in Midtown, a mostly peaceful protest of about 2,500 gathered to support the Palestinian cause. Police said three people were arrested on disorderly conduct charges there.

Brooklyn Bridge is shut down Hundreds of pro-Palestinian protesters trek into Manhattan

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