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## *An Egregious Misreading*

Lawrence Davidson on *New York Times* columnist Thomas L. Friedman's repetition of Israeli propaganda about Oct. 7.



Israeli troops in the Gaza Strip, Nov. 2, 2023. (IDF Spokesperson's Unit, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0)

The mainline media is managed by people acculturated to their society's dominant storyline — and all the myriad prioritized sub-storylines that are supposed to explain events both domestic and foreign.

What are the consequences of this deeply rooted attachment? Well, for one thing, the resulting reporting is predictable. Nine times out of 10, it will reinforce the preconceived opinions of its readers.

Thus, if *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and every other major newspaper in the United States wants to cover the war in the Ukraine, they are not going to send out a reporter or assign an editorial writer with known sympathies with Russia or a critical stance toward NATO.

They are not even going to use someone who is neutral and likely to be even-handed. The same goes for the Middle East in general and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in particular.

In other words, American media works hard, often in the face of contrary evidence, to maintain a worldview that does not range beyond popular ideological limits.

Here is a notable example:

“Thomas L. Friedman is an internationally renowned author, reporter and columnist. He is the recipient of three Pulitzer Prizes — two for international reporting from the Middle East and a third for his columns written about 9/11. He is the author of seven *New York Times* bestsellers.”

When it comes to support for Israel, nothing in his corpus would suggest that Friedman ever had an unconventional thought. Not despite, but because of this, he has ended up the editorial writer on foreign relations (with special concentration in the Middle East) for *The New York Times*.

He, his paper, and no doubt most of his readers, are all traveling a predictable ideological path despite the fact that it often does not reflect reality. Let's see how this is presently working out.

### **Posing Questions**



Friedman in Davos in 2022. (World Economic Forum / Benedikt von Loebell, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Now that we have passed the one-year anniversary of the Oct. 7, 2023, mini-invasion of Israel, Friedman, writing in *The New York Times*, poses a question to all his readers:

“What would your country do if terrorists crossed your western border and killed, maimed, kidnapped or sexually abused hundreds of Israelis they encountered [note he goes from ‘your country’ to ‘Israelis’ automatically] and the next day their Hezbollah allies sent rockets over your northern border, driving away thousands of civilians?”

Friedman then elaborates in a way that at once repeats and reinforces a status quo Western perspective.

“Israel is in terrible danger. It is fighting *the most just war in its history* — responding to the brutal, *unprovoked* murder and abduction of women and children and grandparents by Hamas” (my italics).

Friedman’s question holds a number of questionable and incorrect assertions:

- (1) one can seriously question the characterization of the Oct. 7 invaders as “terrorists.”
- (2) One can be reminded that many of those “killed and maimed” were the victims of Israeli helicopter gunships following the “Hannibal directive.”
- (3) One can point out that there is no hard forensic evidence for a policy of “sexual abuse” on the part of the the Palestinian fighters.
- (4) It is factually untrue that the Oct. 7 action was “unprovoked” and that Israel’s genocidal retaliation constitutes a “just” war. Indeed, these last two assertions are so historically wrong that they mark just how low this famous journalist has fallen — low enough to call an ongoing genocide “just.”

Nonetheless, the vast majority of Friedman’s readers are likely to willfully believe the propagandistic assertions that the Israelis have spun about that day, and which Friedman now

repeats. All of this matches nicely with a Zionist worldview built up in the U.S. since before 1948.

Let's turn the tables. How about if we reword Friedman's question so as to match the worldview of the Palestinians. This is how it might read:

“What would you do if your territory was invaded by a bunch of armed and violent aggressors, backed by a major power? The aggressors say your land is really their land and they then produce a detailed myth as ‘evidence.’

Then they begin to force you and your neighbors out of the area, or corral you into reservations. They deny you any economic development and periodically subject you to pogroms. Every time you try to negotiate with them, they present you with purposely extreme demands. What would you do?”



Jaramana Refugee Camp in Damascus, Syria, established after the Palestinian Catastrophe, or Nakba, 1948. (Public domain, Wikimedia Commons)

You can see that the answer to the reworded question is likely to be very different from the one Friedman posed. Unfortunately, the reworded question, though historically accurate, is unlikely to ever occur to either Friedman or most of his readers. They are that culturally confined to one worldview.

Thus, like so many Zionists (Jewish and otherwise), Friedman seems incapable of seeing the Palestinians' fate as of equal importance to that of the Israeli Jews. That is, equal in civil/political and human rights. He unwittingly does an end-run around this blind spot by favoring a “two state solution.”

