



Vengeful Pathologies

Adam Shatz on the war in Gaza

ON 16 OCTOBER, Sabrina Tavernise, the host of the *New York Times* podcast *The Daily*, spoke to two Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. ‘So, Abdallah,’ Tavernise said to Abdallah Hasaneen, a resident of Rafah, near the Egyptian border, who was only able to get a signal from his balcony, ‘we’ve been talking about all of the air strikes that have been happening since last Saturday, and of course the thing that happened last Saturday as well was this very deadly attack by Hamas on Israel. How do you understand that attack? What did you think of that?’

‘You cannot just put people into prison, deprive them of their fundamental rights, and then see nothing in response,’ Hasaneen replied. ‘You cannot dehumanise people and expect nothing ... I am not Hamas, and I was never a big fan of Hamas ... But what’s happening here is not about Hamas at all.’

Tavernise (sheepishly): ‘What’s it about?’

Hasaneen: ‘It’s about ethnically cleansing Palestinian people, it’s about 2.3 million Palestinian people. That’s why Israel, the first thing that it did was cutting off water and cutting off electricity and cutting off food. So this is not, never about Hamas. It’s about our mistake to be born Palestinians.’

Tavernise’s second guest was a woman called Wafa Elsaka who recently returned to Gaza after working as a teacher in Florida for 35 years. That weekend, Elsaka had fled from her family’s home, after Israel ordered the 1.1 million residents of northern Gaza to leave their homes and head south, warning of an impending ground invasion. Dozens of Palestinians were killed under bombardment while travelling along routes Israel told them would be safe. ‘We lived through 1948, and all we’re asking is to have peace to raise our kids,’ Elsaka said. ‘Why are we repeating history again? What do they want? They want Gaza? What are

they going to do with us? What are they going to do with the people? I want these questions answered so we know. They want to throw us to the sea? Go ahead, do it, don't keep us in pain! Just do it ... Before, I used to say that Gaza is an open-air prison. Now I say Gaza is an open grave ... You think people here are alive? They are zombies.' When Tavernise spoke to Hasaneen again the next day, he said that he and his entire family were huddling in the same room, so that they could at least die together.

The situation in Gaza has reached unspeakable extremes in recent days, but it is not new. In his 1956 story 'Letter from Gaza', Ghassan Kanafani describes it as 'more cramped than the mind of a sleeper in the throes of a fearful nightmare, with its narrow streets that had their peculiar smell, the smell of defeat and poverty'. The story's protagonist, a teacher who has worked for years in Kuwait, has returned home after an Israeli bombing. As his niece comes to embrace him, he sees that her leg has been amputated: she was wounded while trying to shield her siblings from the bombs.

In the words of Amira Hass, an Israeli journalist who spent many years reporting from Gaza, 'Gaza embodies the central contradiction of the state of Israel – democracy for some, dispossession for others; it is our exposed nerve.' Israelis don't say 'go to hell', they say 'go to Gaza.' The occupation authorities have always treated it as a frontier land, more like southern Lebanon than the West Bank, where different, and much harsher, rules apply. After the conquest of Gaza in 1967, Ariel Sharon, then the general responsible for Israel's southern command, oversaw the execution without trial of dozens of Palestinians suspected of involvement in resistance (it's unclear how many died), and the demolition of thousands of homes: this was called 'pacification'. In 2005, Sharon presided over 'disengagement': Israel withdrew eight thousand settlers from Gaza, but it remained essentially under Israeli control, and since Hamas was elected in 2006 it has been under blockade, which the Egyptian government helps enforce. 'Why don't we abandon this Gaza and flee?' Kanafani's narrator asked in 1956. Today, such musings would be a fantasy. The people of Gaza – it's not accurate to call them Gazans, since two-thirds of them are the children and grandchildren of refugees from other parts of Palestine – are effectively captives in a territory that has been amputated from the rest of their homeland. They could leave Gaza only if the Israelis ordered them to take up residence in a 'humanitarian corridor' in the Sinai, if Egypt were to submit to American pressure and open up the border.

