

## **Olga Stefan**

### **Some considerations on resistance, terrorism and where we stand as human beings in the face of horror**

On October 13, five days after the largest terrorist attack on Israeli soil (0.017% of the population was killed in comparison to 9/11 when .0009% was killed), I posted on Facebook a message decrying those on the left that have not condemned Hamas for its terrorist activities against Israeli civilians (children, women, the elderly), its oppression of Gazans, and its dedication to theocratic fascism. I called for a condemnation of all parties that were guilty of war crimes by name, – that means both Hamas and Israel – for the immediate unconditional release of the hostages, and for a return to peace talks. Left-wing leaders like Corbyn, who years ago actually called Hamas his friends, and diem25 have not mustered the courage to call a spade a spade: namely to articulate the terrorist nature of Hamas as an organization. What they have done, however, is to represent Hamas's actions as a legitimate form of resistance to Israeli occupation, highlighting exclusively Israeli crimes and ignoring in entirety the murderous actions of Hamas now and along the years. How is it possible that self-proclaimed left-wing socialists claim that a fascist theocratic organization



that terrorizes its own population, kills the LGBT community in Gaza, tortures dissidents, shoots Gazan anti-Hamas protesters, performs a legitimate form of resistance? Where is the solidarity of these so-called left-wing pro-Palestinians with Gazans who have been protesting all year against the terror they are faced with daily under the Hamas regime? After spending significant amount of time on diem25's and Corbyn's website and Facebook posts, I did not find even one post expressing solidarity with Gazans trying to liberate themselves from the fascist yoke of Hamas.

There have been various theories circulating about the reasons behind the terror attacks on October 7. The Hamas political leadership based in Doha, Qatar, interested in rallying Arab public opinion, at first claimed

that the attacks were a response to the Al-Aqsa events and the violence of Jewish settlers and Israeli military against Palestinians in the West Bank. The “years of oppression” argument is endorsed by Corbyn, diem25 and their supporters, Turkey, a country that has been conducting attacks against Kurds for decades, as well as by theocratic Arab countries, many of which are involved themselves in atrocious military campaigns against other Arab civilians. This argument has been repeated so often that anyone who considers himself anyone adopts it un-analytically to explain Palestinian outrage, but actually ends up justifying terrorism (the **purposeful** targeting of mainly civilians to achieve political goals).

Examples of this rhetoric can be found in the statements of academics like Zareena Grewal, who, a day after Hamas’s terror attack wrote that “Palestinians have every right to resist through armed struggle, solidarity”, a Black Lives Matter Chicago post claiming "when a people have been subject to decades of apartheid and unimaginable violence, their resistance must not be condemned, but understood as a desperate act of self-defense, the BDS movement’s official response: “BDS movement supports the Palestinian freedom fighters in their struggle against Israeli apartheid. We believe that the heroic actions of Hamas fighters against the

occupying forces are reasonable in their quest to liberate their stolen lands. The aggression of the Zionists occupiers has been met with a deserved response - Justified use of armed resistance against the oppressors' military and civilians,” Nerdeen Kiswani who stated, “by any means necessary. If you support Palestine understand that necessitates supporting our right to defend ourselves and liberate our homeland by any means necessary....Freedom has only ever been achieved through resistance,” or Normal Finkelstein who wrote on October 7, “.. if we honor the Jews who revolted in the Warsaw Ghetto—then moral consistency commands that we honor the heroic resistance in Gaza. I, for one, will never begrudge—on the contrary, it warms every fiber of my soul—the scenes of Gaza’s smiling children as their arrogant Jewish supremacist oppressors have, finally, been humbled.” All of these examples, among the thousands that have recently come up, substitute the terms freedom fighters, resisters, and liberators for terrorists.