However, such a solution will not produce equal independence because the Israelis are certain to demand that such a state be a demilitarized Bantustan, its borders and air space controlled by Israel and, soon enough it would be reduced to an economic appendage of Israel.

It is significant that the only right the Palestinians can presently practice is the right of an oppressed people to resist their oppressors. And, in order to rob that right of its moral fiber, the Zionists always refer to the Palestinians as “the terrorists.”

### **The Rotten Apple Premise**

Friedman hasn't got anything nice to say about Prime Minister Netanyahu and his government, either.

“Bibi has prioritized his personal political security over Israel's national security. And for months, he's been spinning the world and his own people to disguise it,” he says.

Actually, that makes Netanyahu an above average power hungry politician and leaves aside the fact that his political allies (who Friedman calls “crazies”) are as typical of the Zionist/Israeli world as their more secular, and allegedly more sober counterparts.

For Friedman, what the Israelis need is a leader who can plan things out better than Netanyahu. A government capable of planning beyond military mayhem. But, is this really probable?

Truth is that, unless you are among the minority who prioritize the release of the hostages (and thus demand a cease fire), you are supportive of Netanyahu's nonstop genocidal tactics in Gaza.



Netanyahu addressing the U.N. General Assembly on Sept. 27. (UN Photo/Evan Schneider)

In truth, this war is about a lot more than Netanyahu's corruption, it is about squaring a circle. Israel cannot be both Jewish and “democratic” as long as the Palestinians have political and civil rights.

So you have to deny them rights, ethnically cleanse them or just slaughter them if they resist you violently. Israel's present prime minister is not a rotten apple in an otherwise wholesome barrel. He is rather a manifestation of a barrel gone rotten at least since 1948.

### **Conspiracy Theory**

Friedman cannot handle this sort of analysis so he instead asserts that it is Netanyahu's stupidity that caused the current mess. He argues that the prime minister walked into a trap that has led to a deterioration of discipline of the Israeli military.

"The Israeli military operation there just starts to look like endless killing for killing's sake." And also, has initiated a sort of brain drain—"stay that course, and Israel's most talented people will start to leave." Then, Friedman adds, "that is just what Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran want."

We are now getting to Friedman's conspiracy theory. In his view, this whole present episode, with its tens of thousands dead, is a setup designed and directed by Iran.

"You see, I have never had any illusions about the macro reasons this war happened. It is the unfolding of an Iranian grand strategy to slowly destroy the Jewish state, weaken America's Arab allies and undermine U.S. influence in the region."

He then adds some details:

"The Iranian-Hamas counterstrategy [to the perceived process of Arab recognition of Israel] was to ignite a ring of fire around Israel, using Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, pro-Iranian Shiite militias in Iraq and West Bank militants armed by Iran with weapons smuggled through Jordan.

The Iranian strategy is exquisite from Tehran's point of view: Destroy Israel by sacrificing as many Palestinians and Lebanese as necessary but never risk a single Iranian life. The Iranians are ready to die to the last Lebanese, the last Palestinian, the last Syrian and the last Yemeni to eliminate Israel."

This is an egregious misreading of the situation. A misreading based on the assumptions that the apartheid nature of the state of Israel, its 76 years of oppression of the Palestinians, its multigenerational education of Jewish Israelis to the belief that Palestinian resistance was equivalent to a Nazi-like anti-Semitism, had nothing to do with either the Oct. 7 incursion or the genocidal nature of Israel's response.

All of which, in fact, hardly needed Iranian machinations to get things going.

### **Betrayal of History's Lessons**

Thomas Friedman fears that, if things continue as is, "the Israel you knew will be gone forever." This statement is the product of Friedman's one dimensional understanding of

Israel. It is an historically decontextualized understanding. Friedman's (allegedly civilized and better) "Israel you knew" never really existed. It was always an illusion, though obviously a stubborn one.

The present behavior of Israel is not an exception to that of an alleged more moderate and sane Israel. It is rather the logical behavior of a state organized around an ethnocentric ideal and established at the cost of dispossessing another people.

The Holocaust, as a basically European occurrence, is no excuse for this dispossession. Anti-Semitism, also a basically European phenomenon, is no excuse. Indeed, the act of dispossession carried out by the Zionists is a betrayal of the lessons that should have been learned from their own history of victimhood.

Instead of learning those lessons, they have instead chosen to replicate the behavior of their past persecutors: pursuing pogroms and genocidal policies. To these historical factors, Thomas Friedman appears blind. This is, no doubt, the same for his editors and most of his readers. Ergo, the blind leading the blind.

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