

A Perspective on the Israel / Hamas Conflict

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Many very tragic things are happening in the world today. In this essay, I will focus on the very active and very violent war between Israel and Hamas, both of whom, in my opinion, have behaved atrociously. I was therefore glad to read in today's paper that just as with Putin a year ago, arrest warrants have now also gone out from the International Criminal Court both to the Israeli and to the Hamas leadership to prosecute them for a grave abuse of human rights. They could all be arrested should any of them set foot in those countries which uphold these court's jurisdiction.

The war was set in motion when, on October 7th of 2023, Hamas chose to instigate a violent and unexpected attack on Israel, focussing their murderous intentions on people who had come from all over Israel to attend a music festival. They killed over 1000 Israelis, tortured and raped many others in the most horrific and brutal ways, and took many hostages.

Here was humanity at its most vile. That said, I believe this attack was always on the cards. So long as Palestinians are trapped under violent military occupation, deprived of basic rights and told they must accept their lot as being inherently 'lower beings', Israel will live under the threat of uprisings, reprisals and terrorism.

And that's precisely what happened.

Hamas knew that Netanyahu's eye was not on the ball. He was too busy trying to destroy the power of the Supreme court and in effect turn Israel into a fascist state. He was doing this in order to placate his ultra-right wing party whose support he desperately needed in order to stay in power and thus avoid having to go to prison for corruption.

The tragedy for the great nation of Israel is that it has had a man like Netanyahu in power for so many years who is both greedy and corrupt, and whose prime interests have been status, money and power. Like Putin, Netanyahu doesn't care a jot how many people die horrible deaths so long as he can save his own wretched skin. Which he might not be able to.

When this whole saga ends - I suspect Netanyahu doesn't want it to as then he'll have to face his day of reckoning - it is probably curtains for him.

Netanyahu's response was way over the top. Consider this: over the first 100 days, Israel responded with overkill. They dropped the kiloton equivalent of three nuclear bombs on the Gaza strip, murdering over 25,000 Palestinians including 10,000 children and putting 400,000 people in Gaza at risk of starvation by intentionally not letting in food or medical supplies.

The U.S. under Biden, who is an old-school hawk, knew perfectly well that Israel was committing crimes against humanity, as the South African court has recently also been bringing to light, but has continued to support the killing game.

However it never works!

Netanyahu, like many other world leaders, operated under the illusion that if you kill enough terrorists, that you kill Terrorism. You don't. *Terrorism is more a tactic than a definable enemy.* And Hamas is everywhere, not just in those wretched underground tunnels built out of the money that Netanyahu paid them.

Yes, agreed, Hamas' theocratic, fascist mindset is fixated on the destruction of Israel, but would there have been *that amount* of hate and violence directed upon Israel had not Israel practised a policy of ethnic cleansing against the Palestinians for so many years?

I don't know the answer.

But what I do know is that just as mosquitos exist where there is swamp land and will not vanish unless the land is drained, so the injustices and inequalities that existed for Palestinians for so many years, created a fertile ground for what happened to have taken place and possibly, even in the violent and horrendous way that it did.

I maintain that the number of terrorists are controlled by the level of hate, desperation and anger that drives people to join their ranks. For example, many young men joined ISIS a) out of anger against the insanely carried out American invasion of Iraq (that would never have happened if there had been no oilfields there), and b) because so many of them lived in so much poverty, that it was the only way for them to earn enough to feed their families. I have no doubt that the same holds true for many recruits to Hamas.

Put simply, 'failed states' are a prime breeding ground of terrorism, and living in the abject hopelessness of the Gaza strip, also makes a person much more susceptible to being brainwashed by fanatical ideas. And one of the ways that autocratic states like Iran tend to spread their message and distract attention away from the fact that it is *they* who are keeping people poor and miserable, is to pay large sums to rogue imams to come and preach distorted messages telling them that all their woes are due to the evil west - Putin has now hitched himself increasingly onto this particular bandwagon - and their evil Israeli cronies!

I emphasise again: it is a mistaken belief that if you kill enough Hamas warriors that you will kill Hamas. Yes, you will weaken them, but it is hard to destroy them unless the environment out of which they emerge, radically changes.

And at the moment, this does not seem likely.

It is also a myth that evil can be killed off by force or that good is likely to come out of it. Yes, even if you enlist religion on your side, as the Ayatollahs always do and as Putin has enlisted the Russian Orthodox church to support his personal crusade of thuggery. Actually, what happens is that you turn into that very evil you are trying to eradicate. i.e., you become the Satan!