So, is it reasonable to conflate justified Palestinian outrage at the injustices inflicted on them by Israel in the West Bank and Gaza with terrorism, and thereby justify it? Are armed struggle, popular resistance and terrorism the same thing? Can we claim that the conditions in Gaza, i.e. poverty, Israeli

control over borders and airspace, Israeli violence against the Palestinian population in the West Bank, are the determining factors of the October 7 attacks, as many who call themselves pro-Palestinian do? I would like to start addressing this question first with a few facts that have appeared in the media since the attack, as information became available after the initial shock, then take a look at the wishes of the Palestinians themselves.

The most blatant counter-argument to the thesis that the October 7 massacre was the result of recent settler and IDF violence in the West Bank and the Al-Aqsa events when hundreds of Haredi stormed the holy mosque, is the revelation that in fact the attack had been in preparation for over two years, with the total support and guidance of Iran. Numerous analysts, including from Gaza, have observed that the real reason behind Hamas's attack was to impede Arab countries' normalization of relations with Israel through the Abraham Accords, including that with Saudi Arabia, Iran's principle competitor and adversary in the Middle East. These two countries were also entering a luke-warm rapprochement of late. Hamas leaders have also ultimately admitted that their main motive was to deter Saudi Arabia and Israel's normalization. So, if the Hamas attack was not a response to Israeli violence in the West Bank, but rather meant to disrupt political

processes that would be disadvantageous to them as an organization, can we still call it Palestinian resistance? And what does Hamas really want?

It is not a mystery to most lucid people that Hamas is a theocratic fascist organization. Its charter is clear: Palestine is a Muslim land, only Muslims can inhabit it and Jews must be killed wherever they are.

'The land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf [Holy Possession] consecrated for future Moslem generations until Judgment Day. No one can renounce it or any part, or abandon it or any part of it.' (Article 11)

'Palestine is an Islamic land... Since this is the case, the Liberation of Palestine is an individual duty for every Moslem wherever he may be.' (Article 13)

'The Day of Judgment will not come about until Moslems fight Jews and kill them. Then, the Jews will hide behind rocks and trees, and the rocks and trees will cry out: 'O Moslem, there is a Jew hiding behind me, come and kill him.' (Article 7)

To them, Palestine means "from the river to the sea", i.e. the elimination of what is now Israel, and does not refer to the geographic area designated through the Oslo Accords for the future state of Palestine next to the state of Israel. What does this imply even for that future Palestinian state

that would exist next to Israel, if it were ruled by Hamas? One of the implications is that the 50,000 Palestinian Christians that currently live in the West Bank would not be welcome, as the 1500 Christian Palestinians that still live in Gaza are currently discriminated against by Hamas and its local supporters.

Of course Hamas does not only discriminate against Christian Palestinians. Hamas has been stealing from Gazans since 2007, pushing them into extreme poverty when it violently took over the strip from Fatah (whose members it murdered), and has been torturing and terrorizing them on a regular basis, as evidenced by an Amnesty International report from 2015, several reports over the years by Human Rights Watch (including the most recent in June 2022), and innumerable articles in the media. Since 2015, there have been anti-Hamas protests in Gaza against rising prices and lack of services, including an online anti-Hamas meeting in 2022, and protests throughout 2023 and as recently as September against Hamas's policy of taking 15% commission on subsidies distributed to Gaza's poorest families by Qatar. An anti-Hamas Gazan activist who was tortured by Hamas said, "People are tired of having no opportunities and no way out. The only way to make a decent living is to be affiliated with Hamas. In the meantime, Hamas

leadership live in nice villas, drive expensive cars and eat in fancy restaurants. And the top leaders, of course, don't live in Gaza at all." Indeed, "Gazans, particularly the 75 per cent under the age of 30, felt widely varying affinities toward Hamas' ideology or claims to Islamic legitimacy. Hamas, they noted, paid salaries when few others could. Risking targeting by Israeli soldiers was a calculated and tolerable hazard of hire if it meant a paycheck," explained Palestinian scholar Sara Roy.

