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Zionist Jonathan Freedland, the UK's Nuanced Version of Thomas Friedman



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Jonathan Freedland is a senior columnist for the *Guardian*, and its point-person in providing commentary and reporting on the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Freedland gives every impression of being fair-minded and “objective” in this commentary, unlike the less-knowledgeable and far-from-impartial US commentator Thomas Friedman, who is little more than a fan-boy of Likud and its political allies (aside from the occasional muted demurral when Israel turns its overwhelming military might on hapless Palestinians, though in the end Friedman always finds ways to exculpate Israel).

Freedland went to Israel to cover its current conflict with Gaza. In a *Guardian* piece from there he enjoined his readers to “listen to the phone call made by one of the Hamas murderers of 7 October to his parents back in Gaza. Hear his pride, his ecstatic joy as he

tells them he has “killed Jews” with his own hands, including a husband and wife and eight others. “Dad, 10 with my own hands!”.

The *Guardian* invited readers of this article to submit a response to what Freedland’s wrote. Here is what I sent in (it did not get published):

“This unspeakable bloodlust [referred to by Freedland] called to mind a parallel episode during Israel’s assault on the Jenin refugee camp two decades ago:

Moshe Nissim, IDF Bulldozer Operator in Jenin: “Before we went in [to Jenin] I asked some guys to teach me [how to operate a Caterpillar D-9 bulldozer]. They taught me how to drive forward and make a flat surface... For three days I just erased and erased... I kept drinking whisky to fight off fatigue. I made them a stadium in the middle of the camp! I didn’t see dead bodies under the blade of the D-9... But if there were any I don’t care”. Originally published in a report by Tsadok Yeheskeli, *Yediot Aharonot*, May 31 2002.

Unlike Mr Freedland I’m not sure what lessons are precisely to be drawn from such cases of untrammelled bloodlust”.

International law requires these war-criminal berserkers (on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides) to be brought to account, and it is not unreasonable to expect fair-minded journalists to acknowledge both such situations accordingly.

In a later article from Israel Freedland says:

“There is, in fact, a terrible price to pay as long as Israel keeps fighting in Gaza, in the form of the deaths of thousands of innocents. And there is a terrible price to pay if Israel stops fighting in Gaza, leaving intact a murderous, eliminationist threat. Neither option is bearable. It is a tragic choice. We cannot do much for the two peoples trapped by that choice, but we can at least admit that we see it”.

But: is Israel not also “a murderous, eliminationist threat” for Gazans since it imposed its draconian siege on that territory in 2007? So why not point this out, instead of pointing this accusatory finger solely at one of the parties involved? And why can’t we “do much for the two peoples trapped by that choice”? There is a clear way out of this supposed tragedy. But first another contention in this article requires attention.

Freedland says “responsibility for a death toll estimated to be in excess of 15,000 – in less than two months – rests squarely with a Hamas enemy that deliberately embeds itself in population centres, including in schools and hospitals”.

Freedland is right to say that Hamas blurs the line between its combatants and non-combatant Gazan civilians—this of course is a *prima facie* violation of international law,

though the application of this law in asymmetrical warfare lacks the clear-cut applicability present in wars of a more regular and standard character.

Freedland's claim however occludes the fact that Israel also blurs the line between its active-duty combatants and those of its civilians who are designated as "reservists".

In Israel, military service is compulsory for most citizens, with men serving for two and a half years and women for two years, starting at the age of 18. After completing their required service, these men and women typically become part of the Israeli Defence Force's (sic) Reserves. That is to say, these individuals, usually up to the age of 40 (50 in certain specialist fields), can be summoned back to active duty at the behest of their government.

So is an Israeli aged 18-40 in civvies really and routinely to be regarded as a non-combatant civilian? After all, reservists are allowed to take their weapons home with them when they finish their service in the regular military, and the media is replete with images of Israelis in civvies shouldering guns in the middle of towns and cities.

Soon after the October 7 attack by Hamas, Israel expanded its mobilization of reservists to 360,000.

Any Jewish person anywhere in the world is a citizen of Israel by virtue of this fact, regardless of their place of birth. As a result, many "Israelis" possess dual-nationality, and can be called-up to serve in Israel's military while living abroad. According to the *Washington Post*, about 10,000 people living in the United States alone have reported for Israeli military duty after receiving draft notices that were part of the mass mobilization after Hamas's attack in October (incidentally, this includes someone who lives and works as a financier in Los Angeles— hence a likely case of making money in one country and killing Palestinians in another).

Israeli airlines El Al, Israir and Arkia added more flights to bring "home" these reservists, according to their websites and Israel's airports authority.

The demarcation between combatants and noncombatant civilians is thus blurred indisputably by both sides in this conflict.

As mentioned above, Freedland contends we can't "do much for the two peoples trapped" in what he regards as an inexorable tragedy. But of course we can! Freedland scarcely mentions Israel's countless illegalities in its dealings with the Palestinian people. A start can be made by addressing some of these.

Every international legal body regards the siege/blockade of Gaza as contravening the law prohibiting the use of collective punishments against civilians. International law permits

an occupied people to engage in armed resistance against the occupier. As long as Israel maintains its illegal siege, there will be justified resistance against the blockader/illegal occupier (with the caveat that noncombatant civilians are not to be targeted). Israel— so far shielded and abetted by its US paymaster— has to be brought to an acknowledgement of this situation.

At the same time, Freedland and others maintain that this step will not be a practical proposition for Israel as long as Hamas maintains its “eliminationist” stance towards Israel.

While Hamas pledged to “eliminate the Zionist entity” in its 1988 founding charter, which called for the creation of an Islamic state over the entirety of the land of historic Palestine, its May 2017 “Document of general principles and policies” abandoned eliminationism in favour of a long-term truce in which Israel exists within its 1967 borders as a condition of further negotiations leading to the creation of a Palestinian state.

Neither the exact nature of this putative Palestinian state nor that of a future Israel was specified in the May 2017 document, leading Hamas doubters to maintain that this was merely a playing-for-time diplomatic smokescreen employed by Hamas while it pursued its longer-term eliminationist goals. But in any event, contra Freedland and others, Hamas has not been committed publicly to the elimination of Israel since 2017.

Zionists such as Freedland have of course a visceral distrust of Hamas.

Hamas is however in no position to destroy Israel militarily, so why not create an internationally supervised framework, in the context of a long-term ceasefire or truce, in which Hamas is held accountable for each and every one of its policy declarations and subsequent actions? The same of course would apply to Israel.

Will anyone take bets that a principled procedure of this kind is unacceptable to Israel and its supporters in the western media?

Meanwhile, in Gaza Hamas will doubtless be crippled by Israel’s brutal techno-militarism, but in the longer-term Hamas or one of its approximations or proxies will almost certainly find ways to continue the resistance.

An American state, New Hampshire, uses “Live free or die” as its official motto.

What if the long-suffering Palestinian people insist on joining New Hampshire in adhering to this simple motto? Saying this in the knowledge that 75% of Gazans are now internally displaced, and 400,000 have lost their jobs since Israel began its retaliation after October 7.

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