The motives behind Al-Aqsa Flood, as Hamas called its offensive, were hardly mysterious: to reassert the primacy of the Palestinian struggle at a time when it seemed to be falling off the agenda of the international community; to secure the release of political prisoners; to scuttle an Israeli-Saudi rapprochement; to further humiliate the impotent Palestinian Authority; to protest against the wave of settler violence in the West Bank, as well as the provocative visits of religious Jews and Israeli officials to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem; and, not least, to send a message to the Israelis that they are not invincible, that there is a price to pay for maintaining the status quo in Gaza. It achieved a grisly success: for the first

time since 1948, it was Palestinian fighters, not Israeli soldiers, who occupied towns at the border and terrorised their inhabitants. Never has Israel looked less like a sanctuary for the Jewish people. As Mahmoud Muna, the owner of a bookshop in Jerusalem, said, the impact of Hamas's attack was 'like shrinking the whole last hundred years into a week'. Yet this shattering of the status quo, this blow for a kind of morbid equality with Israel's formidable war machine, has exacted a huge price.

The fighters of Hamas and Islamic Jihad – brigades of roughly 1500 commandos – killed more than a thousand civilians, including women, children and babies. It remains unclear why Hamas wasn't satisfied after achieving its initial objectives. The first phase of Al-Aqsa Flood was classic – and legitimate – guerrilla warfare against an occupying power: fighters broke through the Gaza border and fence, and attacked military outposts. The early images of this assault, along with reports that fighters from Gaza had moved into twenty Israeli towns, gave rise to understandable euphoria among Palestinians; so did the killing of hundreds of Israeli soldiers, and the taking of as many as 250 hostages. In the West, few remember that when Palestinians from Gaza protested at the border in 2018-19 during the Great March of Return, Israeli forces killed 223 demonstrators. But Palestinians do, and the killing of unarmed demonstrators has only added to the allure of armed struggle.

The second phase, however, was very different. Joined by residents of Gaza, many of them leaving for the first time in their lives, Hamas's fighters went on a killing spree. They turned the Tribe of Nova rave into a blood-drenched bacchanalia, another Bataclan. They hunted down families in their homes in kibbutzes. They executed not only Jews but Bedouins and immigrant workers. (Several of the victims were Jews who were well known for their solidarity work with Palestinians, notably Vivian Silver, an Israeli-Canadian who is now a hostage in Gaza.) As Vincent Lemire noted in *Le Monde*, it takes time to kill 'civilians hidden in garages and parking lots or sheltering in safe rooms'. The diligence and patience of Hamas's fighters were chilling.

Nothing in the history of Palestinian armed resistance to Israel approaches the scale of this massacre – not the 1972 Munich Olympics attack by Black September, not the Maalot massacre by the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine in 1974. More Israelis died on 7 October than in the five years of the Second Intifada. How to explain this carnival of killing? The rage fuelled by the intensification of Israeli repression is surely one reason. Over the last year, more than two hundred Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli army and settlers; many of them were minors. But this rage has much deeper roots than the policies of Netanyahu's right-wing government. What happened on 7 October was not an explosion; it was a methodical act of killing, and the systematic murder of people in their homes was a bitter mimicry of the 1982 massacre by Israeli-backed Phalangists in Sabra and Shatila in Lebanon. The calculated posting of videos of the killings on the social media accounts of the victims suggests that revenge was among the motives of Hamas's commanders: Mohammed Deif, the head of Hamas's military wing, lost his wife and two children in an airstrike in 2014. One is reminded of Frantz Fanon's observation that 'the

colonised person is a persecuted person who constantly dreams of becoming the persecutor.' On 7 October, this dream was realised for those who crossed over into southern Israel: finally, the Israelis would feel the helplessness and terror they had known all their lives. The spectacle of Palestinian jubilation – and the later denials that the killing of civilians had occurred – was troubling but hardly surprising. In colonial wars, Fanon writes, 'good is quite simply what hurts them most.'