The organizers of the 2019 anti-Hamas street protests in Gaza said that their only demand was "electricity, work, food, dignity and basic rights like citizens in any other country." Before the October 7 terrorist attack, Israel provided electricity to Gaza, but due to internal conflicts between Hamas and Fatah that resulted in the PA's failure to pay, electricity became sparse and intermittent since 2017. A Gazan activist who took part in the 2022 online event stated, "Hamas has billions of dollars in investments in many countries, while people [in Gaza] starve to death and migrate in search of work." This assessment is supported by various Palestinian and Israeli sources that show that 20% of the entire Hamas government annual budget is earmarked for military purposes (in contrast to the US's 11%), including 40million dollars for the

building of tunnels that reach Israel kibbutzim to attack Israeli citizens and through which to smuggle arms, and for the pay of terrorist fighters' salaries rather than investment in the Strip's infrastructure to serve the population's needs.

What does this tell us about those like Corbyn, diem25 and the rest named above, among of course the thousands others who expressed similar opinions and claim to be pro-Palestinian, but have been silent when Gazans risked their lives on the streets demanding their rights to live in basic decency? They instead came out justifying terrorism as a form of legitimate resistance, ignoring the destruction caused to the Palestinians they claim to support by the terrorist organization they claim is fighting for freedom. Besides expressing profound hypocrisy and in many cases antisemitism, this position also tells us how uninterested these voices really are for the fate of Gazan Palestinians, only 38% of whom in a July 2023 survey showed sympathy for Hamas although it is the largest employer, 62% supported the maintenance of the 2021 ceasefire between Hamas and Israel that through this attack Hamas trampled on, and 50% agreed with the following proposal: "Hamas should stop calling for Israel's destruction, and instead accept a permanent two-state solution based on the 1967 borders."

While Israel's blockade of Gaza after Hamas's coup took control of the Strip in 2007 undoubtedly "deepened the economic and social crises for the Gaza population", as one Gazan political scientist explains, "ultimately, both Hamas and the Palestinian Authority share responsibility for these crises, especially since Hamas' takeover of the Strip," he concludes.

If such a large part of Gazan Palestinians want to be liberated from Hamas, do not believe in terrorism as a legitimate form of resistance, and support a two-state solution, why do so many pro-Palestinians in the west remain silent to Gazans' wishes, champion violence and terror against civilians, and justify Hamas? Despite not representing the will of their people, Hamas is claimed to represent "Palestinian resistance" by a large portion of the pro-Palestinian west. And here, I would like to take a moment to present the differences between the concepts of legitimate resistance, which can be argued to be armed struggle, such as the first Intifada in the West Bank and strikes against military assets, and the illegitimate form of terrorism.

The first two Intifadas were armed uprisings against the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza strip, but the first (1987–1993) ended with the renunciation of terrorism, the recognition by the PLO of the right of the state of Israel to exist, and an

engagement in a peace process through the Oslo Accords. At this time Hamas was rising, with its dedication to terror and rejection of the right of Israel to exist. The second Intifada (2000–2005), provoked by Ariel Sharon’s visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, saw much more violence on both sides, including several terrorist attacks and the March 2002 Hamas suicide bombing that killed 30 civilians and injured 140 who were celebrating Passover at a hotel in Netanya. These events resulted in the reoccupation by Israel of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Therefore, I would argue that in the first Intifada there was a much more legitimate use of violence, or armed struggle, that resulted in political advancement. I would also argue that the targeting of military positions is also a legitimate form of armed struggle in the context of the occupation.

But has terrorism ever succeeded in advancing a group’s political goals? According to Richard English, professor of politics at Queen’s University Belfast, terrorism achieves “partial strategic victory, in which a diluted form of a group’s main aims can be claimed to have been furthered by terrorism, or in which secondary goals (revenge against an enemy, the sustenance of resistance into future generations) have been secured.

