**[They called Mandela a terrorist](https://www.dawn.com/news/1785167/they-called-mandela-a-terrorist)**

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WHEN the lights suddenly go off, we mostly lean on our primordial instincts to negotiate the darkened room with memory of passage through the maze of obstacles and locate, say, a candle.

Memory can similarly help sift fact from fiction of the tragedy unfolding in the darkened Gaza Strip where Israel is killing and displacing an occupied people and muffling their remonstrations to an outraged world.

It’s an old tactic though, experienced in Jammu and Kashmir, and more recently in [Manipur](https://www.dawn.com/news/1774017) in India. It’s another matter that it could never deter the keen observer from gleaning the facts, some chilling and forbidding, others pulsating with life and hope.

This Saturday would mark 28 years since Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination. The Israeli prime minister was killed by a Jewish gunman on Nov 4, 1995, at a peace rally in Tel Aviv. The killer, an angry law student, belonged to a pack of right-wing Israelis, including those that currently rule the country, who opposed the Oslo peace accords.

Rabin signed the pact with Yasser Arafat in 1993, and Bill Clinton presided over the ceremony that offered land to Palestinians in the West Bank. And though it wasn’t the greatest remedy to vacate Israel’s occupation of Palestinian homeland, Oslo, at least, took a step in the direction.

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To rub salt into the wounds of its opponents, Rabin and Arafat got the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize together with Israel’s then foreign minister Shimon Peres “for their effort to create peace in the Middle East”.

The stage was set for ensuing mayhem. It would reveal itself over the next decades in the daily killings and dislocation of Palestinian civilians by Jewish settlers, nudged and armed by those who opposed the Oslo rapprochement.

Benjamin Netanyahu, the current Israeli prime minister, opposed Oslo and has been frequently accused of complicity in Rabin’s murder, not directly but in a manner that resembles charges against the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) for the assassination of Gandhiji at a prayer meeting in Delhi in 1948.

The RSS got the proverbial clean chit in the plot. But Hindutva’s all-time favourite icon from the Congress party, Sardar Patel, did note that Gandhi’s murder “was welcomed by those of the RSS and the Mahasabha who were strongly opposed to his way of thinking”.

One such ‘way’ of Gandhi’s thinking that riles Hindutva remains enshrined in his article in Harijan of Nov 26, 1938. “Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English, or France to the French.” Patel recalled that RSS members had distributed sweets over Gandhi’s murder. What about Rabin’s death?

Observing the anniversary last year of the assassination, Israel’s Labour Party chief Merav Michaeli singled out Netanyahu and Ben Gvir, the rabid right-winger and current national security minister, for mention.

“Yitzhak Rabin was murdered in a political assassination. He was murdered in a political assassination with the cooperation of Benjamin Netanyahu and [Itamar] Ben Gvir,” Michaeli said.

The *Times of Israel* recalled that Ben Gvir captured the national limelight when he gloated as a teen about stealing an emblem from Rabin’s car a short time before the assassination. “We got to his car, and we’ll get to him, too,” he said in televised comments.

The claims are routinely denied by Netanyahu. Reports recall, however, how in the weeks before the assassination, Netanyahu, then head of the opposition, and other senior Likud members attended a right-wing political rally in Jerusalem where protesters branded Rabin a ‘traitor’, ‘murderer’, and ‘Nazi’ for signing the peace agreement with the Palestinians earlier that year. Netanyahu also marched in a Ra’anana protest as demonstrators behind him carried a mock coffin.

In the swirling darkness of Gaza, Netanyahu’s words from 2020 do shine a light on his military campaign, now into its fourth week. “I asserted my right to express a different position. It was not only my right, but also my duty,” he said at the time. “I vehemently opposed the calls of ‘traitor’ directed towards [Rabin] but I thought he was wrong and mistaken in the direction he took. It was an error to make peace with the enemy.”

Had making peace with ‘the enemy’ been such a revolting idea, we would be still watching unending violence over Ireland, while the Irish Republican Army would remain damned as a terrorist group by those that now embrace it. Remember also that Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan had both decried African National Congress and Nelson Mandela as terrorists. Mandela remained on the US terror watch nearly until his death.

As news from Gaza remains [blocked](https://www.dawn.com/news/1784414/civilians-in-gaza-at-unprecedented-risk-after-communication-blackout-amnesty), it’s redeeming to know that journalists are still staking their lives to present the truth from ground zero. UN workers, among others, will too bear witness as aid givers.

As we wait anxiously for independent sources from Gaza for the other side of the narrative, there is a bold interview to lean on. The intrepid Kashmiri journalist Iftikhar Gilani interviewed a Hamas spokesman for India’s respected [*Frontline*](https://frontline.thehindu.com/world-affairs/mousa-abu-marzouk-hamas-leader-interview-israel-gaza-war-crisis/article67465315.ece?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=article_share) magazine.

That should help break the silence on behalf of Gaza’s unheard and oppressed. Moussa Abu Marzouk who heads Hamas’ international relations office from Doha was asked whether the killing of Israeli civilians was not a prelude to the destruction of Gaza itself.

The stand-off did not begin on Oct 7, Marzouk reminded Gilani. Point taken. Granted the root of the problem was the decades-long occupation, why kill civilians, Marzouk was asked. He denied as propaganda the popular version of the events.

“There are false Israeli narratives about civilian deaths. According to the testimony of the Israelis who lived through the events, our freedom-fighters did not kill them. Rather, some video clips prove that the fighters cared for Israeli children. An Israeli woman said that a fighter asked her permission to take a banana and eat it. Can someone who asks for permission to eat kill civilians?” That said, we still need to keep groping in the dark for the elusive candle.

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*Published in Dawn, October 31st, 2023*