**Rape, Israeli Charges and World Media**

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In the aftermath of October 7th, the acknowledgement of sexual violence in war is crucial, and if it occurred, it must be condemned and the perpetrators held accountable. The BBC and CNN reported that a UN Team suggested Hamas fighters likely committed sexual violence in Israel on that day. However, it’s essential to note that the UN team held no meetings with Hamas, and no victims came forward.

The BBC’s attempt to provide balance includes direct quotes from the UN report, stating that some allegations of rape and sexual violence couldn’t be verified or were deemed “unfounded.” Notably, the report mentioned difficulties in establishing a discernible pattern of genital mutilation.

The pursuit of truth and justice regarding the events of that day is paramount, emphasizing the need for a balanced narrative while acknowledging the challenges in obtaining verifiable information.

In simpler terms, some of the allegations have been proven false, and none have been confirmed as true. Examining CNN and BBC’s methodology is crucial. The source of the information is a UN report issued on March 4th by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

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It’s important to note that the UN report acknowledges that the evidence falls below the standard of “beyond reasonable doubt.” Many victims and witnesses couldn’t be interviewed due to relocations within Israel and to other countries, along with some first responders being unavailable due to military deployments, rendering the findings inconclusive.

The report highlights inconsistencies among people from Kibbutz Be’eri, with some retracting earlier statements. The UN was unable to establish whether sexual violence had occurred in Kibbutz Be’eri, emphasizing the uncertainty. While the possibility of rape is not ruled out, the report categorically states that “no tangible indications of rape could be identified.” Additionally, no digital evidence specifically depicting acts of sexual violence was found in open-source indicators, making the complete removal of all traces unlikely given the extensive circulation of information.

In evaluating the events of October 7th, there is indeed a contradiction between reported violence and Hamas’s official response. While circumstantial evidence suggests possible sexual violence and mutilations, Hamas asserts a commitment to avoiding harm to civilians, especially vulnerable groups.

The chaotic nature of conflicts makes it challenging to ascertain the precise sequence of events. The presence of partially clothed bodies raises questions, yet the context of a high-intensity conflict with an imminent military response adds complexity. It’s a delicate balance between acknowledging the potential for violence and considering the practicalities of fighters engaging in such actions amidst ongoing hostilities.

Regardless of what transpired on October 7th, a critical review of sources becomes imperative, acknowledging the complexity of information in conflict situations.

The UN is always a good starting place and a search on their website is a good indicator that things in Gaza are not as Israelis, Western Mainstream media and many Western politicians would like us to believe. Article after article, report after report the wording is worrying. Examples include Fear for Gaza; A humanitarian crisis; Catastrophic and unconscionable shameful conditions in Gaza; Lifesaving medical care collapsing; and Babies perishing. I could go on but the UN messages are clear, Israel is behaving in an inhuman and overly aggressive manner. The International Court of Justice has described this as a “plausible genocide”.

A plausible genocide could stop today if there was a ceasefire but the US has told the UN that a ceasefire isn’t needed, what’s needed is sensitive negotiations. The US is the only country that has vetoed a ceasefire, it is seemingly not interested in cessation despite Joe Biden’s claims last week that one was imminent.

Hamas representatives are currently in Egypt waiting to talk about how to achieve this, while Israel’s leaders are in Tel-Aviv, having decided not to attend the meeting that Joe Biden told us, over ice cream, was so close to a ceasefire that it would happen as soon as yesterday – it didn’t! And despite this development, on Saturday, Vice President Harris called on Hamas and not on Israel, to agree to an immediate ceasefire.

The US is still sending aid, still sending troops to the region, still reporting in all their mainstream media that Hamas are the guilty party but while this is happening, their citizens are not so convinced. Just over a month ago, public opinion in the US was that over half the population thought Israel had gone too far. This is not a popular war; Every weekend, tens of thousands of protesters gather and march through cities throughout the USA and other parts of the world. Their calls for immediate peace are ignored

Aaron Bushnell became a global talking point “I’m an active-duty member of the United States Air Force, and I will no longer be complicit in genocide” was his message and “Free Palestine” were his final words. Anyone who has seen the harrowing video of his self-immolation cannot but imagine the physical pain he endured and the mental anguish that led him to that point. Something many veterans, and service military personnel must also be feeling. Georgetown University reports the results of polls are moving higher into the “opposing” camp as time goes on, more and more Americans are in favour of a ceasefire despite the view that the cause of the current conflict is predominantly Hamas actions on 7 October. Even the US public, normally inured to violence in the Middle East, is creating a wind of change.

But the Administration are not so sensitive to these shifting nuances as Kamala Harris and called for Hamas, not Israel, to agree to an immediate ceasefire as recently as Saturday.

The US are correct in one aspect, “sensitive negotiations” are needed. However, for the reported 71,700 injured people and the families and friends of the 30,410 already dead and thousands missing those sensitive negotiations can wait – an immediate cessation of the conditions allowing the deaths, injuries, hunger and thirst of the people who remain in Gaza must surely take priority.

*The writer is a freelance columnist.*