What hurt the Israelis nearly as much as the attack itself was the fact that no one had seen it coming. The Israeli government had been given a general warning by the Egyptians that Gaza was restive. But Netanyahu and his associates believed they had successfully contained Hamas. When the Israelis recently moved a significant number of soldiers from the Gazan border to the West Bank, where they were tasked with protecting settlers carrying out pogroms in Huwara and other Palestinian towns, they told themselves not to worry: they had the world's finest systems of surveillance and extensive networks of informers in Gaza. Iran was the real threat, not the Palestinians, who lacked the capability – and the competence – to mount an attack of any significance. It was this arrogance and racist contempt, bred by years of occupation and apartheid rule, that caused the 'intelligence failure' of 7 October.

Many analogies have been proposed for Al-Aqsa Flood: the Tet Offensive, Pearl Harbor, Egypt's attack in October 1973, which started the Yom Kippur War, and, of course, 9/11. But the most suggestive analogy is a pivotal, and largely forgotten, episode in the Algerian War of Independence: the Philippeville uprising of August 1955. Encircled by the French army, fearful of losing ground to reformist Muslim politicians who favoured a negotiated settlement, the FLN launched a gruesome attack in and around the harbour town of Philippeville. Peasants armed with grenades, knives, clubs, axes and pitchforks killed – and in many cases disembowelled – 123 people, mostly Europeans but also a number of Muslims. To the French, the violence seemed unprovoked, but the perpetrators believed they were avenging the killing of tens of thousands of Muslims by the French army, assisted by settler militias, after the independence riots of 1945. In response to Philippeville, France's liberal governor-general, Jacques Soustelle, whom the European community considered an untrustworthy 'Arab lover', carried out a campaign of repression in which more than ten thousand Algerians were killed. By over-reacting, Soustelle fell into the FLN's trap: the army's brutality drove Algerians into the arms of the rebels, just as Israel's ferocious response is likely to strengthen Hamas at least temporarily, even among Palestinians in Gaza who resent its authoritarian rule. Soustelle himself admitted that he had helped dig 'a moat through which flowed a river of blood'.

A SIMILAR moat is being dug in Gaza today. Determined to overcome its humiliation by Hamas, the IDF has been no different from – and no more intelligent than – the French in Algeria, the British in Kenya, or the Americans after 9/11. Israel's disregard for Palestinian life has never been more callous or more flagrant, and it's being fuelled by a discourse for which the adjective 'genocidal' no longer seems like hyperbole. In just the first six days of air strikes, Israel dropped more than six thousand bombs, and more than twice as many civilians have already died under bombardment as were killed on 7 October. These atrocities are not excesses or 'collateral damage': they occur by design. As Israel's defence minister, Yoav Gallant, puts it, 'we are fighting human animals and we will act accordingly.' (Fanon: 'when the colonist speaks of the colonised he uses zoological terms' and 'refers constantly to the bestiary'.) Since Hamas's attack, the exterminationist rhetoric of the Israeli far right has reached a fever pitch and spread to the mainstream. 'Zero Gazans', runs one Israeli slogan. A member of Likud, Netanyahu's party, declared that Israel's goal should be 'a Nakba that will overshadow the Nakba of 1948'. 'Are you seriously asking me about Palestinian civilians?' the former Israeli prime minister Naftali Bennett said to a reporter on Sky News. 'What is wrong with you? We're fighting Nazis.'

The 'Nazification' of Israel's opponents is an old strategy, underwriting its wars as well as its expansionist policies. Menachem Begin said he was fighting Nazis during the 1982 war against the PLO in Lebanon. In a 2015 speech, Netanyahu suggested that the Nazis might have deported, rather than exterminated, the Jews of Europe if Haj Amin al-Husseini, the mufti of Jerusalem, hadn't placed the Final Solution in Hitler's head. In their brazen instrumentalisation of the Holocaust and vilification of Palestinians as Nazis worse than the Nazis themselves, Israeli leaders 'mock the real meaning of the Jewish tragedy', as Isaac Deutscher observed after the 1967 War. What is more, these analogies help to justify even greater brutalisation of the Palestinian people.

