

Why My Sympathy for the Palestinians Is Growing

It is true that a recent poll indicated that 75% of Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank supported the actions of Hamas on Oct. 7. It is true that the people of Gaza chose to elect Hamas as their leaders in 2006. And it is true that an alarming number of Palestinians have no desire to see a two-state solution. Instead, they want an Israel-free Middle East, "from the river to the sea." Yet in many ways the Palestinians are victims, and my strong support for Israel does not stop me from grieving over the suffering of the Palestinian people.

They have been victims of decades of bad leadership. Victims of lifelong anti-Israel propaganda. Victims of the aftermath of the Six-Day War in 1967.

Their leaders rejected a two-state solution under the Peel Commission in 1937, under the U.N. Partition Plan in 1947, and under subsequent arrangements through the decades. (For a powerful summary of the evidence, see Efraim Karsh, "Palestine Betrayed.")

Not only is this so, but rather than absorb the Arab refugees who fled Israel during the War of Independence in 1947, the surrounding Arab nations were complicit in creating a permanent refugee crisis. To this day, the Palestinians are the only multigenerational refugees on the planet, and every year that goes by, their anger and disappointment and disillusionment grow.

As stated by professor Alon Ben-Meir on the History News Network website:

No efforts have been made to resolve the tragic refugee problem on its own since 1948. Instead, it has been exploited

at the expense of innocent men, women, and children, who have been misled, mistreated, marginalized, and used as sacrificial lambs only to feed the insatiable hunger for power of their misguided and self-absorbed leaders.

In what was initially a disastrous event, the 1948 exodus turned into a Greek tragedy, festering over time and engulfing innocent souls. Since then, the refugees have multiplied nearly sevenfold, with many living under subhuman conditions which serve as incubators for militancy and violence, which Hamas in particular seeks to cultivate.

In addition, Ben-Meir points out that the U.N. organization formed specifically to deal with the Palestinian refugee crisis, called UNRWA, "in particular is guilty of perpetuating the Palestinian refugee crisis."

No wonder that, despite world protests supporting Hamas and chanting "Free Palestine," the Palestinians feel lonely and isolated.

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As reported in a November 2023 article in Haaretz, "other studies show that Palestinians feel profoundly, existentially, alone. The second post-Oct. 7 West Bank survey, commissioned by a new policy outfit called the Institute for Social and Economic Progress, asked which international actor is Palestine's most important strategic ally: 56 percent said 'none.' The top ally was Russia, then Turkey (18 and 11 percent, respectively); just 8 percent chose 'the Arab world.' Palestinians have no homegrown heroes either. In focus groups, the institute quoted a participant saying 'I feel that the Palestinian population is orphaned, there is no one to lead them.'"

As for the people of Gaza electing Hamas in 2005, their other alternative, the Palestine Authority, was not dramatically better. And certainly, the general population could not expect that their senior leaders would become billionaires while they lived in poverty or that hundreds of millions of dollars of international funding would go to acquire weapons and build terror tunnels rather than benefit the people themselves.

And we cannot forget that, from their earliest days, especially in Gaza, they have been exposed to hate-filled, anger-generating, anti-Israel propaganda on state-run TV and in their schools. To die as a martyr fighting the evil occupation is a lofty goal.

Added to this is the fact that Israel's attacks on Hamas, which uses its own civilians as human shields, serve to confirm the evil nature of this Jewish terror state. What else would you expect the people to think?

Earlier this week, while visiting some colleagues in Asia, I was invited to participate in an international student forum at a major university discussing the subject of equality. I presented a perspective based on the Declaration of Independence, but before I spoke, different students shared their thoughts.

One young man stood to speak, filled with anger. He was a Palestinian from Gaza. Israel, he said, killed his father and brother. Yet America supported Israel. And here in India, no one said a word about Palestinian suffering under Israel in recent weeks. The students applauded his words.

At the end of my brief talk, I said that as a Jewish American, I wanted to speak to the students from Gaza and Syria, to hear their perspective rather than to share mine. (Another Gazan student told us that in the recent war, Israel killed his mother and father.)

They asked me instead to share my perspective, which I said I

did not have the right to do. I was a stranger to them, and they had lost family. How could I speak to their suffering?

But they insisted I did, so I asked them to forgive me for anything I said that was offensive, and I would give my perspective.

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As I began to describe the monstrous acts of Hamas on Oct. 7, they immediately objected. No babies were killed, they told me. No women were raped. This was all propaganda.

When I described Hamas operating under Al Shifa hospital, they mocked the idea, saying these were all manipulated images on social media. And on and on it went.

And they reiterated the lie that Israel bombed one of their hospitals, but this time, rather than the initial exaggerated numbers of 500 dead, it was over 1,000 dead. (The reality, of course, is that an Islamic Jihad rocket misfired and landed in the parking lot next to the hospital, killing scores of innocent people.)

Afterwards, I went to shake the hand of the first Gazan man who spoke. He said to me, "I will not shake your hand. The blood of my family is on your hands." (Again, this was because of America's support of Israel.)

I approached the second Gazan man who spoke, and he said to me, "Your rockets killed my family."

How can you not have sympathy for people like this? How can your hearts not break for them?

I was able to tell them that, over and over on my radio show and in writing, I have reiterated that Palestinian blood is as precious in God's sight as Israeli blood and that the death of a Palestinian baby is as grievous as the death of an Israeli baby.

And just last week, an Orthodox Jewish colleague in Israel reached out to me, asking me to endorse a major initiative calling for Christian prayer for Israel. I was thrilled to do it, with only one request: he needed to add a specific line with prayers for the suffering Palestinians, which he was happy to do.

So my support for Israel remains the same as ever, but my burden for the Palestinians continues to increase. {eo}

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