

# Palestine Needs Mass Support, Not Sectarian Marginalization

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**Over a year after Israel launched its genocidal aggression on Gaza, many in the antiwar movement are rightly furious. But we can't let that rage cloud strategic thinking about the best way to stand in solidarity with Palestine, says Bashir Abu-Manneh.**

The moral indignation and anger at Israel's prolonged apocalyptic war on Gaza is transformative. Israel's genocidal tyranny has moved the conscience of the whole world, triggered a huge global protest movement in the West against its colonialism and occupation, and radicalized a new generation of young activists. For a global majority, Palestine is now a cause for justice, democracy, and freedom.

Understandably, however, the yearlong war's continuation and the United States' unfettered support for Israel has brought deep frustration and anger. As US arms continue to flow to an Israel that remains protected from the wrath of global public opinion, protesters and activists legitimately feel ignored and sidelined by warmongering elites. They are right to be enraged at the continuation of the war, the ceaseless stream of images of death and destruction they see through their phones, and the degradation of their own democracy through the clampdown on support for Palestine.

But it would be a huge mistake to take one's political cue from a very small minority of vocal activists who have turned legitimate anger and frustration at the drawn-out suffering of the Palestinians into a mindless embrace of violence — not least because this would play into the hands of those who want to see a popular antiwar mass movement discredited.

To be effective and political, moral outrage should feed strategic thinking. Political organizing is about identifying mechanisms and tactics that work in a given context — not embracing purist notions and magical formulas that discredit the movement and tar it with support for indiscriminate violence.

Most worryingly, some voices in the Palestinian solidarity movement have [glorified](#) Hamas's October 7 attacks. Those are premised on the reasoning that the oppressed have a right to resist and that, therefore, the job of activists acting in solidarity is to defend and justify everything they do. But the latter point does not follow from the former.

There is no question that Palestinians have a right to resist foreign occupation. That is an achievement of the decolonization era enshrined in international law. But it does not follow that everything the Palestinian resistance movement does advances the Palestinian cause. Or, perhaps most important for organizers and activists who want to maximize their capacity to actually end the bloodbath in Palestine and Lebanon, that every act of resistance is equally effective in ending the Israeli occupation and war machine. Indeed, some acts are counterproductive and make things much worse.

The October 7 attacks are a case in point. Consider the effects of Al-Aqsa Flood. Gaza has been

decimated. Two million Palestinians displaced multiple times. Over 43,000 counted dead that we know of for sure (with some credible estimates arguing for far more), with 10,000 still under the rubble, and 100,000 injured, mostly women and children. Seventy percent of housing units in Gaza are destroyed; 96 percent of Palestinians are food insecure, and starvation and famine are prevalent. Palestinian society has been totally destroyed and will take generations to rectify and rebuild.

What the Palestinians in Gaza are experiencing is worse than the Nakba. So how can the October 7 attacks but seem like a massive miscalculation by Hamas? No doubt Hamas still glorifies and celebrates its military operation and momentary shattering of Israel's seemingly unshakable power and oppression. But any reasonable cost-benefit analysis for the people of Gaza has to conclude that the price is simply not worth it.

This is why many Palestinians in Gaza dream of returning to the era before October 7 — a perverse twist of fate. However miserable and brutal the siege was, it wasn't genocide. Palestinians in Gaza lived in their homes and led as normal a life as they could under occupation: in *sumud* and in the hope of better circumstances. That they yearn for the past now cannot be discounted in any evaluation of October 7.

To praise and defend Hamas's actions also ignores the fact that such actions have played directly into Israel's hands. Israel pushes the conflict to a military confrontation that it can win. War in this context of a highly unequal conflict and a balance of power that is overwhelmingly to Israel's advantage is counterproductive. Hamas's indiscriminate militarization of the resistance empowers Israel, glues Israeli society to warring governments, tars the resistance with the label of "terrorism," and undermines the legitimacy of the Palestinian national struggle.

But because of Israel's brutal genocide, the question of Palestine is now back in global political focus. There is thus a huge opening for solidarity work now — solidarity work that can actually win over mass numbers of people and effectively pressure the power brokers who are facilitating this genocide.

Significantly, the July International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling (July 19, 2024) has deemed Israel's occupation illegal. The decision is a radical rejection of Israel's justification and practice of prolonged occupation.

It is a strong affirmation of the Palestinian right of self-determination and calls for a sovereign and independent Palestinian state, and to "wipe out all of the consequences of the illegal act" and provide reparations, restitution, and compensation to occupied Palestinians. Importantly, this is still what occupied Palestinians want despite the increasing erosion of political hope for significant change.

The decision also demands that other states should distinguish in their dealings between Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, not aid and assist in maintaining illegality, and finally hold Israel accountable for breaching international law. A majority of states in the UN General Assembly have accepted this ruling, giving Israel one year to implement it. Now some Western governments have also begun to call for an arms boycott or have blocked weapons deliveries to Israel themselves.

These developments are a huge asset for Palestine and a real political opening for advocating for Palestinian rights. For the ICJ ruling to have any chance of implementation and enforcement, it requires focused political work and organization. The ultimate measure of success is identifying ways of operationalizing all these new interventions to change the situation on the ground for occupied Palestinians.

Palestinians need successful and effective means to improve their lives and end Israel's brutal occupation. They also need modes of resistance that increase their leverage, not undermine it, and force a new reality on Israel.

The tasks for solidarity work are therefore huge now. Palestinians cannot afford for this moment to be squandered on sectarian infighting or on celebrating disastrous means that push the Palestinian cause to irrelevant political margins and isolation. In their righteous anger over Israel's slaughter, the pro-Palestine movement should reject the temptation to valorize violence. Doing so only empowers Israel to continue this war. Hope and focused advocacy must prevail.

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