The sadism of Hamas's attack has made this Nazification much easier, rekindling collective memories, passed down from one generation to the next, of pogroms and the Holocaust. That Jews, both in Israel and the diaspora, have sought explanations for their suffering in the history of antisemitic violence is only to be expected. Intergenerational trauma is as real among Jews as it is among Palestinians, and Hamas's attack touched the rawest part of their psyche: their fear of annihilation. But memory can also be blinding. Jews long ago ceased to be the helpless pariahs, the internal 'others' of the West. The state that claims to speak in their name has one of the world's most powerful armies – and a nuclear arsenal, the only one in the region. The atrocities of 7 October may be reminiscent of pogroms, but Israel is not the Pale of Settlement.

As the historian Enzo Traverso has observed, the Jewish people 'now occupies a quite unique position in the memories of the Western world. Its sufferings are proclaimed and the object of legal protection, as if Jews had always to be subject to special legislation.'

Given the history of antisemitic persecution in Europe, Western concern about Jewish lives is entirely understandable. But what Traverso calls the ‘civil religion of the Holocaust’ increasingly comes at the expense of concern for Muslims – and at the expense of any truthful reckoning with the question of Palestine. ‘What separates Israel, the US and other democracies when it comes to difficult situations like this,’ the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, declared on 11 October, ‘is our respect for international law and, as appropriate, the laws of war.’ Meanwhile, Israel was honouring international law by levelling neighbourhoods and killing entire families – a reminder that, as Aimé Césaire wrote, ‘colonisation works to *decivilise* the coloniser, to *brutalise* him in the true sense of the word.’

In the days since the Hamas attack, the Biden administration has promoted policies of population transfer that could produce another Nakba. It has backed, for example, the ostensibly temporary relocation of millions of Palestinians to the Sinai so that Israel can continue its assault on Hamas. (The Egyptian president, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, replied that if Israel were truly interested in the well-being of Gazan refugees, it would relocate them in the Negev – in other words, on the Israeli side of the border with Egypt.) To aid its assault, Israel has received further weapons shipments from the US, which has also dispatched two aircraft carriers to the Eastern Mediterranean, as a warning to Hamas’s chief regional allies, Iran and Hizbullah. On 13 October, the State Department circulated an internal memo urging officials not to use the words and phrases ‘de-escalation/ceasefire’, ‘end to violence/bloodshed’ and ‘restoring calm’ – not even the mildest of reproaches would be tolerated. A few days later, a UN Security Council resolution calling for a ‘humanitarian pause’ in Gaza was predictably vetoed by the US (the UK abstained). On the CBS news programme *Face the Nation*, Jake Sullivan, the US national security adviser, defined ‘success’ in the war as ‘the long-term safety and security of the Jewish state and the Jewish people’, without any consideration of the safety and security – or the continuing statelessness – of the Palestinian people. In an extraordinary slip of the tongue, he all but endorsed the Palestinian right of return: ‘when people leave their homes in conflict, leave their houses in conflict, they deserve the right to return to those homes – to those houses. And this situation is no different.’ Perhaps, but it’s unlikely, especially if Hizbullah abandons its caution and joins the battle, a scenario that an Israeli ground offensive makes far more likely. America’s support for escalation may make electoral sense for Biden, but it carries the risk of provoking a regional war.

UNTIL the devastating explosion at the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital on 17 October – a bombing Netanyahu immediately blamed on ‘barbaric terrorists in Gaza’ – American newspapers mostly read like press releases for the Israeli army. The cracks that had begun to make space for Palestinian reality, for words like ‘occupation’ and ‘apartheid’, vanished overnight: a testament, perhaps, to how small and fragile these rhetorical victories had been. The *New York Times* ran an editorial claiming that Hamas had attacked Israel ‘without any immediate provocation’ and a fawning profile of a retired Israeli general who ‘grabbed his pistol and took on Hamas’ – his advice to the army was to ‘level the ground’ in Gaza. (Once again, Israel’s extraordinary daily newspaper *Haaretz* showed up the cowardice of the American press, blaming Netanyahu’s ‘government of annexation and dispossession’ for causing the war.) MSNBC’s three Muslim anchors went off the air temporarily, in seeming deference to Israeli sensitivities. Rashida Tlaib, a Palestinian-American congresswoman from Detroit, has been denounced for leading a ‘Hamas caucus’ because of her criticisms of the IDF. There have been hate crimes against Muslims, fuelled at least in part by a torrent of popular Islamophobia on a level not seen since the war on terror. Among its first casualties: a six-year-old Palestinian boy in Chicago, Wadea Al-Fayoume, murdered by his family’s landlord in apparent retribution for 7 October.

