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Atrocities committed against one's enemies, up to and including genocide, always begin with dehumanization.

I have always been aware of this, and I know there is a tendency among Palestinians to dehumanize Israelis, the settlers, and Zionists, just as there is a tendency among Israelis and their supporters to dehumanize Palestinians, the PLO, and Hamas, especially with the term "terrorist." During the Rwanda genocide, the Hutus referred to Tutsis as "cockroaches" before they began slaughtering them.

It is therefore with great alarm that I listened to the frenzy of horrifying statements coming from Israeli commanders as they escalated their attacks on Gaza. In addition to the term "terrorist," often irresponsibly used here in the US as well, the term being used now is "human animals." This designation is not limited to Hamas and its fighters, but covers all the people of Gaza, as the Israeli President Hertzog said on Friday: "It is not true civilians were not involved . . . They are collectively responsible for the attacks."

The Israeli Minister of Defense, Yoram Gallant, used this disgusting term, and the Israeli Army's Commander in Chief, Herzl Halevy, preparing for the ground assault also declared, "They are human animals, and we will treat them accordingly." In addition to the massive bombardment, he said that "there will be no water, no electricity, no food, and no medicines." This openly illegal statement (under the laws of war) went largely unchallenged in the West, precisely because many have bought into Israel's demonization and dehumanization of Palestinians. Support and sympathy for the civilian casualties of Hamas' attack, however, was used as a "green light" and legitimization of Israel's subsequent response.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Neftali Bennet argued that he is in favor of a Unity Government, precisely because, in his words, "We plan to do things in Gaza that the world ordinarily would not have permitted. We have a short window of opportunity right now, and we need a united

government to be able to do it." He did not elaborate or give any details, but clearly he was contemplating serious war crimes, and he wanted Israel to have the "legitimacy," acceptance, and freedom to carry them out.

This task was particularly easy because Palestinians, and particularly their resistance, had already been demonized thoroughly in the West. Over the course of a brutal 16-year siege of Gaza, it has been common to ignore the humanity of those whom Israel has attacked regularly and with total impunity.

The frenzy of US media coverage demonizing Hamas and Gaza generally, while emphasizing the sorrow, grief, and humanity only of its civilian victims, becomes part of this same scheme. When Israel felt it had built sufficient sympathy, it moved further into genocidal territory, ordering half the population of Gaza to leave their homes and move south within 24 hours. This clearly illegal action, amounting to forced transfer of an entire civilian population, was deemed not only permissible, but indeed it was rebranded as a "humanitarian gesture" warning the population to move out of harm's way as Israel moves in its massive ground forces and conducts further bombardment. The fact that there was in fact nowhere to go to was not seen as an insurmountable problem. The fact that half the population of Gaza are children was also ignored. They did not factor into the calculus of the need to allow Israel to work out its revenge, indeed of its declared plan to "wipe out" and "obliterate" its enemies.

As a result, we are able to witness genocide, ethnic cleansing, and serious war crimes being committed in real time. A group of civilian Palestinians fleeing towards the south, as directed, were bombed by Israel. 70 of them were killed in one incident on Thursday. It is a massacre no less barbarous than the massacre of Israeli youth at the music festival, but it happened with little international comment or concern. I am not sure if many of my readers were even aware of this incident, or saw any pictures or expressions of grief for these victims.

One day, Israeli commanders, politicians, and soldiers may have to face an international tribunal for their crimes in this "war." In all cases, however, they will have to answer to God for their actions. I am deeply concerned, however, with those here in this country who are complicit in these crimes, who willingly paved the way for them to occur by granting them a green light and moral justifications, not to mention a steady supply of weapons and ammunition, by accepting and participating in the demonization and dehumanization that was the necessary prelude to these atrocities. Scripture teaches that the one who hates their brother is one and the same with the murderer (I John 3:15). The thought (the hatred) and the words (the bigotry, racism, and dehumanization) precede and lead to murder.

All those who, under the cover of sympathy for Israeli civilian casualties, have accepted the dehumanization and demonization of Palestinians, who proudly proclaim that they unequivocally “stand with Israel,” and who openly and publicly permit its genocidal actions stand under God’s judgment. It is not too late to repent, to turn away from this evil, to seek forgiveness, and begin to acknowledge the humanity of all God’s children, be they Israeli or Palestinian.

*"Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer" (1 John 3:15).*

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