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## Why White Americans see the Brutality of Hamas but do not see the Brutalities Inflicted on the Palestinians

By: Tabish Khair

*The reason why many decent Americans do not see the tragedy of the Palestinians is that Israel is doing to Palestine what white Americans did to the Native Americans.*

Hamas committed the first blunder: by attacking Israel with shocking brutality. The US President, Joe Biden, committed the second blunder, by condemning the attack in words that offered Israel a kind of carte blanche to go marauding into Gaza, and maybe elsewhere too, in retaliation. Strong condemnation of the brutal Hamas attack was absolutely necessary, but it did not need to include encouragement to hawkish Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to commit brutalities in return. Biden could have instead used American clout and power to bring the Hamas leadership to book for their act of terror.

But instead, after indicating to Israel that it can essentially do anything in retaliation, Biden also sent off a large consignment of ammunition to Israel. It has become habitual for the US to spend its citizens' taxes on weapons, produced by its huge arms industry, to be liberally distributed around the world. Hence, this consignment was perhaps taken as a normal gesture by the US: Santa Claus and his gifts to his friends. But, examined closely, it was a strange gesture, because Israel does not lack weapons, and it is also a significant producer of arms. It exports them too. Maybe Biden meant it to be a reassuring gesture, but he must be a very naïve politician if he thought that Israel would not consider it a clear invitation to invade Gaza, no matter what the humanitarian consequences.

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A kind of cowboy attitude, both guns drawn and handed over to your pardner, seems to be widespread among Americans. As I write this, on the eighth day of the Israel-Hamas war, when Israel seems to be preparing to invade Gaza on the ground after pounding it relentlessly by air, I find CNN mostly talking to military strategists and Israeli officers. A couple of times when I caught a glimpse of Palestinians on CNN, they were presented as shouting, weeping, fleeing masses. I switched to Danish TV, and immediately, along with the coverage of a moving memorial held for the Israeli dead in the synagogue in Copenhagen, there was also an interview with Palestinians in Denmark who have lost family members in Gaza. They were talking – like Israelis do on CNN – in a rational way. One of them spoke against hate. Another one said that ordinary people should not be confused with militants. I had spent more time watching CNN, but I had not heard such Palestinian voices. All the individualized voices of suffering had been Israelis or their relatives in the US, while Palestinians had appeared only as shouting, weeping, gesturing, fleeing masses.

Perhaps encouraged by such American leadership and coverage, a very decent and unprejudiced American friend said to me: “Palestinians are so full of hate. If I had a choice, I would give Palestinians in Gaza a visa to get out, and then bomb all the ones who chose to stay.” I pointed out that let alone Palestinians, even poor Indians have trouble getting visas to many countries.

Why is it, I wondered, that so many decent Americans see the deplorable and explosive brutality of Hamas, but do not see the slow and consistent brutality of Israel against Palestinians?

But then I realized that a lot of white Americans on social media and elsewhere seemed to be thinking like my friend. Surely, I thought, it could not just be because they are possessors of such a powerful passport, and can mostly travel freely to any country, except four or five countries where Americans have decided to give Santa Claus gifts of arms to one of the local warring parties. Why is it, I wondered, that so many decent Americans see the deplorable and explosive brutality of Hamas, but do not see the slow and consistent brutality of Israel against Palestinians? This does not just include the slow grabbing of lands and consistent discrimination against Palestinians, it also involves regular mortalities. Just a couple of weeks before Hamas stupidly and brutally attacked Israel, the United Nation's Humanitarian Office (OCHA) had announced that “the number of Palestinians killed in the West Bank and Israel by Israeli forces so far in 2023 (172) has surpassed the total number killed in all of 2022 (155).”

Then the answer struck me. Of course, many white Americans will not see that side of the tragedy, because in order to see what is happening between Palestinians and Israel today, they will have to own up to their own past. In some ways, Israel is doing to Palestinians exactly what white Americans did to Native Americans. It is not coincidental either that many of the Europeans who moved to America and dispossessed American Indians were also on a religious migration and often thought of the new world as a kind of promised land.

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And what did they do? They essentially pushed Native Americans into smaller and more congested areas, and whenever Native Americans fought back, they were struck down with much stronger and disproportionate force. There was a time when, for many white Americans, “the only good Indian was a dead Indian.” The process is essentially what has been and is being replicated by Israel with Palestinians. For the hawks in Israel “the only good Palestinian is a dead Palestinian.”

And Biden, inadvertently or not, has essentially told them to go ahead with it. Maybe he was not aware of the repercussions of his words and gestures, for he does seem to be a doddering old man at times. Maybe he thought it was a good option in the light of the forthcoming elections. Maybe he believed that it would solve the problem, and I do not blame him if he is tired of organisations like Hamas, which seem to learn nothing from the past and keep banging the collective Palestinian head against the same bloody stone wall. But whatever the reason and whatever the consequence, I am afraid that Biden will appear to many to be not that different from Bush Junior, who had a good purpose too – Saddam Hussain was a murderous dictator – but who created a bigger mess in the process. A lot of people who are supporting his “clear stance” today will be less willing to owe up to it in five years. But, of course, the people who will suffer most won’t be them – or Americans.

A great opportunity to reduce and perhaps eliminate Hamas as a political factor, with global and even Arab support, was lost because US and its allies publicly handed the guns of retribution to an Israeli regime not famous for its restraint or commitment to peace

Maybe USA cannot help messing up the rest of the world until it finally and truly faces up to its own messed up past, its occluded genocides, its convenient lack of introspection. The ghosts of the American past, as we always know in gothic stories, seem to return as monsters – but because the US is the only global power today, they end up haunting all of us, alas! And decent Americans, like my friend, cannot see this, because they still cannot fully understand why Native Americans wanted to live in their own ancestral lands, and why Palestinians want to live in Gaza.

Maybe they are not to be blamed. After all, you can be American in almost any city in the world today. It is actually more difficult for a Dane to be Danish in Copenhagen, an Indian to be Indian in Mumbai or a Nigerian to be Nigerian in Nairobi, than for an American to be American in all such metropolises!

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