**In the shadows of occupation**

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Several days ago, a surprise and well-coordinated attack on Israel by the Palestinian militant group Hamas, drew renewed global attention to the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict that has troubled the Middle East for many decades.

This conflict has a longstanding and complicated history, and involves a complex web of grievances, tensions, political, historical and territorial disputes that extend far beyond the actions of any one group. It predates the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. The territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea is claimed by both Palestinians and Israelis, with profound religious significance for Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike. Over the past 70 years, this contested region has experienced periods of war, uprisings, and occasionally, brief moments of hope for potential compromises. However, that is no longer the case.

The recent Hamas assault has received significant global attention, with the US, EU and Britain condemning the attacks while pledging support to Israel. However, the destruction in Gaza and the tragic loss of thousands of Palestinian lives, including many children in Israeli airstrikes, have been notably underreported all across Western media.

The claim of Israel’s right to self-defence has been used to justify these actions, which has sparked intense debate and led to contrasting perspectives, and more troublingly, unfolded a humanitarian crisis that has escalated to a level of destruction and suffering unseen before.

Just three days into the fighting, Israeli commanders declared they had gained control of the border around the Gaza Strip and were preparing major military action “to change the reality” there. The situation is indeed as ruthless as it sounds, and in fact even more frightful than is foreseeable by any one of us.

Come to think of it, you can blame Hamas for many things, but you absolutely cannot absolve Israel of its horrific choices. In conflicts as such, a declaration of war typically involves two sides, fully equipped with military capabilities. In the present case, the Palestinian territories, particularly Gaza, lack even the most basic resources like water, shelter, and most importantly, critical medical care that is required to equip them to face and combat the kind of gruesome attacks that are being launched against them.

What is indisputable is that one of the world’s most well-funded militaries is attempting to justify a severe military response to an isolated incident of violence within a settler colonial state. Not only does this raise serious concerns about the proportionality and humanitarian impact of the actions taken but is also a gross violation of international human rights law. According to a Unicef report, hundreds of children have been killed as a result of the Israeli airstrikes. “Hundreds and hundreds of children have been killed and injured. Every hour in Gaza the number of children killed rises. The killing of children must stop.”

What any reasonable individual should readily acknowledge is that the Israeli government, under its current policies, is engaging in actions that could very well be categorized as being equivalent to ethnic cleansing. They have been carrying out extensive bombings within Gaza, with a devastating impact on the civilian population, half of which comprises children under the age of fifteen, with families being wiped out entirely from the prospects of any future life, even before they had the chance to fully experience the richness of life in its truest form.

The Western media’s role in this situation is indeed a matter of concern. Reporting has been conspicuously biased, lacking impartiality, and repeatedly dismissing the horrific events unfolding within Gaza by the minute. Palestinians are enduring extreme hardship, to an extent beyond comprehension, as they lack access to even the most basic of amenities required for survival, while grappling with the relentless attacks being carried out within their homeland - living in constant fear, starving, injured, orphaned, and under the threat of an occupying government intent on nothing less than their complete annihilation.

This harsh reality requires a global call to action, urging everyone, particularly those in positions of power, to break the silence and rightfully acknowledge the atrocities being committed without any accountability, whatsoever. It is a plea for humanity, urging the world to translate concern into tangible action.

Every innocent life is precious on either side of the field, but to brutally take the lives of hundreds and thousands of innocent children, depriving them of their childhood and the opportunity to grow up like any other child around the world, all in the name of protecting and defending an oppressor state, constitutes a grave violation of international humanitarian law and qualifies as a war crime.

Times have changed and the world today is wiser, many no longer blind to the true face of the oppressor. These are difficult times, and within this complex reality, a sad reality that we live in, it becomes evident that it often takes a full-scale ‘counter’ attack by those who have endured decades of oppression to awaken global awareness to the long-standing suffering of the Palestinian people.

Regrettably, even in the face of these particular realities, numerous world leaders continue to provide unwavering support to those wielding immense power, effectively condoning actions that have resulted in the loss of innocent lives of those, whose tragic fate was simply belonging to a state they once called their homeland.

It remains essential to prioritize peace and the protection of civilians, irrespective of the political and diplomatic intricacies that surround this enduring conflict. This is the time to act. To educate ourselves. As we find ourselves within our homes, one of the most meaningful steps we can take is to educate ourselves with the right side of history. To simply be aware.

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