

## *Beyond Moral Deformation: the Barbarism of Israel*

All decline is gradual, but some declines more steep and rapid than others. All decline is spectral, making it difficult to specify at what point certain boundaries have been crossed. So it has been with the modern nation state of Israel: whenever it was, exactly, that it passed beyond collective inhumanity into outright barbarism, it has arrived there now. Israel is a nation of barbarians, with a culture of barbarism.

This is not to say that *all* Israelis are barbarians. The journalists at Haaretz continue to draw public attention to the

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pervasive discrimination, legal apartheid and genocide. The tireless workers for human rights, such as those in B'Tselem, continue to amass evidence documenting human rights abuses in Israel and advocating for change. However these organisations do not represent Israeli society at large. The celebrated Israeli journalist Gideon Levy said recently in an interview with France 24 that while many deplore the most recent piracy, kidnapping and mistreatment of flotilla activists, Israel is largely a xenophobic society and the international outrage at the gloating of Israeli Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir over their treatment will only help him in the upcoming election.

Israel has never treated non-Jews and dissidents well, but recently its behaviour has worsened. A widely-condemned new law introducing execution by hanging will effectively apply only to Palestinians. An article by the veteran Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Nicholas Kristof in the New York Times (previously a dogged supporter of Israel) recounted interviews with dozens of Palestinians prisoners, their families and acquaintances, detailing the use of rape and torture in Israeli prisons. Israeli authorities have threatened to sue the paper, claiming that the allegations were 'blood libel', in other words, virulent anti-Semitism. Various op-ed writers slammed Kristof's reporting as flatly unbelievable: see, for example, Rachel O'Donoghue's article in the Wall Street Journal: 'Kristof's Unbelievable Tale', whose headline was 'The columnist publishes a poorly sourced, fantastical tale of torture and dog rape in Israel'. The 'tale' was of course not Kristof's but the testimony of the many people he interviewed and the torture and various forms of rape that are business as usual in Israeli prisons have been well attested by human rights organisations.

As if the treatment of Palestinians for the last 75 years were not enough, Israel now bears responsibility for convincing Trump to start an entirely unprovoked war with Iran. Granted, Trump should have resisted the pressure, which was applied to earlier US presidents, but Netanyahu and his government still bear responsibility for advocating it, as well as launching repeated attacks on southern Lebanon and on the capital, Beirut.

Egged on by Israel, the US has bombed Iranian civilians, including in a double strike on a girls' school, killing over 150 children and their teachers. When questioned in a congressional hearing, Admiral Brad Cooper of CENTCOM simply evaded questions

about this attack put to him by Senator Adam Smith (Vermont), as well as by others, as if a double strike on a school were not a matter that merited serious investigation and the forthright answering of questions about it simply unnecessary.

The war with Iran, which has already resulted in the devastation of the Gulf states, their essential infrastructure and economies, and caused crippling rises in the price of oil globally, looks to push the entire world into recession and in some places, famine, given the inability to move vital goods, including fertiliser, through the Strait of Hormuz. And for what reason? Supposedly to stop Iran building a nuclear weapon—which they have consistently said they do not want and which UN weapons inspections confirmed they do not have—and to effect ‘regime change’, though it’s not clear why the internal affairs of Iran should be dictated by Israel and the United States. Iran is a signatory to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, as Israel is not, and although Israel refuses to confirm or deny that it has nuclear weapons, it is widely believed to possess them. Who is calling for Israel to divest itself of the nuclear weapons it almost certainly has and for the Middle East to be declared a nuclear-free zone? The Supreme Leader of Iran, whom Israel and the US killed early in the war, issued a fatwa against the building of a nuclear weapon, so if a non-nuclear Iran was what these two rogue states wanted, they have undermined their

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objective through their own actions, all the while using this nuclear ‘threat’ as an excuse for bombing Iranian civilians.

The growing cries in Israel for a ‘Greater Israel’ indicate its thirst for power and domination. Is there any reason to believe that if it ever succeeded in snatching land from the Nile to the Euphrates that it would treat those now resident there any more humanely than it has treated Palestinians?

