

## NY Times Opinion - Piling Horror Upon Horror

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Watching from afar as people race toward an abyss, I find it hard to know what to write except “no,” over and over. In the face of massacres that for Jews around the world brought back memories of genocide, the language of some Israeli leaders has, in turn, become murderous. On the cusp of a likely ground invasion of Gaza, many people I’ve spoken to, Jewish and Palestinian alike, are terrified that this rhetoric will become reality.

Isaac Herzog, Israel’s president, said that the “entire nation” of Gaza was “responsible” for the attacks at a news conference on Friday, telling reporters, “It is not true, this rhetoric about civilians not being aware, not involved.” Herzog later clarified that civilians are not legitimate targets, but his words, coming from a member of Israel’s center-left Labor Party, were still chilling, suggesting a broad political consensus that Gazans are collectively to blame for the horror that befell Israel. “All gloves are off,” Ron Prosor, a distinguished Israeli diplomat, [told](#) Politico.

In such an environment, the ruling Israeli right, some of whose members [spoke](#) of forcing Palestinians out of Israel even before Hamas’s latest rampage, has little to restrain it. Tally Gotliv, a member of the Knesset from Benjamin Netanyahu’s Likud party, [urged](#) the use of “doomsday weapons” on Gaza. Another member of Likud called for a second nakba, the Arabic word referring to the mass expulsion of Palestinians at Israel’s creation in 1948.

I can empathize with liberal Jews both in Israel and throughout the diaspora who feel too overwhelmed, at this moment of great fear and vulnerability, to protest the escalating suffering inflicted on Palestinians. It is not fair that events are moving too quickly to give people time to grieve the victimization of their own community before being asked to try to prevent the victimization of others. Nevertheless, as atrocities are piled on atrocities, I hope Jews will attend to what is being threatened in our name. And all Americans should pay attention, given how much our country underwrites Israel’s military.

In Gaza, mass death has already begun. Last week the defense minister, Yoav Gallant, announced that Israel was cutting off Gaza’s water, electricity, food and fuel. There was hopeful reporting over the weekend that at the urging of President Biden’s administration, water to a town in Gaza’s south had been turned back on, but for many, drinking water is still unavailable. The Associated Press [reported](#) on Sunday that clean water has run out in U.N. shelters across Gaza. On Saturday, UNICEF [reported](#) that, according to local sources, more than 700 children in Gaza had been killed. The number by now is surely higher.

Some readers, I suspect, will respond that while this is all terrible, it is also all Hamas’s fault. In many ways, I agree. Hamas’s terror is clearly the immediate cause of the hell raining down on Gaza; most countries attacked as Israel was attacked would respond with war. That does not, however, license Israeli indifference, or worse, to the lives of civilians. Israelis have a right to their rage; I imagine that if I were Israeli, I would share it. But incitement against Palestinians, the overwhelming majority of whom have

nothing to do with Hamas terrorism, is leading us toward somewhere even darker than where we are right now.

Influential voices in America are intensifying the bloodthirsty atmosphere. Appearing on "[Fox News Sunday](#)," the Republican senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas dismissed worries that mass civilian casualties in Gaza will work to Hamas's advantage on the world stage. "As far as I'm concerned, Israel can bounce the rubble in Gaza," he said. That phrase, "bounce the rubble," is a reference to a Winston Churchill [quote](#) about apocalyptic military overkill. To Cotton's right, the language is even more incendiary. "If it comes down to ethnic cleansing — you want to cleanse my people, I'll cleanse yours first," [said](#) Joel Pollak, a senior editor at large at Breitbart News, on the webcast of the leading young conservative Charlie Kirk.

We can already see where the total dehumanization of Palestinians leads. This weekend, a 6-year-old boy in Illinois was allegedly stabbed to death by his landlord, who is also accused of gravely injuring the boy's mother. According to the local sheriff's office, the victims were targeted "due to them being Muslim and the ongoing Middle Eastern conflict involving Hamas and the Israelis."

If this is the atmosphere in parts of the United States, it is exponentially more fevered in Israel. On Monday morning I spoke to Diana Buttu, a Canadian Palestinian lawyer in Haifa who once served as a legal adviser for the Palestine Liberation Organization. "I can understand what my grandmother felt in 1948 when she fled" from a town near Nazareth, Buttu said. "Because it's a climate of total fear that you're next. And this isn't just in the Gaza Strip; it's also spread to the West Bank." Already, [according](#) to Al Jazeera, at least 55 Palestinians in the West Bank have been killed, some by soldiers and others by settlers. Haaretz [reported](#) that five Palestinians were shot dead by settlers in the village of Qusra. A message to the village on WhatsApp said, "We have no red lines. We'll punish you in order to make an example out of you."

Buttu sent me a link to a mostly Hebrew-language Telegram group with over 82,000 subscribers in which people had posted celebratory photographs of dead and injured Palestinians. "The people of Gaza are not innocent!" said an introductory message for English speakers. If and when those who believe this act on it, we can't pretend we weren't warned.