**Gaza- A Sense of Balance Missing**

**The US is the only country that has vetoed a ceasefire.**

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Starting with the premise that sexual violence in war is not uncommon, we all need to ac­knowledge that it happens, it’s ab­horrent, and must be pun­ished when it occurs. October 7th was no dif­ferent. If sexual vio­lence occurred, there is every reason to seek the perpetrators and pun­ish them, but what’s hap­pened as a result of that fate­ful day seems... no, it doesn’t seem, it IS absolutely out of balance and cannot, in any sense of decency, be accepted as a normal response, nor can it, under any definition, be described as self-defense.

Both the BBC and CNN, from ei­ther side of the Atlantic, report that a UN Team has concluded that there were most likely rapes on October 7th carried out by Hamas fighters. Hamas, of course, deny the allegations: the BBC headline reads: “UN Team says Hamas likely carried out sexual violence in Isra­el on October 7th”. But, reading on, the UN team held 33 meetings with Israelis and none with Hamas. The team admitted that not one victim came forward. Whether rapes, sex­ual violence, or mutilation of bod­ies occurred on that day is vitally important to establish and must eventually be done; perpetrators must be held responsible, but bal­ance needs to be brought to the narrative, and the BBC is not very good at doing this. While there was undoubtedly violence against in­nocents and there is circumstan­tial evidence that sexual violence took place, there is also “limit­ed evidence” that mutilations oc­curred, including decapitation or attempts to decapitate.

[Plantation drive started in South Waziristan](https://www.nation.com.pk/12-Mar-2024/plantation-drive-started-in-south-waziristan)

The official response from Hamas gives a very different story: Our Nar­rative… Operation Al Aqsa Flood states that: “Avoiding harm to civil­ians, especially children, women, and elderly people is a religious and moral commitment by all the Al-Qa­ssam Brigades’ fighters.” So, there is a direct contradiction. So many bodies were found partially clothed that it’s hard to believe nothing of a violent sexual nature happened, but in a conflict, when there are hun­dreds of people running around shooting at hundreds of others, and a massive response from the Israe­li military was imminently antici­pated, it’s equally as hard to believe fighters took the time to stop, par­ticipate in rapes, and then contin­ue their slaughter. Notwithstand­ing what did or did not happen on 7th October, we must, at least for the time being, critically review our sources. The UN is always a good starting place, and a search on their own 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.

[New PDMA DG Irfan Ali Kathia assumes charge](https://www.nation.com.pk/12-Mar-2024/new-pdma-dg-irfan-ali-kathia-assumes-charge)

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; 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 which could stop today if there was a ceasefire, but the US has told the UN that a cease­fire isn’t needed; what’s needed are 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.

[Awareness walk on violence against women](https://www.nation.com.pk/12-Mar-2024/awareness-walk-on-violence-against-women)

The US is still sending aid, still sending troops to the region, still reporting in all their mainstream media that Hamas is 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. Clearly, 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 favor of a ceasefire despite the view that the cause of the cur­rent conflict being predominantly Hamas actions on 7th October.

[38 arrested, 54 cases registered over profiteering](https://www.nation.com.pk/12-Mar-2024/38-arrested-54-cases-registered-over-profiteering)

Even the US public, normally in­ured to violence in the Middle East, are creating a wind of change. But the Administration is 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 is 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.

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