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Rape & Genocide: the Israeli War Machine We Support



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

The headline above is outrageous and incendiary – it is also unquestionably true. We have a duty to bear witness to what the Palestinians must endure.

The great Israeli journalist Gideon Levy wrote powerfully a couple of days ago about the rape culture that is part of the Israeli war machine. Riots occurred at the Sde Teiman Israeli detention centre this week in support of soldiers arrested by the Israeli military police in connection with rape, torture and murder. Members of the Knesset, including cabinet ministers, participated in storming the prison, a living hell for hundreds of Palestinians. Schools are raising funds to support the soldiers charged, while senior military figures publicly howl at the arrests. The assumption, based on decades of precedent, is that no one will face real consequences.

“Rapists as heroes,” Gideon Levy said in Haaretz newspaper last week. “Heroically sodomizing shackled and helpless men. How can we dare to complain about their Nukhba? [Hamás’s elite fighters, some of whom are accused of rape on October 7th].

“Even the shocking number of prisoners who have died in detention and the number of amputees do not tell the story of the evil and the sadism of Sde Teiman in full. The brutality, torture and inhumane conditions were, insofar as is known, accompanied by various kinds of sexual violence.

“Some day we will hear about this violence in detail. And then too, we won’t feel shame. And then, too, we will understand and forgive, and perhaps we will even take pride. After all, ultimately, the IDF is the most moral army in the world. Everyone knows that in Israel. Only in Israel,” Gideon Levy says.

This is an Abu Ghraib moment that is largely being ignored and that the US and Israel hope will quickly be forgotten. Abu Ghraib was an infamous US-run prison in Iraq where various depravities were perpetrated on Iraqi citizens. When “skite” photos emerged, it enraged the Arab world, shamed the Americans, and sharply brought into question the high-falutin’ pronouncements over why that poor country needed to be subjected to Pax Americana.

We shouldn’t be surprised at Sde Temein. The Chief Rabbi of the IDF Eyal Krim was appointed to his role as shepherd of the IDF despite being on record as saying rape of non-Jews, in certain circumstances, was ok:

“Although intercourse with a female gentile is very grave, it was permitted during wartime ... out of consideration for the soldiers’ difficulties,” he wrote. “And since our concern is the success of the collective in the war, the Torah permitted [soldiers] to satisfy the evil urge under the conditions it stipulated for the sake of the collective’s success.” (The Times of Israel, 20.7.2016). With spiritual guidance like this, Sde Teiman becomes less surprising.

Only 4% of Israeli Jews feel that their army has gone too far in its war on Gaza, according to the latest research by Washington-based Pew Research Center.

The communications team at Pew responded to questions to drill down a bit – separating the views of Arab and Palestinian citizens of Israel (about 20%) from Jewish citizens. The numbers are depressing.

+Only 4% of Israeli Jews feel the IDF has “gone too far”.

+ 42% of Israeli Jews say the IDF “has not gone far enough”.

+The real number may be higher because 7% refused to answer these questions.

What is equally harrowing is that the governments of the West are turning their backs on Palestinian suffering. It is something the governments of Australia, New Zealand and the

West in general have done for generations prior to October 7. It demands an answer to two fundamental questions.

Who are you? What do you stand for? These are possibly the two most important questions any person or any society should ask themselves. They generate insight into core values and identity. Our leaders are telling us that we “share values” with the Israelis. That’s why we share intelligence with them, are helping by attacking the Houthis, welcome Israelis at the Olympics, trade with them, welcome their soldiers as tourists, and in so many ways participate in the commission of genocide.

The Knesset recently voted – with only the Arab parties opposing – for a resolution declaring the two state solution dead and buried.

The Israeli assassination in Tehran this week of Ismail Haniyeh, the leader on the Hamas side of the hostage negotiations, was designed to snuff out any chance of peace. Choosing to kill him in Iran on the very day of the inauguration of that country’s new President sent a clear signal. President Masoud Pezeshkian had stated that he wants to avoid war and try to settle the region down. Iran will now feel compelled to respond.

Veteran Palestinian leaders like Dr Hanan Ashwari despair when they look at Western complicity in Israel and America’s crimes. “Gangster style assassinations and extra-judicial executions are a matter of policy in Israel. The bombing of [Hezbollah military leader] Fuad Shukri in Beirut followed by the murder of Ismail Haniyyeh in Tehran are specifically designed to inflame the whole region and sabotage any chances of a deal or de-escalation. These are attacks not just on the capitals of sovereign states but also on significant leaders to ensure total provocation and destabilisation. Israel is a rogue state that represents a real & present danger globally,” she said this week.

The USA welcomed the Israeli leader last week to Congress. Netanyahu loves America; it has the best democracy that Israel can buy. He received over 50 standing ovations – nearly one a minute – from his vassals.

American economist and geopolitical commentator Professor Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University told Judge Napolitano this week:

“The position of the US in the world is in a kind of dramatic free-fall. Our foreign policy is bankrupt. There is fear [of the US], there is power, but there’s very little respect,” Sachs says. The decline started around the time of Bill Clinton’s presidency, Sachs says. “I see the last five presidents, Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump and now Biden as continuing a path of decline of the United States in international respect, in international responsibility, in lawfulness, in making the world safer.

“Biden has been one of the worst presidents in modern American history. He just led us into more and more war and conflict.”

When I was a child, born in the 1950s, I wondered, like many people, how the Nazis could have done what they did; how did ordinary people in Germany put up with it? I know the answer now because in all the countries of the West, our governments and many of our citizens have chosen silence, platitudes or complicity over solidarity and meaningful action. The Israelis are no worse than the Germans who committed genocide in Namibia in the early 20th Century, or the British who were running concentration camps in Kenya where various sado-sexual acts were performed on Mau-Mau activists (all while young Princess Elizabeth toured the country) or those who inflicted generations of atrocities on Aborigines, Maori, Kanaks and other victims of settler colonialism. Left unchecked (for example, by a responsible superpower) something happens in the human brain as entire societies slide into darkness. Stories of revival, or being the Chosen People or embodying Exceptionalism all have shadow sides and in those shadows terrible things happen to the victims of the strong.

I will give the last word to Martin Luther King. His people suffered centuries at the hands of racists, rapists, supremacists, but the struggle continued to his death and to this very day. I hope somewhere Palestinians read these words and find a glimmer of hope, an echo of solidarity in the dark night they are passing through:

“We shall overcome because Carlyle is right: No lie can live forever. We shall overcome because William Cullen Bryant is right: Truth crushed to earth will rise again. We shall overcome because James Russell Lowell is right: Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne. Yet that scaffold sways the future. We shall overcome because the Bible is right. “You shall reap what you sow.” With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope.”

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