The enormous tragedy today is that because of Israel's hugely over the top response, any hope either of a one state or a two state solution is starting to eviscerate and increasing numbers of people in many different countries are starting to lose sympathy with Israel. The tragedy is that countries tend to get identified with the policies of their leaders. In the same way that most North Koreans are peace loving and could not be more different from their seriously deranged leader, so most Israelis, excluding those who are on the extreme right wing, could not be more different from their leader.

But sadly, they are becoming tainted with Netanyahu's cruelty and bellicosity and as a result anti Semitism is starting to grow in the world and this enormously saddens me.

But another disturbing thing is also occurring which people don't tend to talk about. I think that what Hamas did on that fateful day has also had a deeply damaging effect on the psyches of many Israelis. Whereas before Oct 7th, there was a lot of Israeli sympathy towards the plight of the

Palestinians, and many peace groups within the country were working hard to find ways to improve their lot.

Because of what happened, a lot of that sympathy has now melted away. An Israeli friend told me that the effect of that raid has been to re-ignite a trauma that was already there and that a certain hardening in many Israeli hearts had occurred. She told me that now she observed that she couldn't care how many Palestinians died or starved to death and that many of her friends were feeling the same, and that this deeply disturbed her.

'This is what trauma does to us,' I told her, 'especially if it comes on top of an existing collective wound which so many Jews hold.' I told her that as a psychotherapist, I have worked with people who have experienced deep traumas and particularly who have been in war zones, and one of the many side-effects of being subject to extreme violence is that it serves to cauterise our hearts.

In order not to feel the extreme pain, we close down our capacity to feel; we turn away from our capacity to experience compassion and empathy and so what happened on October 7th played into an already wounded and vulnerable mindset. People talk about the wounding of the Palestinian psyche but they forget the fragility of the Jewish one. It is very, very tough living somewhere where you are encircled by those whose main aim is to eradicate you.

As I said, the attitude of many Israelis towards Palestinians today has changed radically. It may be summed up by these words from a rap song that has just come out.

'There is no forgiveness for swarms of rats. They will die in their rat holes.'

The need for revenge is all consuming.

As is well known, Iran also has a central role to play in this terrible drama. It sponsors Hamas as well as other terrorist groups. My heart also goes out to the poor Iranians who live under a fascistic, theocratic regime which utterly distorts the spirit of Islam and where, if you dare oppose the regime in any way, you might get tortured and imprisoned, or if you are a woman and you are not wearing your hijab correctly, you might get shot in the eye or in the groin for offending the morality police.

In that country, you are dealing with a mafia state prepared to kill all its people simply to hold on to its power, money and weapons.

While Israel's politicians must bear a lot of responsibility for this grim reality as it has evolved over the decades, I also put a lot of blame on the many other Arab countries who over the years I felt could have done more to assist their beleaguered Palestinian brethren.

The trouble with international politics is that too many world leaders primarily think about what is in their own national interest. Though many foreign ministers are adept at talking the right talk – making the correct noises - in reality seldom is enough attention put towards concretely ensuring that policies are put into place that will effectively also serve the interests of the larger global community in addition to the interests of the countries involved.

Too many people thought that so long as the Palestinian problem didn't get too out of hand, that Israel's creeping annexation of the West bank could be ignored and that the problem would somehow melt away on its own.

Well it didn't!

One is reminded of the person who has aches and pains, but because they are not *that* bad, they do nothing about them, until one day all hell breaks loose and it is too late to do anything.

This is what is happening, and in much of the world today.

Look at the other big war going on and at Putin's *folies de grandeur*. The neo Nazi par excellence, maintaining that he was invading Ukraine to rid it of Neo Nazis! I have written about Putin's war at length in my other essay about war in general.

I'll just mention that the one thing that characterises all these psychopaths – actually, I like to call them pathocrats, autocrats with pathological inclinations - who have somehow attained positions of power in their countries, is that their thinking is always very one-dimensional. It utterly lacks vision.

Just as Putin invaded Ukraine, thinking it would all be over in a day or two and the Ukrainians would meekly back down, and thus was forced to improvise reasons to justify his aggressions, so Netanyahu embarked upon his revenge game also without any real strategy in sight other than wanting to kill as many of the 'rats' as possible and so 'prove' to his peoples that he was a 'man of courage and determination.' (In order to be able to kill others, one has first to dehumanise and demonise them.)

He had forgotten Gandhi's remark to the effect that 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth makes everyone blind'!