In Europe, expression of support for Palestinians has become taboo, and in some cases criminalised. The Palestinian novelist Adania Shibli was told that the award ceremony at the Frankfurt Book Fair for her novel *Minor Detail*, based on the true story of a Palestinian Bedouin girl who was raped and killed by Israeli soldiers in 1949, had been cancelled. France has banned pro-Palestinian demonstrations, and the French police have used water cannon to disperse a rally in support of Gaza in the place de la République. The British home secretary, Suella Braverman, has floated plans to ban the display of the Palestinian flag. The German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, declared that Germany’s ‘responsibility arising from the Holocaust’ obliged it to ‘stand up for the existence and security of the state of Israel’ and blamed all of Gaza’s suffering on Hamas. One of the few Western officials to express horror over what is happening in Gaza was Dominique de Villepin, France’s former prime minister. On France Inter, he railed against the West’s ‘amnesia’ over Palestine, the ‘oblivion’ that enabled Europeans to imagine that economic agreements and arms sales between Israel and its new Arab friends in the Gulf would cause the Palestinian question to disappear. On 14 October, Ione Belarra, Spain’s social rights minister and a member of the left-wing party Podemos, went even further, accusing Israel of genocidal collective punishment and calling for Netanyahu to be put on trial for war crimes. But Tlaib, Villepin and Belarra have been far outnumbered by the Western politicians and pundits who have sided with Israel as the ‘civilised’ party in the conflict, exercising its ‘right to defend itself’ against the barbarous Arabs. Discussion of the occupation, of the roots of the conflict, is increasingly conflated with antisemitism.

Jewish ‘friends of Israel’ may consider this a triumph. But, as Traverso points out, the West’s uncritical support of Israel, and its identification with Jewish suffering over and above that of Palestinian Muslims, ‘promotes a movement of Jews into the structures of domination’. Worse, the abandonment of neutrality regarding Israel’s conduct places Jews in the diaspora at increasing risk of antisemitic violence, whether from jihadi groups or lone wolves. The censoring of Palestinian voices for the sake of Jewish security, far from protecting Jews, will inevitably intensify Jewish insecurity.

The binary treatment of the war in the Western press is mirrored in the Arab world, and in much of the Global South, where the West’s support for Ukraine’s resistance to Russian aggression and its refusal to confront Israel’s aggression against Palestinians under occupation had already provoked accusations of hypocrisy. (These divisions recall the fractures of 1956, when people in the ‘developing world’ sided with Algeria’s struggle for self-determination, while Western countries backed Hungary’s resistance to Soviet invasion.) In countries that fought to overcome colonial rule, white domination and apartheid, the Palestinian struggle for independence, in conditions of grotesque asymmetry, strikes a powerful chord. And then there are Hamas’s admirers on the ‘decolonial’ left, many of them ensconced in universities in the West. Some of the decolonials – notably France’s Parti des Indigènes de la République, who hailed Al-Aqsa Flood without qualifications – seem almost enthralled by Hamas’s violence and characterise it as a form of anti-colonial justice of the kind championed by Fanon in ‘On Violence’, the controversial first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*. ‘What did y’all think decolonisation meant?’ the Somali-American writer Najma Sharif asked on X. ‘Vibes? Papers? Essays? Losers.’ ‘Decolonisation is not a metaphor,’ the groupies of Al-Aqsa Flood intoned. Others suggested that the young people at the Tribe of Nova festival deserved what they got, for having the chutzpah to throw a party a few miles from the Gaza border.