**The vast majority of terrorist groups end their violence without securing their central, primary, strategic aims.”**

In keeping with this differentiation between legitimate armed struggle and terrorism, let’s touch on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, mentioned by Finkelstein in his warped comparison to Hamas’s targeting of defenseless Israeli civilians, whom they raped and burned to death. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was the heroic last stand of Jews that were slated for deportation to the gas chambers of Auschwitz. These heroes decided to sacrifice their lives through uneven armed struggle against the Nazi army, not against Polish or German civilians, trying to save as many Jews from deportation as possible. With his heinous false comparison, Finkelstein has lost all credibility.

Additionally, as a result of Hamas’s actions during the second Intifada and in Gaza after their 2007 takeover, we see that terrorism did not result into any political achievements, but rather a clamping down.

Knowing that Hamas conducted the October 7 terrorist attack against the interests and will of their people at a time when Gazans were at the peak of their dissatisfaction with the terrorist organization, we can surmise that the decision was taken knowing that Israel would retaliate violently and thus

assure Gazans' dependence on Hamas, thereby allowing Hamas to maintain its position in the Strip despite its low popularity.

Two Gazan commentators attributed the reason for the attacks to Hamas's strategy of uniting the fronts, *wihdet al-saha* in Arabic, at a time when disillusionment with the peace process is at an all-time high and violence in the West Bank has increased dramatically since the last Israeli elections when Netanyahu's coalition with the extreme-right won. Indeed, a unified front could be a very real consequence of the Israeli crack-down in the West Bank and the extreme violence of the bombardments in Gaza.

But it is worth remembering that there is also a significant division between the West Bank and Gaza politically, economically and ideologically. In a survey from before the attacks, only 44% stated that they would vote for Hamas in the Gaza Strip and 28% for Fatah. In the West Bank, the vote for Hamas stands at 25% and for Fatah at 34%. In a question about the main problem confronting Palestinian society today, 9% in the Gaza Strip and 35% in the West Bank said it is corruption; 30% in the Gaza Strip and 17% in the West Bank said it is unemployment and poverty; 19% said it is the continuation of the occupation and settlement construction; 30% in the Gaza Strip and 11% in the West

Bank said it is the continued siege and blockade of the Gaza Strip; 10% said it is the split between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; and 3% said it is the weakness of the judiciary and the absence of liberties, accountability and democracy. This shows us that for Gazans the most pressing issue is unemployment and poverty and the siege, the former mostly attributed to Hamas and the second of course to Israel. For the West Bank, where unemployment is at 13.1% while in Gaza at 45.5%, it is perhaps understandable that the preoccupations are more focused on corruption. What is striking is that on average, only 19% of the population in the West Bank and Gaza stated that the occupation is the main problem of Palestinian society today.

The largest percentage of respondents, 61%, do not wish to abandon the two-state solution, while 51% strongly support or support popular non-violent and unarmed resistance.

So the question remains: how can any left-wing supporters of Palestinians' rights justify a fascist theocratic organization like Hamas that is inherently and openly antidemocratic, dedicated to the oppression and annihilation of other religions and peoples, and focused on the suppression of human rights of their own people? While the fascistoid government currently in power in

Israel is continuing its enormous mistakes, leading many to fear a regional conflict, maybe indeed with a revolt in the West Bank and other Arab countries as various militant groups are galvanized by Hamas's actions, the only reasonable position that we, as concerned human beings, can hold in support of Gazan, West Bank Palestinians and Israeli civilians is: 1) to condemn Hamas for the massacre of innocent Israeli civilians and for cynically carrying out this act knowing that its own people would suffer, only to further its own political standing, 2) push for a ceasefire and in the same breath demand the release of the hostages now, 3) after Hamas is eliminated somehow, plan for an international body to manage Gaza until maybe Fatah can take over, and 4) call on the international community to demand the renewing of the peace talks leading to a two-state solution. Only a well-negotiated two-state solution and the rejection of terrorist organizations will bring peace and stability to the region.

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