**[Can we fight Zionism, not Jews?](https://www.dawn.com/news/1780257/can-we-fight-zionism-not-jews)**

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ANYONE who is familiar with the history of Spain under Muslim rule before the 1492 Catholic pushback — and there’s an excellent body of work on the theme by Tariq Ali — could not miss the intermingling of Jewish, Christian and Muslim cultures in a cornucopia of art, literature and philosophy at its zenith.

One was sadly reminded of that slice of history in the face of the needless pain and trauma coming with the uptick in the bloodletting between the people that once represented a blessing to humanity.

The Hamas [attack](https://www.dawn.com/news/1780296/israel-imposes-blockade-in-bid-to-starve-palestinians) on Israel has left over 700 people, overwhelmingly Jewish, dead. The unkindest cut was the reported killing of 260 revellers at a musical jamboree.

The right-wing government of Israel is, of course, singularly responsible for provoking the attack. It has allowed the sacred Al Aqsa Mosque to be desecrated by Jewish extremists.

Its troops have been killing Palestinians at will in Gaza and in the West Bank and allowing settlers to plunder more land with impunity. Prisoners at Delhi’s Tihar Jail are treated with more respect than are Palestinians in the open prison that the Gaza Strip is.

Christian worshippers too have not been spared in the new Israel, being spat upon by zealots in some kind of invented tradition. Netanyahu is pursuing several agendas, not excluding his personal reprieve, at least for now, from the judicial sword hanging over his head.

Narrow Israeli nationalism is out for revenge, and the consequence for the Palestinians could be unspeakably horrific.

On the other hand, the daybreak blitzkrieg has jolted the state of Israel and severely embarrassed Prime Minister Netanyahu. How did the celebrated Israeli intelligence miss the Hamas assault?

And how did Israel allow an unforgivable number of its men and women, apparently including military personnel, to be driven or simply walked across the wall and into the Gaza Strip as hostages?

We knew that Israel’s greatest ally, the US with its own fabled intelligence apparatus, was caught napping on crucial occasions on its watch, including the weekend carnage in occupied Ashkelon.

US intelligence lapses that come to mind include most obviously the Iranian revolution, which saw scores of American diplomats being taken hostage; the ground-changing [Indian nuclear tests](https://www.dawn.com/news/875481/india-s-nuclear-tests) of 1998; and of course, the daylight [attack](https://www.dawn.com/news/1645741) with hijacked planes on the World Trade Centre.

As we write 2,000 have been [killed](https://www.dawn.com/news/1780266/hunt-for-survivors-in-afghan-quake-rubble) far away from the headlines in Afghanistan’s Herat region in a devastating earthquake. Again, this is the country where the US abandoned its vacuous promise of liberating Afghan women and ushering democracy, a terrible intelligence goof-up.

In what ways is Gaza different from Ukraine? Both are fighting brutal occupation, but treated very differently.

How sincere are those who are courting Israel today but whose history from Martin Luther to Shakespeare is peppered with scorn for Jewish people.

India’s Hindutva ideologues, embracing Israel today, given their shared love of Islamophobia, openly celebrated Hitler. They prescribed the treatment meted out to Jews in Germany for Indian Muslims. The solidarity with Israel does not go unrewarded. A host of Indian journalists and opposition leaders found their mobile phones infected with Israeli-manufactured Pegasus malware.

Was the Indian state spying on its fellow citizens with Israel’s help? Saturday’s outrage revealed a truer reality: that Israel may know more about the private lives of distant Indian hacks and politicians but evidently less about the sullen mood turning into a lethal brew in its own backyard.

So, what is at stake? The fallout under such circumstances always has both intended and unintended features. The Hamas action disrupted moves for a Saudi-Israeli rapprochement, and prompted poll-bound President Biden to promise military and diplomatic support to Tel Aviv, moving some battleships closerto Israel’sseashore.

In so doing, Biden unwittingly raised a key question: in what ways is Gaza different from Ukraine? Both are fighting brutal occupation, but treated very differently.

Biden may remember how his fellow Democrat Jimmy Carter was trolled when he wrote a book years ago describing Israel’s treatment of Palestinians as apartheid.

At the same time, Carter was also hated by Iran’s clerical regime, so much so that they contrived with Ronald Reagan to have him defeated in the 1980 election.

This and similar ironies have no doubt impeded a long-overdue resolution to the Palestinian question. A feature of the lingering miasma is the unabated bad blood, which vested interests have continued to pour into the Palestine-Israel question.

Carter deleted a misleading word in the book to vacate the slim possibility of his being seen as a supporter of violence, but he stayed with the description of apartheid.

He, too, would have strongly disapproved of the daybreak attack by Hamas against its powerful neighbour. It’s a huge tragedy without any ifs or buts. Yet, that’s not the way supporters of Palestine — though not necessarily of Hamas — would see it.

Such supporters include leading Jewish intellectuals in Israel, in the US and Europe. A swathe of ordinary people from across the globe but overwhelmingly from the Global South are poring over the double standards they have always noted in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Ilan Pappe, a Jewish historian veers close to the idea of seeing the problem whose shards not for the first time hit world capitals at the weekend, as settler colonialism.

In a collection of essays and interviews with Noam Chomsky in a volume titled On Palestine, Pappe spelt out the idea: “The application of this definition — settler colonialism — to the case of Zionism is now quite common in the academic world and has politically enabled activists to see more clearly the resemblance of the case of Israel and Palestine to South Africa and to equate the fate of the Palestinians with that of the Native Americans.”

Seeing a distinction between Zionism and Judaism could thus be a step towards undercutting the right-wing yearning for mindless violence, which extracts a brutal toll on both sides without offering a vision for the future.

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