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# The Palestinian Resistance Isn't a Monolith

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**As Palestinians reckon with the genocide being inflicted on them and their prospects for national liberation, it does them a disservice to flatten their political diversity and complex ongoing debates.**

Since October 7, any critical evaluation of Hamas's military operation — its method, rationality, and targets, or its role in ending the Israeli occupation — has been hard to voice within the Left. This is so not only because an occupying power is ultimately responsible for the destructive status quo, but also because criticizing the tactics of a group acting in the name of the oppressed is seen as undermining their rightful cause.

This situation is compounded by numerous intellectuals on the Left who have voiced unconditional support — if not celebration — for Hamas's attack. A [recent](#) post on the Verso Books blog places a socially regressive religious movement like Hamas into the universal emancipatory tradition of the Left, stating that “the paragliders who flew into Israel on October 7 continue the revolutionary association of liberation and flight.”

Andreas Malm has [suggested](#) that the Al-Aqsa Flood operation achieved more than the First Intifada because Palestinians managed to replace stones with military arms — ignoring that the intifada was the largest self-organized anti-colonial mass movement in Palestinian history, and that it compelled Israel to make unprecedented political concessions. Indeed, to argue that Hamas has managed to achieve more is to totally ignore that its military attack has triggered a huge genocide against the Palestinian people.

As Rashid Khalidi has [argued](#), “Looking back over the past six months — at the cruel slaughter of civilians on an unprecedented scale, the millions of people made homeless, the mass famine and disease induced by Israel — it is clear that this marks a new abyss into which the struggle over Palestine has sunk.” Tom Segev [concurs](#): “For Palestinians, the Gaza war is the worst event they have experienced in 75 years. Never have so many been killed and uprooted since the *nakba*, the catastrophe that befell them during Israel's war of independence in 1948, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced to give up their homes and become refugees.”

In addition to individual voices, uncritical celebration of Hamas has also been witnessed in parts of the otherwise inspiring solidarity mobilizations in recent days. “We say justice, you say how? Burn Tel Aviv to the ground,” some are [heard chanting](#) in one video.

Such slogans, no matter how rare, undermine the Palestinian cause. Supporting Palestine is about ending an illegal occupation and holding Israel accountable for violating international law. It is not about supporting the killing of Israeli civilians or the destruction of Israeli cities. Upholding international law means upholding it for everyone.

This sort of rhetoric collapses a whole range of political positions in Palestine into what one militant group says and does. It also assumes that Hamas speaks and acts on behalf of all the Palestinian

people all the time — simply because it won an election (with 45 percent of the vote) in the Occupied Palestinian Territories in 2006 (mainly as a protest vote against the Palestinian Authority's corruption and its [surrender at Oslo](#)).

Hamas's one election win is, therefore, not a blank check for eternity. This is especially true because in governing Gaza, Hamas has forgotten about democracy, employed authoritarianism and corruption, and repressed political organization and dissent. To openly speak your mind or express your political views has proven costly for many Palestinians in Gaza. But their silence is not support for Hamas.

Two recent articles in the mainstream press convey how important it is to listen to Palestinian voices in Gaza as they are undergoing the extreme conditions of genocide, famine, and starvation instituted by the Israeli occupation army.

The *Financial Times* [recently](#) reported on public opinion in Gaza — a sobering read. While Palestinians in Gaza clearly blame Israel for executing a human catastrophe in Gaza, there is growing anger and resentment directed at Hamas for failing to expect the scale of Israel's retaliation for the October 7 attacks and to protect Palestinians during the war.

One interviewee, Nassim, openly says, that Hamas “should have predicted Israel's response and thought of what would happen to the 2.3mn Gazans who have nowhere safe to go” and “should have restricted themselves to military targets.”

Another interviewee, Samia, is even more damning. “The role of the resistance is to protect us civilians, not to sacrifice us,” she said. “I don't want to die and I didn't want my children to witness what they've seen and to live in a tent suffering from hunger, cold and poverty.”

Such criticism tracks with what many Palestinians from Gaza have been posting on social media in recent months. It has also been represented in the critical reporting of veteran anti-occupation journalist Amira Hass.

In a [recent](#) article in *Haaretz*, Hass captures the popular disgruntlement and criticism of Hamas's operation as well as what is seen as Hamas's hugely costly mode of armed resistance against a vastly superior Israeli military. Palestinians in Gaza openly complain about their lack of security and protection from Israel's expected retribution and about Hamas's lack “of clear strategic political planning.”

What most troubles one interviewee, Basel, is that his criticism of Hamas and its approach to resistance is being tarred as treason. As Hass explains, “He's angry that the Palestinians outside Gaza and their supporters expect Gazans to shut up and not criticize Hamas, because the criticism ostensibly helps the enemy. He rejects the assumption that doubting the decisions and actions of this armed group — and to do so publicly — is an act of treason.”

These critical voices are consistent with the [most recent opinion polls](#) conducted in the Occupied Territories. Though polling in wartime is subject to extreme challenges and fluctuations, especially in Gaza where political fear and silencing are important factors to consider in assessing the accuracy of responses, some consistent trends can be identified.

Polls show that Hamas's approval rating in Gaza in recent months has indeed declined by 11 points — to one-third. There has also been an overall drop in support for armed struggle. In response to the question, “In your view, what is the best means of achieving Palestinian goals in ending the occupation and building an independent state?” there is a decline in support for armed struggle in both the West Bank and Gaza, from 63 percent in December to 46 percent in March. In Gaza alone,

it is down from 56 percent to 39 percent. Hamas itself has also just [reiterated its willingness](#) to put down its arms and to accept a long-term cease-fire with Israel in return for a state along the 1967 borders.

In Gaza, too, there has also been a dramatic increase in support for the two-state solution: up from 35 percent in December to 62 percent in March. This remains true even as the majority of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza also acknowledge the practical impediments to such a solution, namely Israel's expanding settlement project. What this does nevertheless indicate is that Palestinians in Gaza hope that international attention and external political pressure on Israel might yield results.

Support for the one-state solution among occupied Palestinians has declined to 24 percent during the war on Gaza. Most occupied Palestinians want to separate from Israel and to live in their own state, and they want to get rid of the illegal settlements in the West Bank. The colonial project contravenes Palestinian rights under international law, especially the right to self-determination.

In addition, Israelis have dehumanized Palestinian society to the most extreme levels during this war. Following the cues of their aggressive elite and warmongering media (saturated with ex-military and security experts), Israelis have overwhelmingly supported the decimation of Gaza. What troubles Israelis most is the hostages, not the war. The lives of Israeli hostages matter, while Palestinians are, in the words of Israel's defense minister, "human animals."

Motivated by vengeance and retribution, Israel is a narcissistic society wallowing in its own injury and using that injury as an excuse for its monumental crimes against the Palestinian people. Palestinians find Israel cruel, callous, and horrifying, and their first thought is "protect me from Israel." Is this the Israeli society that Palestinians should be expected to live with in dignity and with equal rights?

Whatever the future holds, Palestinians need to be able to work through their devastating predicament collectively, democratically, and without fear. To insist on that is to boost their right of self-determination.

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**P.S.**

• Jacobin. 04.28.2024:

<https://jacobin.com/2024/04/gaza-left-hamas-occupation-war-solidarity>

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