It is, of course, true that Fanon advocated armed struggle against colonialism, but he referred to the use of violence by the colonised as ‘disintoxicating’, not ‘cleansing’, a widely circulated mistranslation. His understanding of the more murderous forms of anti-colonial violence was that of a psychiatrist, diagnosing a vengeful pathology formed under colonial oppression, rather than offering a prescription. It was natural, he wrote, that ‘the very same people who had it constantly drummed into them that the only language they understood was that of force, now decide to express themselves by force’. Evoking the phenomenological experience of anti-colonial fighters, he noted that in the early stage of revolt, ‘life can only materialise from the rotting cadaver of the colonist.’

But Fanon also wrote hauntingly of the effects of war trauma – including the trauma suffered by anti-colonial rebels who killed civilians. And in a passage that few of his latter-day admirers have cited, he warned that

racism, hatred, resentment and the 'legitimate desire for revenge' alone cannot nurture a war of liberation. These flashes of consciousness which fling the body into a zone of turbulence, which plunge it into a virtually pathological dreamlike state where the sight of the other induces vertigo, where my blood calls for the blood of the other, this passionate outburst in the opening phase, disintegrates if it is left to feed on itself. Of course the countless abuses by the colonialist forces reintroduce emotional factors into the struggle, give the militant further cause to hate and new reasons to set off in search of a 'colonist to kill'. But, day by day, leaders will come to realise that hatred is not an agenda.

To organise an effective movement, Fanon believed, anti-colonial fighters would have to overcome the temptations of primordial revenge, and develop what Martin Luther King, citing Reinhold Niebuhr, called a 'spiritual discipline against resentment'. In line with this commitment, Fanon's vision of decolonisation embraced not only colonised Muslims, freeing themselves from the yoke of colonial oppression, but members of the European minority and Jews (themselves a formerly 'indigenous' group in Algeria), so long as they joined the struggle for liberation. In *A Dying Colonialism*, he paid eloquent tribute to non-Muslims in Algeria who, together with their Muslim comrades, imagined a future in which Algerian identity and citizenship would be defined by common ideals, not ethnicity or faith. That this vision perished, thanks to French violence and the FLN's authoritarian Islamic nationalism, is a tragedy from which Algeria still has not recovered. The destruction of this vision, upheld by intellectuals such as Edward Said and a small but influential minority of Palestinian and Israeli leftists, has been no less damaging for the people of Israel-Palestine.

'What fills me with dread,' the Palestinian historian Yezid Sayigh told me in an email,

is that we are at an inflection point in world history. Deep ongoing shifts over at least the past two decades that have been giving rise to right-wing and even fascist movements (and governments) were already building up, so I see Hamas's slaughter of civilians as roughly equivalent to Sarajevo 1914 or maybe Kristallnacht 1938 in accelerating or unleashing much broader trends. On a 'lesser scale', I'm furious at Hamas for basically erasing all we fought for over decades, and aghast at those who can't maintain the critical faculty to distinguish opposition to Israeli occupation and war crimes, and who turn a blind eye to what Hamas did in southern Israeli kibbutzim. Ethno-tribalism.

The ethno-tribalist fantasies of the decolonial left, with their Fanon recitations and posters of paragliders, are indeed perverse. As the Palestinian writer Karim Kattan wrote in a moving essay for *Le Monde*, it seems to have become impossible for some of Palestine's self-styled friends to 'say: massacres like those that took place at the Tribe of Nova festival are an outrageous horror, and Israel is a ferocious colonial power.' In an age of defeat and demobilisation, in which the most extreme voices have been amplified by social media, a

cult of force appears to have overtaken parts of the left, and short-circuited any empathy for Israeli civilians.