One could argue that these actions are those of the government, which like all democratically-elected governments, is not a permanent fixture but a snapshot of popular will at a particular time—very often, not a flattering portrait and very often, whose policies are not those of the very people who elected them. In this case, however, the current Israeli government’s domestic policies actions enjoy a lot of popular support. Israelis are still incensed at the October 7 attacks and do not accept that killing 70,000 Palestinians in retaliation for the killing of 1200 Israelis is an even mildly disproportionate response.

Israelis have lived in an apartheid state since Israel was founded on the forced depopulation of Palestinians, who were abruptly evicted from their homes without compensation in 1947. A year later, South Africa instituted apartheid within its own borders—but South Africa had at least named apartheid for what it was and ended it in 1994 . The apartheid state of Israel has existed for over 75 years, three times as long as apartheid in South Africa, and Israel has still not acknowledged that its national identity is

not just incidentally connected to this ideology, but actually founded upon it.. Apartheid in South Africa ended when the descendants of those who had invented the system saw for themselves that it was, if not immoral, then at least senseless. It is hard to see that Israelis will at any time soon recognise either the futility or the grotesque inhumanity of the society they have created.

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The brutalising of the activists on the second flotilla of unarmed boats seeking to bring aid to Gaza corroborates the reports emanating from Palestinian detainees in

Israeli prisons. This is a nation devoid of any notion or standards of human rights or human decency. Beatings, electric shocks, maintaining prisoners in stress positions, denial of medical care and water, sexual abuse—these are normalities in the Israeli military and judicial system, not just treatment of those who captured, however briefly, the attention of the world's press, as the flotilla activists acknowledged on their release. There are numerous video clips of interviews with members of the recent flotilla returning to their home countries. All report the same kind of abuses and many show visible bruises, or wounds hidden by the bandages and neck braces applied by medics when they arrived from Israel in Turkey. Israel denies they were harshly treated, but if so, whence the bruises? Did they beat each other or beat themselves? Did Turkish doctors apply bandages and neck braces merely to assist a publicity stunt? One of the Dutch activists stated the matter bluntly: the Israelis have 'created a culture over decades' and only words like 'sadist' and 'perverted' can be applied to the Israeli officials who tormented them. One of the French participants said of the system used, where groups of three captives passed through a dark room and were subjected to beatings and other mistreatment, and then went into another room, where they could hear the abuse being wreaked on the next group, that the soldiers engaged in this violence, 'took pleasure' in it.

These outrages would seem bad enough if they were isolated, but all the testimony from human rights organisations is that they are not. The abuse of the flotilla activists is significant in that the Israeli authorities must have known the world would hear about it and although there were denials, they did not seem to think the activists should have been treated carefully so as not to add fuel to the bonfire of accusations of Israeli brutality. (The denials that abuse had taken place were also not plausible. For example, one activist was fitted with a neck brace by doctors in Istanbul when she arrived. Later photos show her not wearing it, a point which Israelis made much of, but the notion that medics would have thought it necessary to send her home with it indicates she needed it at the time. It's just not credible that Turkish doctors were acting like prop assistants in a fraud.)

When we add to the egregiously savage behaviour of the Israeli army and prison guards the daily outrages perpetrated by ordinary Israelis against non-Jews, we see a pattern that extends well beyond the corruption of the army, prison guards and the police force. Christian clergy, monastics and pilgrims report being on the receiving end of verbal abuse

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and spitting on a regular basis (see, for example, [here](#) and [here](#)) and even violence. Settlers in the West Bank continue to terrorise residents, egged on by Israeli rabbis. Such incidents indicate

that the brutality of those in uniforms is merely the sharper end of a long stick: Israelis have accepted violence and various other forms of abuse as acceptable, so acceptable that ordinary Israelis participate in it in their daily lives. Ethno-supremacism and religious hatred have become normalised. According to Nurit Peled Elhanan, a professor of language and education at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israeli children are 'indoctrinated' in these attitudes in school.

Add to the experience of schooling, the powerful socialisation of the military service that is compulsory for all but the Ultra-Orthodox, as well as the powerful socialisation of the latter, given the closed nature of their communities, it's not surprising that the whole society has been infected with notions of racial, ethnic and religious superiority and a mentality of indifference to the standards of human rights and civil behaviour that are considered normal in most other countries.

The question is: how can a society that had fallen into this mire ever extract itself?