

October 30, 2023

Recently as I have gone forward to drop a pebble in the water during the 'Joys and Sorrows' part of our UU service, I have found myself feeling perhaps as "heartsick" as at any point of my long life, because of what is happening in the Middle East.

I have always been sympathetic to the creation of Israel and its role as a refuge for the Jewish diaspora, particularly in the aftermath of WWII and the Holocaust. In turn, ever since my own visits to Palestine I have been a dues-paying member of various US Jewish organizations focused on peace. And, I wholeheartedly share the condemnation of the brutal tactics of the Hamas militants during their attack on Israeli civilian society on October 7.

That overall sympathy for Israel cannot and must not, however, translate into "willful ignorance" of what has for far too long actually been happening to Palestinians on the ground in the "Much Too Promised Land" (to borrow the title of Aaron David Miller's 2008 critical book).

I have perhaps had a privileged view of the reality across the "Green Line," having traveled extensively in the occupied West Bank in 2002 and then again in 2005, when I also traveled to Gaza. I was there as the head of a review team, with Palestinian experts, to evaluate aid projects of the Belgian Government.

My 2005 visit corresponded with the construction of "The Wall," which was laid out by the Israelis in a manner that often resulted in the disruption of Palestinian communities on the West Bank; I saw the wall literally running down the middle of the main streets of towns and villages. In turn, rather than following the internationally recognized Green Line boundary with the West Bank, the wall zigged and zagged to bring about a *de facto* and illegal annexation of thousands of acres of Palestinian land, including valuable olive orchards. My visit to Gaza in turn gave me the chance to observe first hand the unhappy living conditions there, which have only gotten worse since, and also to meet and deal with the Hamas civilian authorities (as opposed to the military wing) who had come into office in the local government by virtue of recent popular elections.

At a personal level, I retain vivid memories of witnessing dehumanizing behavior of Israeli Defense Force (IDF) personnel at the frequent disruptive roadblocks on what are supposed to be Palestinian roads deep in the West Bank. I experienced the frightening surprise sweeps by armored IDF vehicles through Palestinian cities. I saw the network of modern roads throughout the West Bank connecting the illegal Israeli settlements, patrolled by the IDF, on which Palestinians are not allowed to travel. I saw the evidence of the physical destruction of Palestinian cultural infrastructure carried out by the IDF in Ramallah and elsewhere. I heard numerous first hand reports of innocent Palestinian civilians going about their daily

business and being shot and killed. (One of the members of my review team was a Harvard educated Palestinian woman whose husband was the Chancellor of an important Palestinian university. They recounted to me over dinner at their home in Ramallah how their teenage daughter had been randomly shot and wounded as she was trying to get to her high school.)

It is against this background that I mourn the horrible reality that the inhuman and detestable behavior of the Hamas fighters towards Israeli civilians on October 7 is being met by the inhuman and detestable shedding of Palestinian civilian life in Gaza with what seems to be indiscriminate Israeli bombardment of one of the most densely populated places on Earth (with weaponry largely supplied by the US).

*One “crime against humanity” cannot merit another, and is almost certain to lead to nothing but more strife and terror in the future.*

I have no answers--I fear we are faced with the potential for a truly catastrophic war, with consequences far beyond Gaza or Israel. When I went to Palestine there was still hope for a 'Two State Solution.' Even if Israel, in a fit of revenge, succeeds in wiping out Hamas in Gaza, unless and until a solution is found that gives Palestinians, and Israelis, hope for a future in which each can live their lives in dignity and security, there will not only be no peace, but Israel itself risks losing its heart and soul as a nation that claims to be defined by democratic and enlightened human values.

While I am certain we all share a sense of horror and grief about the plight of civilians on both sides, it is the Palestinian civilians in Gaza who find themselves particularly imperiled at this point, with no escape and so little assistance reaching them.

This has moved me personally to find a way to try to help with humanitarian relief, which led me to the Emergency Crisis Fund for the People of Gaza that has been set up by [United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) . During my 25 years with the UN Development Programme working in Africa and elsewhere, I have had personal experience with this office of the UN, and can testify to its effectiveness. They are in position to act rapidly and efficiently the moment the opportunity arises to begin serious humanitarian relief in Gaza, working with other UN and non- governmental organizations that have capacities on the ground.

I have just sent them a donation, and would like to urge others to consider doing the same. Here is the link to the fund: <https://crisisrelief.un.org/opt-crisis>

[Once on the website, one needs to click on the right hand arrow a few times to get to the screen for "Help for the People of Gaza".]

Gary E Davis

(PS. I cannot help but mention sadly that over 60 United Nations staff members have so far been killed by the bombings in Gaza).