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Israel

The double standard with Israel and Palestine leaves us in moral darkness

Moustafa Bayoumi

Biden and Zelenskiy support a war they say was 'unprovoked' but a defenseless population will pay for media misinformation

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Women hold candles during a rally to show support to Palestinians and against Israel's military operations in Gaza, in Santiago, Chile, on 10 October 2023. Photograph: Martin Bernetti/AFP/Getty Images

I always dread watching US news coverage of wars, and now is no exception. After Hamas's deadly attacks in Israel and Israel's hellish bombardment of Gaza, I checked in on MSNBC. Before long, I heard one of their reporters talk about "the violent history between these two nations" - as if Palestine were a country - and had to turn off the TV to get a break. Palestine is not a country. That's the whole point.

Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel all live under various regimes of organized discrimination and oppression, much of which makes life

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What exactly counts as a provocation? Not, apparently, the large number of settlers, more than 800 by one media account, who stormed al-Aqsa mosque on 5 October. Not the 248 Palestinians killed by Israeli forces or settlers between 1 January and 4 October of this year. Not the denial of Palestinian human rights and national aspirations for decades.

One can, in fact must, see such actions as provocations without endorsing further murderous violence against civilians. But if you watched only US news, you would be likely to presume that Palestinians always act while Israel only reacts. You might even think that Palestinians are the ones colonizing the land of Israel, no less. And you probably believe that Israel, which holds ultimate control over the lives of 5 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and yet denies them the right to vote in Israeli elections, is a democracy.

To be considered a political being you must at the very least be considered a human being. Who gets to count as human? “I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed. We are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly,” Israel’s defense minister Yoav Gallant said. Human animals? How can such language and an announced policy of collective punishment against all the residents of Gaza be seen by Israel’s supporters in the United States or elsewhere as defensible? Let’s be clear: Gallant’s language is not the rhetoric of deterrence. It’s the language of genocide.

There’s the nagging hypocrisy of the war in Ukraine. So many around the world support Ukraine’s resistance to foreign occupation (as they should) but blithely deny Palestinians any way to resist their occupation. Even non-violent methods of resistance like the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign is vilified and even criminalized. Why the double standard?

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Israeli military shot and killed the Palestinian American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in May 2022?

The double standard may be expected considering how the plight of the Palestinians has been discussed in the past, but that doesn't eliminate its moral darkness. It's also particularly dangerous and tone-deaf at this moment, when we're on the cusp of a government - Israel - using unprecedented violence on a largely defenseless and penned-in population, in part to cover for its own fatal mistakes and embarrassment.

One fundamental way this double standard operates is through a false equivalence, a two-sides-ism that hides the massive asymmetry of power between the state of Israel and the scattered population groupings that make up the Palestinian people. They're not equal. One dominates while the other is dominated. One colonizes. The other is colonized.

At least since the Oslo accords of 1993, we have been sold various promises that the way out of this injustice was negotiated settlements; after generations of enormous human sacrifice, Palestinians would finally achieve their national aspirations. It was already clear to many of us that this had long ago become a necessary illusion maintained by the powerful. Today, a negotiated peace seems farther away than ever.

This both saddens and frightens me. We are very likely entering another long and painful era where armed struggle and violent domination become increasingly and mutually dependent on each other for survival. Yet neither can win. The Palestinians will remain. They cannot be eliminated. Israel too will continue to exist. The future is full of unnecessary and horrific bloodshed all around. Desperate western attachment to morally bankrupt double standards bears a large portion of the blame.

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