And there's a lot of blindness around today. On every side. *Everyone involved in this conflict has made grave mistakes.*

How does one deal with this? What can be done to give peace a chance? Is a major war going to be averted?

As regards the last concern, we have so far been spared as neither Israel nor Iran seem to want it. But regarding the peace issue, regarding what will happen to the Palestinians, to be honest I do not have a clue, as there is so much deep-seated hatred, so much fear, so much suffering, so much deep wounding and so many insufficient human beings scrabbling about desperately for a solution. Neither side wants to be seen as yielding an inch, and I can't myself see how Israel can ever be safe until some kind of solution occurs for the Palestinians.

What all world leaders forget is that as Einstein pointed out. 'No problem can be solved at the level it exists at. You have to go to a higher level'. Just as I have found this to be true in my psychotherapy practice, so it is also true in terms of larger world problems.

The problem is that many world leaders don't know how to get to this 'higher level' as it is not part of their conventional modus operandi. They operate out of a win/lose, succeed or fail mindset which I believe is at the same level as the conflict itself. The kinds of deep emotional and spiritual issues also brought up by this war, can't just be resolved rationally and pragmatically.

The kind of wounding that has occurred will take generations to heal.....

In addition, the problems in the Middle East can not be separated from the larger problems in the world: the problems of the environment, the problems of race and hunger and poverty and inequality, the problems of the way 'the system' operates, the problems of politics and economics, the problems of despair and hopelessness and the way poor people tend to get treated by the 'powers that be'!

All the many things 'wrong' with our world somehow dovetail into each other.

The best you and I can do is try to live our personal lives with integrity and take stands for those issues which we believe in.

In the last few years I have written two books exploring what is wrong with the world and what I feel that you and I, the little person in the street, can do about it. In both these books I suggest that we need to understand that the problems we see out in the world are always reflections of glitches within our own personal and human-collective psyches and that if we wish for change 'out there', we need first to make changes inside ourselves. We won't have real peace out there unless more of us find it inside ourselves.

Otherwise we simply continue projecting our own fears and prejudices onto our endeavours to find resolutions.

And so the contamination carries on.

Yes, we can continue to scapegoat our Putins and Netanyahus, continue to blame and demonise them, as in this way we don't have to own the greed, violence and materiality inside ourselves. But I think that we also need to ask what it is about ourselves that we have created such dreadful human beings to be our leaders? (In America today, nearly half the country wants an orange-coloured neo Fascist riddled with dementia, to be their next President!) But these condemnations also don't get us too far. 'If a way to the better there be', said a character in a Thomas Mann novel, 'it lies in taking a full look at the worst.'

The truth is that these dreadful human beings simply embody dimensions of our own dark sides – our own dreadfulness - that we don't want to face and thus prefer to project onto other people. I understand fully why Netanyahu acted in the ways he did. How?

Because there is a part inside me that could, if I allowed it, be capable of doing exactly the same. I also have sides of me that are greedy, insecure, violent, weak, inauthentic and that want to be liked and once upon a time I used to have a strong need for status and glamour. Call it my inhumanity or our inhumanity! My inner work is to purify these parts of myself.

We need to know that as Thich Nhat Hanh, the Buddhist monk and peace activist put it:

We all have war inside us, not only the soldiers.

And this we need to own and work through inside ourselves, as the more whole and harmonious each of us becomes as we learn to transmute what Carl Jung called our Shadow Side, the more we will be able to be instruments to help balance and harmony emerge out in the world.

I think we could say that today humanity as a whole is having to face the sum total of our collective evil which is also being played out in many ways other than war. Yes, these are tough times we are living through. Initiatory times, times where we are being tested as a species to the full. Are the haves going to do more to help the have-nots? Are we going to give up our addictions to destroying the very environment which we depend upon for our survival?

I believe that once more of us learn to see and thus start to address and work with the darkness inside our own hearts, the more hope we have of saving our planet.

As this gradually happens, we can also begin seeing our world with a whole new set of eyes; we can start finding a new story for our lives and a new vision and can learn to open our Hearts and thus start having access to the great storehouse of love, tenderness and beauty that lies inside them.

And the more this happens, the more our world problems also start being cleared up.

Instead of continuing to glorify the illusion that we are all separate entities, disconnected from one another, we need to realise that despite the colour of our skin, our race or religion or class, we are all interconnected and all come from the same ground of being and are all different expressions of one incredible humanity.

The more this starts to take place, the more we will move to a place where peace on Earth becomes possible.