

Israel-Palestine: Our humanity is being put to the test

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When it comes to attacking Gaza, Israel's policy right now is more about damage than accuracy.

We're living in a hellish reality, driven by a thirst for revenge and manifesting in war crimes. Israel's goal is not to hit military targets or terrorist infrastructure. The point is to target more than two million people – their children, their elderly. The scope of the catastrophe that awaits is hard to fathom.

In recent days in Israel, voices of otherwise reasonable people – people associated with humanist values and human rights – have expressed that thirst for revenge. They have justified erasing Gaza under a security pretext or even a humanitarian one. I've heard others who have adopted the rhetoric of the rightwing extremists who insist that every Gazan is a bloodthirsty antisemite who supports the atrocity that Hamas committed over the weekend.

But our humanity is exactly what is being put to the test. Every picture and every testimony from the inferno in Israel's south, every desperate and heartbreaking plea from those still searching for loved ones, every update to the death toll that keeps climbing – all of these threaten to pull our values out from under us and deliver us into the demand for vengeance.

Hamas' criminal attack filled many Israelis with existential fear of a sort we didn't know before – at least not in this generation. Now, the fear, the rage, the hate, and the pain threaten to wreak havoc not just on Gaza, but on us as individuals and a society.

Morality is never a privilege, a luxury, an accessory that we can don when it's convenient or remove when less so. Morality isn't an indulgence we can't afford during a catastrophe.

Insisting on morality is an insistence on context, without which this horrible violence loses its meaning and gets reduced to "human animals that want to destroy us for no reason." To insist on morality and context is not to justify a crime. On the contrary – it is to ensure our understanding of reality includes all of the factors that contribute to it, so that we can more effectively change it.

If Hamas' crimes justify unmitigated destruction through the collective punishment of the people of Gaza, what morality can we claim to condemn Hamas, especially given the harm Israel has inflicted there over the years? If Gaza's election of Hamas all those years ago justifies erasing its population from the planet, what should the Israeli public's punishment be for electing fascist leaders and war criminals, who routinely impose destruction and death on Palestinians?

Our commitment to morality and human rights principles can't be conditioned on our subjective feelings. The whole point is to draw the red lines that can't be crossed even in times of war. There's no rage that justifies war crimes.

The need to withdraw into Israeli tribalism, and cling to it, is understandable. But not while sacrificing our political community. The Jewish-Arab solidarity we have managed to build in this land has been hard to come. It is small and fragile, and is facing a terrible test. We mustn't fail.

No civilian is “collateral damage.” War crimes are an abomination that can’t ever be justified. One can only hope that the day after this toxic dust settles, the so-called “human rights” camp will be able to look at itself in the mirror.

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P.S.

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One last thing. This is a moment of deep crisis in Israel-Palestine and we need you to have our back. Our journalists are on the frontlines, making sure you get the best reporting and analysis from inside the struggle for true justice between the river and the sea. They do so because thousands of readers support our work. If you are not already one of them — now is the time to join! Support +972 with a one-off donation, or better yet, with a monthly donation. Thank you!