

The many sides of war: academic silliness, military danger, political entrapment



by Lev Tsitrin

Let's get the silly stuff out of the way first.

The *New York Times* found no better use for its opinion pages than to publish a lengthy [“guest essay” by one Omer Bartov](#), “a professor of Holocaust and genocide studies at Brown University” whose “greatest concern watching the Israel-Gaza war unfold is that there is genocidal intent, which can easily tip into genocidal action.” Mind you, he is talking not of genocidal intent of Hamas or PA – but of Israel! To prove this, the professor takes a microscope to Israeli leaders’ rhetoric – and sees sure signs: it is not nice to call Hamas “Amalek” or “human animals;” or to warn that Gaza will have to be turned into rubble. “There is still time to stop Israel from letting its actions become a genocide” Is the cry of his

soul.

Relax, professor. A month before your heart-felt plea, the Israeli Army told Gazans to move South, away from active fighting, and hundreds of thousands heeded the call. Furthermore, Israel recently scheduled daily pauses in fighting to allow the remaining non-combatants to leave. Israelis don't need your help with forestalling Palestinian genocide, professor Bartov – they do it on their own. You are just being a silly annoyance – a fly in La Fontaine's fable of "[The Coach and the Fly](#)" that thinks that its buzzing is what makes the coach move uphill, and not the horses, its moral being that

Thus certain ever-bustling noddies
Are seen in every great affair;
Important, swelling, busy-bodies,
And bores 'tis easier to bear
Than chase them from their needless care.

This is not to say that there is no place for a history professor in helping with what is now going on. How about, instead of engaging in "needless care," the professor dedicates his energies to cooling-off of the self-righteous indignation of ignoramuses who demonstrate on college campuses?

The professor can do it by shedding the light on the basic fact that the only reason students attend college is to learn – in other words, to fill their gaps of knowledge. Being not-yet educated (or not educated in world history even if they are close to graduation), they do not know what they are talking about when they accuse Israel of "colonialism." In fact, a major education campaign is badly needed to happen on campuses world-wide – a campaign that focuses on the history of conquests, of colonization of lands, and of movements of populations, Persians trying to conquer Greece, Greeks under Alexander of Macedon getting all the way to India; Roman

conquests spanning the entirety of Western Europe, a hunk of Asia, and all of Northern Africa; Arabs who after the death of Mohammed went on a campaign of conquest that gave them the half of then-known world, from Spain in the West to India in the East (Palestine including); Russians moving eastward over frozen rivers, conquering land all the way to the Pacific coast; Ottomans who took over much of the Arab empire; the Spanish who expanded into South America, the Dutch getting to Indonesia and South Africa, the French and the Brits moving into North America and Australia; and European powers who carved up Africa.

Since the professor is focused in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he could do some useful service by pointing out that Arabs are no more “indigenous” to Palestine than the Russians are to Kamchatka – they are mere descendants of Arab imperialists and settler-colonialists of old, so if the “progressives” want to talk of the “indigenous” population of Palestine whose rights should be defended, they must assign this role to the Jews; if they are to condemn “settler-colonialism” in Palestine and welcome its “liberation,” than it is the Arabs whom they must condemn. Teach this to the ignoramuses who demonstrate on your campus, professor Bartov. Stress to the students that they attend the university to learn, not to teach.

Having dealt with this brazen but useless professorial profiteer engaged in “needless care” on the pages of the *New York Times* behind, let’s turn from an academic fly that is puffed-up with self-importance, to the horses that actually do the work: the Israeli army, and the Americans.

The army is facing a dangerous and daunting task of rooting out a ruthless enemy who is willing to sacrifice any number of Palestinians to Hamas’ settler-colonial and genocidal goal of destroying Israel. The army does what it can to spare the non-combatants while eliminating Hamas. It is a professional force doing its dangerous task in full accordance with the Western

rules of armed conflict. What more can be said?

As to the Americans, it gets more than a little tricky. The Biden administration seems to sense a great geopolitical opportunity in the elimination of Hamas. A veteran Middle East hand Aaron David Miller [attributed Biden's firm rejection](#) of ceasefire to "preternatural support for Israel," but there is much more to it. Mr. Miller is either being coy – or is uncharacteristically naive. Removal of Hamas, this "exhibit A" of the impossibility of reliance on Palestinian willingness to live in peace with Israel, opens the way to the renewed push for a Palestinian state in unified West Bank and Gaza which Biden seems determined to exploit – and which the Europeans and Arabs will, undoubtedly, enthusiastically welcome. And this is the strategic bind for Israel: on the one hand, it is great that the US has a vital interest in the complete destruction of Hamas, shielding Israel from the calls for ceasefire which would save Hamas from defeat – but once the army accomplishes the task of destroying Hamas, the political arm-twisting to create a Palestinian state will start in earnest.

This danger cannot be overestimated: we saw on October 7 what a Palestinian state looks like, because once a Palestinian state is established, Israeli arrest raids that keep the West Bank relatively calm will become impossible – they will mean crossing of an international border, and thus an act of war, and thus ensuring that the West Bank will become another Gaza, armed and ideologically driven to attack Israel – and that Gaza itself will rearm.

The administration's narrative is that the PA is an ideological opposite to Hamas – that it is a pragmatic, peaceable body amenable to compromise and advocating a policy of "live and let live." But if so, why are the portraits of suicide bombers proudly displayed all over its territory? Why are they lionized as Palestinian patriots and "martyrs" – i.e. figures to emulate? Why are their families – and those of the

terrorists in Israeli jails – paid pensions in proportion to the number of Israelis killed – the so-called “pay-for-slay” policy? Why are the textbooks portray Israelis as foreign intruders, not as natives living of their ancestral land?

Besides, who can guarantee that those so-called “moderates” would keep their power after a Palestinian state is declared? After all, once Israelis withdrew from Gaza in 2005, the PA got kicked out of power by the Hamas – first electorally, and then militarily – in no time; by 2007 it was over for the PA. Given the Palestinian mood, the same will surely happen in the envisioned Palestinian state.

Hamas lulled Israel into complacency by its seeming willingness to govern – to let Palestinian workers earn money in Israel, and to take funds from Qatar to pay salaries in Gaza, and to build it up. This turned out to be a trap – yet once Hamas is defeated, the same illusion will be whispered in Israel’s ear regarding the PA by American peace processors.

There should be no illusion – Hamas and PA’s tactics may be different, but their goals are same: to restore Arab settler-colonialism to their corner of the world, so Israel will have to figure how to evade Biden’s diplomatic push for Palestinian state. Once Hamas is defeated, Biden’s love for Israel will morph into the love for the Palestinians, and the horses that made it to victory will start pulling in the opposite directions. Israel will be in a very tough bind. It should start thinking of how to deal with the absence of Hamas – a situation that may become every bit as existentially dangerous for Israel as was Hamas’ existence.