But the radical left's cult of force is less dangerous, because less consequential, than that of Israel and its backers, starting with the Biden administration. For Netanyahu, the war is a fight for survival – his own as much as Israel's. He has generally preferred tactical manoeuvres, shying away from full-scale offensives. While he has led Israel in several assaults on Gaza, he is also an architect of entente with Hamas, a position he justified in 2019 at a meeting of Likud members of the Knesset, where he said that 'anyone who wants to thwart the establishment of a Palestinian state has to support bolstering Hamas and transferring money to Hamas'. Netanyahu understood that as long as Hamas was in charge in Gaza, there would be no negotiations over Palestinian statehood. Hamas's offensive not only shattered his wager that the fragile equilibrium between Israel and Gaza would hold; it came at a time when he was simultaneously fending off bribery charges and a protest movement, sparked by his plan to erode the power of the judiciary and remake the country's political system along Orbánised lines. Desperate to overcome these setbacks, he has thrown himself into this war, casting it as a 'struggle between the children of light and the children of darkness, between humanity and the law of the jungle'. Israel's homegrown settler fascists, represented in his cabinet by Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir, both open advocates of ethnic cleansing, have killed several Palestinians in the West Bank since the Hamas attack (including those killed by the army, the death toll there is more than sixty). Palestinian citizens of Israel are fearful of the kind of attacks they suffered at the hands of Jewish gangs in May 2021, during the Unity Intifada. As for the people of Gaza, not only are they being forced to pay for Hamas's actions; they are being forced, once again, to pay for Hitler's crimes. And the imperative of invoking the Holocaust has become Israel's ideological Iron Dome, its shield against any criticism of its conduct.

What is Netanyahu's ultimate aim? Eliminating Hamas? That is impossible. For all of Israel's efforts to paint it as the Palestinian branch of the Islamic State, and as reactionary and violent as it is, Hamas is an Islamic nationalist organisation, not a nihilist cult, and a part of Palestinian political society; it feeds on the despair produced by the occupation, and cannot simply be liquidated any more than the fascist zealots in Netanyahu's cabinet (or, for that matter, the terrorists of the Irgun, who carried out bombings and massacres in the 1940s and later became part of Israel's political establishment). The assassination of Hamas leaders such as Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi, both killed in 2004, did nothing to impede the organisation's growing influence and even assisted it. Does Netanyahu imagine, then, that he can force Palestinians to give up their weapons, or their demands for statehood, by bombing them into submission? That has been tried, over and over again; the invariable result has been a new and even more embittered generation of Palestinian militants. Israel is not a paper tiger, as Hamas's leaders concluded after 7 October, still exulting from the experience of killing Israeli soldiers asleep in their beds. But it is increasingly incapable of changing course, because its political class lacks the

imagination and creativity – not to mention the sense of justice, of other people's dignity – required to pursue a lasting agreement.

A responsible American administration, one less susceptible to anxieties about an upcoming election and less beholden to the pro-Israel establishment, would have taken advantage of the current crisis to urge Israel to re-examine not just its security doctrine but its policies towards the sole population in the Arab world with whom it has shown no interest in forging a real peace: the Palestinians. Instead, Biden and Blinken have echoed Israel's banalities about fighting evil, while conveniently forgetting Israel's responsibility for the political impasse in which it finds itself. American credibility in the region, never very strong, is even weaker than it was under the Trump administration. On 18 October, Joshua Paul, who had been the director of congressional and public affairs for the State Department's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs for more than eleven years, resigned in protest over the administration's arms transfers to Israel. A posture of 'blind support for one side', he wrote in his resignation letter, has led to policies that are 'short-sighted, destructive, unjust and contradictory to the very values we publicly espouse'. It's no wonder the only Arab state to criticise Al-Aqsa Flood was the United Arab Emirates. American double standards – and the pitilessness of Israel's response – have made it impossible.

The inescapable truth is that Israel cannot extinguish Palestinian resistance by violence, any more than the Palestinians can win an Algerian-style liberation war: Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs are stuck with each other, unless Israel, the far stronger party, drives the Palestinians into exile for good. The only thing that can save the people of Israel and Palestine, and prevent another Nakba – a real possibility, while another Holocaust remains a traumatic hallucination – is a political solution that recognises both as equal citizens, and allows them to live in peace and freedom, whether in a single democratic state, two states, or a federation. So long as this solution is avoided, a continuing degradation, and an even greater catastrophe, are all but guaranteed.

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