

Opinion

Can Gazans Freely Say What They Think About Hamas and the October 7 Attack?

Monday 8 January 2024, by [HASS Amira](#) (Date first published: 8 January 2024).

The scale of death and destruction caused by Israel's air and artillery strikes dim any willingness to voice criticism or question the logic of Hamas' strategy

Displaced Palestinians, who fled their houses due to Israeli strikes, seek shelter near the border with Egypt, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, January 7, 2024. Credit: REUTERS/Ibraheem Abu Mustafa

The hippopotamus in the room during every phone conversation - when there's time between airstrikes and lining up for water - is Gazans' views on Hamas' attack of October 7. It seems the vast majority don't feel free to express their opinions sincerely, not on the phone - whenever the reception allows for a political discussion - and not on social media.

There is a mix of reasons for this. Usually, the perennial sense of terror caused by [bombs, death and flight](#), as well as the daily struggle to obtain water, food, warm clothing and shelter from the rain aren't a good basis for an open political-ideological discussion. As time goes by, [the scale of death and destruction](#) caused by Israel's air and artillery strikes dim any willingness to voice criticism or question the logic of [Hamas'](#) strategy.

Many believe that Israel is carrying out one of its contingency plans to achieve the demise of the Palestinian national project.

The conclusion from this scale is that Israel isn't just retaliating but is carrying out one of its contingency plans to achieve the demise of the Palestinian national project. Public self-criticism could be considered the absolving of Israel of its intentions and direct responsibility for what the Palestinians are experiencing [as genocide](#).

If Israel thinks it can topple [Hamas](#) through mass killings that would turn the people's fury against this Islamic organization, it's forgetting that even Hamas' greatest opponents don't treat Israel as a neutral player or victim, and that it will always be perceived as a regime aiming to harm the

Palestinians. People don't want to be a partner, even indirectly, to Israel's propaganda machine.

Another reason is that "resistance" and the "armed struggle" remain a hallowed national ethos, even for most Palestinians who can't or don't intend to join it. Even Hamas' opponents believe it grew out of legitimate opposition to Israel's occupation, viewing it as part of the Palestinian social and political fabric.

People lining up for water in Gaza's Muwasi area last week. There's a constant sense of terror caused by bombs, death and flight, as well as the daily struggle to obtain water, food, warm clothing and shelter from the rain. Credit: Fatima Shbair/AP

The more the settlement-and-siege policy proves that Israel aims to foil any possibility of Palestinian independence, even on territory occupied in 1967 ([the West Bank](#) and Gaza), the more support there is for armed resistance. Diplomacy failed and unarmed popular struggle was suppressed by Israel. Negotiations and their remaining vestige, security coordination, effectively wiped out the Palestine Liberation Organization and made the Palestinian Authority hated by most Palestinians.

Amid these failures, the armed struggle and its sex appeal stick out. The support for the armed struggle may have several rationales: a wish to avenge 75 years of expulsion and oppression, a belief that this is a logical tactic against an enemy that only understands force (as proved, for example, by Egypt's Anwar Sadat in [the 1973 Yom Kippur War](#)), or a deep conviction in the inevitable need for a struggle against a settler colonial project such as Zionism. The fact that the opposition today to an armed struggle is associated with the corrupt PA actually enhances support for this track.

The unarmed resistance to the occupation - *sumud* (steadfastness) - is the default of every Palestinian, something you imbibe with your mother's milk. Armed resistance, in contrast, is considered superior because it involves a conscious willingness for self-sacrifice.

Three months into the war, Palestinians are impressed with the skills Hamas displayed during and after the attack, including its long-term planning while maintaining secrecy. It was able to arm and [tunnel](#) under Gaza beyond all the assessments of Israeli intelligence, deceiving a powerful enemy that possesses a wide web of collaborators and surveillance capabilities. Hamas has also demonstrated personal and group combat skills that has inflicted many casualties on the Israeli army.

Palestinians who deny the massacre of October 7 or don't believe most Israeli reports (especially about [rape](#)), and those who admit that there were deliberate killings of civilians, still measure Hamas' attack in relation to Israel's systematic and deliberate attacks on civilians over decades. So for them, in the competition over evil and cruelty, Israel remains the winner.

The subversive but relevant political question - whether the price paid by Gazans for Hamas' attack is worth it - comes up here and there but coyly in the form of hints. An indirect answer is provided in touching posts that express longing for the Gaza that no longer is, for community and social life, for the urban scenery and the sea.

But it seems that there is also fear that Hamas members could hear such statements and punish the people making them. This is what a former Gazan now living in the West Bank told Haaretz. People in her family were killed by Israeli airstrikes, while others had to flee to the Muwasi area in southern Gaza. It's still hard to independently verify whether such fear of Hamas relies on rumors, or on an actual silencing or punitive measures. But the fear is there.

Comments about the fear to publicly criticize Hamas' attack have also been expressed by people born in Gaza but now living in the West Bank. They don't fear physical harassment but rather the

aggressive silencing of their opinion due to the public's support for the attack.

A Gaza-born man living in Ramallah commented bitterly: "It seems that the farther people are from Gaza, the more determined their support is for Hamas' right and reason to combat Israeli colonialism up to the last Gazan."

Amira Hass

P.S.

• HAARETZ. Jan 8, 2024 11:58 am IST:

<https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2024-01-08/ty-article-opinion/.premium/can-gazans-freely-say-what-they-think-about-hamas-and-the-october-7-attack/0000018c-e4c0-d249-a1ce-efc59aeb0000>

• *Amira Hass' articles in the Haaretz:*

<https://www.haaretz.com/ty-WRITER/0000017f-da24-d494-a17f-de27b9aa0000>

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