

How should we respond to the injustice inflicted on the Palestinians?

What is taking place in the Middle East is not a War on Gaza, as it is labeled, but a genocide if not holocaust of innocent Palestinians in Gaza, brutally carried out by Israel, condoned if not aided by the United States of America. The United States provides not only the weapons used by the cruel regime in Tel Aviv but also the money to finance such operations. The United States blindly supports Israel, apparently coerced by the powerful pro-Israel lobby in the country. What really matters to Israel is the US support, not the United Nations resolutions. The fact remains that Israel has no qualms committing crimes against humanity, with absolute impunity, so long as it has the US support.

Seen in these terms, the United States is equally guilty of war crimes being committed in Gaza in the name of Israel's self-defense. Nearly a thousand Palestinians have been killed, 40 per cent of them women and children, and over 3,000 Palestinians have been injured in Gaza, not to mention the colossal collateral damage inflicted on buildings and infrastructure. What is appalling is the Israeli civilian support for this murderous operation, as shown by a recent poll in which 91 per cent were in favour. What is heartening, however, is that there are still some fair-minded people in Israel, at least 9 per cent, who denounce Israel's brutality in Gaza.

One may interpret the popular support for the war in Israel simply as a predictable reaction from a people who are living on borrowed time in a stolen land or more seriously as an understandable response from a people who are ignorant of the issues that lie behind the hubris. The Israeli media conspiracy through wanton disinformation and misinformation may also have made these people oblivious to the atrocities being committed by Israel in Gaza.

To be sure, a cessation of the current carnage in Gaza will only be a beginning of a new phase in the seemingly endless hostilities that have been going on in Palestine for over 60 years. The chances are there will be no real peace until and unless justice is handed out to the people of Palestine, who are now only asking for what they had in 1967, after having conceded 78 per cent of their homeland to the Israelis when the state of Israel was arbitrarily set up in 1948. Israel is dead wrong if it thinks that it can numb the Palestinians into submission by imposing its will under the weight of its superior military might.

Not surprisingly, the anger and outrage at what is happening in Gaza cuts across racial and religious boundaries in many parts of the world. The Muslims, in particular, are incensed by the horror inflicted on their fraternity in Palestine for generations, and they blame it not only on Israel and the United States, the alleged villain and the accomplice, respectively, but also on the "spineless" Arab leaders who are accused of being the stooges of the United States.

Decisions taken in anger are often wrong, as they are not rationally made based on a careful analysis of the pros and cons. One such decision is to boycott American and Israeli products. No doubt, such boycotts do have symbolic values in sending strong messages, but one must be mindful of the unintended effects, which can be very detrimental.

For starters, consumers, who boycott, unwittingly limit their choices, thereby settling for inferior or costlier substitutes, which means that they deny themselves value for their money. It is in this sense that they hurt themselves in their attempt to hurt the producers of the boycotted products. Second, it is morally wrong to punish the producers who hardly have anything to do with the policies of the countries they originate from or operate in. Third, inadvertently, local workers employed by these companies in the host country will eventually bear their brunt of such boycotts. Fourth, boycotts represent a double-edged sword as they invite retaliation, putting a country's own products at grave risks in export markets. Fifth, the multinational corporations, which are usually targeted at, are often on the other side of the equation in the sense that they are a voice of moderation in their home countries, as they are affected by foreign policies pursued by their home governments. Sixth, such actions may impede investment inflows by sending wrong messages to potential foreign investors. The list may go on and on, but the upshot in a nutshell is that a country may end up as net loser without achieving the main objective, namely justice for the Palestinians.

As history has repeatedly shown, violence begets violence. Militancy therefore is not the answer, although people are driven by desperation to take up arms, as in the case of Hamas. There can be no military solutions for the Palestinian problem. It is indeed ironical that the entire Arab World, a hundred times larger, is no match for the tiny Israel. War is despicable and should not even be the last resort, for there are no problems that cannot be resolved through talks and negotiations, if the contesting parties are sincere and willing to put their hearts and minds together to arrive at just solutions.

Attempts must be made to dispel untruth that blemishes the Palestinian cause, perpetrated through media distortions, especially in Israel and the United States. The powerful pro-Israel lobby in the United States needs to be countered with logic and reasoning and facts and figures. The Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) must take up this task, instead of merely convening ceremonious summits. It is encouraging to note that the world opinion is finally beginning to shift towards justice for the Palestinians, if the growing demonstrations in every part of the world are any measure.

The Gaza misadventure by Israel is hopefully the breaking point for the world to say enough is enough. Israel runs the risk of stigmatizing itself as a pariah state if it continues to disregard the world opinion, while the United States may lose respect and goodwill it had earned based on its lofty principles of freedom and democracy, if it continues to ignore the injustice inflicted on the Palestinians who have become refugees in their own homeland.

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