19 October 2023

Dear Friends and Colleagues

I am sitting before the empty page as I try to write, but the emotions do not allow me to sketch my thoughts. I shared my letters with you a few times in the past, but this time the situation is very different. Thus, with great sorrow, frustration, sadness, anger and compassion I am writing in the mid of the war to share with you my perspective about the very complex situation.

Yes, the Hamas as an ideological terrorist Palestinain organization, surprised Israel in a vicious attack that included inhuman and brutal atrocities performed on civilian population. Several thousand Hamas terrorists easily penetrated the separating wall between Gaza strip and Israel and murdered, wounded and kidnapped children, women and old people. About 1800 Israelis perished, more than 200 kidnapped and over 2500 injured. The stories of the victim are indescribable - mothers tell about kidnapped children and murdered babies, sons and daughters tell about families that were annihilated in the attack, and grandfathers tell about heroic sons who defended the families. It just happened that close to the Gaza strip was organized a music festival with hundreds of participants and the horrible stories of carnage murders and heroic savers are told. In addition, the Hamas organization launched and shot hundreds of rockets into Israel trying to hurt civil population. All the major cities from the south to Tel Aviv and even north to Herzliya (where I live) were attacked.

It all happened within three days. The army, the security service, and the police were all caught unprepared in the frozen conception and preoccupied with protecting Jewish settlers in the West Bank where some of them were busy carrying pogroms of Palestinians under the protection of the Israeli army. It took six to eight hours for the army units to arrive to repel the attack. It took five days to fight the entering terrorist to clean the area from the hostile forces.

Is this the whole story? Of course, not –although the Israeli government and most of the public do not want to hear the other part of the situation,

The other part of the story is also very sad ---and anyone who tries to tell the other half is delegitimized in Israel and even investigated. But this cannot be denied –the reality is as cruel –and the demand for revenge is human but is a source of much evilness. The history shows that victims sometimes lack compassion and are violent especially when the atrocities are compared to the past –with the ultimate genocide- Holocaust and the Hamas terrorists are likened to Nazis.

Israel immediately began to bomb indiscriminately the Gaza strip with its over two million residents to eradicate Hamas. The story the Israeli army tells is that they warn civil population and are surgically precise in bombing. But those are stories to clean Israeli conscience. Bombs do not distinguish between Hamas fighters and civilians and pilots do not see their victims face to face. In reality, until now have been killed from the air 3200 people, majority civilian and over 11,000 injured. These include children, women, and old people. Electricity is shut and there is not enough water. Hospitals are too crowded to take care of all the injured. Whole neighborhoods are destroyed and over 600,000 refugees are moving south as the Israeli army demands. But the entrance to Sinai in Rafah is closed by the Egyptians so the civil population is trapped as it has been for the past 15 years because of siege by the Israelis. Many Israelis demand to flatten Gaza strip which means to turn it to Drezden as allied forces did. For Palestinians, the situation reminds another Nakba (disaster) of 1948 war in which about 700,000 moved from Palestine, many of them expelled by the Jewish military forces. Some of the families of Gaza are refugees once again.

President of the USA with the Western world leaders expressed unequivocal support of Israel and all these leaders communicated condemnation and disapproval of the massacre carried by Hamas. On the18th of October President Joe Biden, who was criticized by the ministers of the government and even insulted because of objecting to the anti-democratic steps taken by the Israeli government, visited Israel. This was a very emotional visit by a genuine friend, who also marked the red lines for the Israeli leader. There was supposed to be a meeting of Arab leaders with the president of the USA, but was cancelled by the Arabs.

Is that all? No –the situation requires to be opened minded and provide the larger picture which is necessary for the comprehensive understanding of the context.

1. Palestinians are 56 years under evil occupation, annexation of almost two third of the West Bank and are under an apartheid. Israel has settled Jews in the West Bank with 480.000 Jewish settlers dispersing them on this territory and 200,000 settlers settled in the East Jerusalem which was until 1967 control of Jordan. The hope for a two-state solution vanished and Palestinians live in despair under occupation.
2. In 2002 was proposed the Arab Peace Initiative by then-Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. The iinitiative calls for an end to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians and the normalization of relations between Israel and the entire Arab world, in exchange for an Israeli withdrawal from the areas gained by Israel during the 1967 [Six Day War](https://www.adl.org/israel-international/israel-middle-east/content/AG/israel-international/israel-middle-east/content/AG/six-day-war-1.html) and a “just settlement” to the issue of [Palestinian refugees](https://www.adl.org/israel-international/israel-middle-east/content/AG/palestinian-refugees.html). The Arab League endorsed the plan in March 2002 and since then was ratified at the annual meetings of the League. Israeli governments never dealt with the proposal and never considered it formally.
3. Palestinians of Gaza are since 2007-- when Hamas conquered it, winning free elections— under a complete siege, where all the entrance and exit from Gaza are dependent on the will of Israel.
4. The two state solution is rejected by Israeli government who continues to settle Jews in the West Bank Jews and turned the President of the Palestinian Authority Abu Mazen, who objects to the use of violence, to a collaborative partner who allows Israeli security forces to enter every Palestinian city to arrest Palestinians accused to be terrorists.
5. In September 2020 were signed the Abraham Accords which are bilateral agreements on Arab–Israeli normalization between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Palestinians felt that they are neglected in this agreement.
6. The Israeli government, since Netanyahu came to power in 2009, has a policy of divide and rule between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. He authorized a supply of money to Hama by Qatar on the basis of the conception that Hamas will not carry large scale military attacks. On the other hand, he refused to negotiate with Abu Mazen, using him only for security coordination. By doing so, he closed the possibility of negotiating a two-state solution and enabling Hamas to offer Palestinians a violent way to liberate Palestine.
7. Since November 2022 Israel is ruled by most extreme coalition of nationalist, messianic, religious and racist components with the intention to destroy the democratic elements of the state. Prime Minister Netanyahu appointed extreme religious right-wing settler Betzalel Smotrich to be not only the finance minister, but also a Minister in the Ministry of Defence in charge of COGAT (Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories) and religious-messianic and racist Itamar Ben Gvir to be the minister of internal security, including police. Thus, settlers became the official representative of the settlers and settlement expansion in the Israeli government. And the focus of the army became policing the West Bank, guarding the settlers, not guarding the borders.
8. In January 2023 the Minister of Justice presented a plan to overhaul the legal system to be under political supervision. At this point a d massive demonstration and protest movement had started to defend the Israeli democracy that lasted about 40 weeks, until the war. A few days ago, a moderate rightist party (with two ex-chiefs of staff) joined the coalition.
9. The government expanded Jewish settlements in the West Bank, declared that its goal is to control the entire land from the river to the sea with no room for a Palestinian state, carried provocations on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif the 3rd holiest site in Islam, harassed Palestinians and supported pogroms carried by the settlers, deepened the apartheid and over 250 Palestinians were killed in encounters with the Israeli military in the occupied West Bank in comparison to 30 Israelis.

I presented only facts, not fake news. Now you have the information that enables you to evaluate the situation. I do not want to exonerate Hamas from the most brutal acts of terrorism Hamas deserves a trial for violating basic human rights by performing atrocities that is hard to imagine that human beings can carry out. But Hamas does not include all the Palestinian population that is collectively punished for living under the totalitarian regime of Hamas. Gaza will probably be conquered, and Hamas destroyed as the revenge is asking for. But what will be next- is the question that the government cannot answer because it is not prepared to answer, or it does not have a clue. The Palestinians are not going anywhere. I can guess---the occupation will deepen, and the vicious cycles of violence will escalate. The Israelis are condemned “to live on their swords” as the Prime Minister Netanyahu said.

In my book published in 2023 “*Sinking into the honey trap: The case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.*” I described the culture of conflict and the need to keep the conflict with the rise of the authoritarian regime. Specifically, on the one hand, I described the rise of the extreme religious Zionist sector with the support of all the governments that ruled Israel from 1967 with the backing of the supreme court in deepening the occupation and the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and on the other hand I analyzed the meaning of the evil occupation. Israel is paying high costs for the occupation with its creeping annexation and apartheid.

We, Israelis and Palesntians, are human beings who deserve to live in security and peace. The context does not allow us—leaders are working to increase the conflict and world leaders are preoccupied with their interests and not with the prosperity of the two nations that find themselves engulfed in intractable conflict. We, civilians, need the world to give a hand in this humane mission. Israelis and Palestinians are incapable at the present to reach a peaceful resolution of the conflict. They need help from the world to prevent continuation of the bloodshed. Past experiences of the peace agreement with Egypt, of the Oslo accord and of negotiations between the Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert and president of the Palestinian Authority Abu Mazen demonstrate that it is possible.

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