

## **Force-marched into immorality**

**Patrick Lawrence**

There is a long and unfortunate tradition in America—and it is fair to say throughout the West—of foreign policy as the exclusive preserve of sequestered elites. In the U.S. case, it is since the late-19<sup>th</sup> century, when America first had a foreign policy one could speak of, that more or less remote, unelected cliques have conducted the nation's foreign affairs without reference to the popular will. Reflecting this, I have long counted Americans fortunate that others are capable of distinguishing between the American government and the American people.

As of 7 October this no longer holds, it seems to me. The extremity of the Israeli regime's inhumanity as it prosecutes its barbaric campaign against the Palestinians of Gaza has altered fundamentally the dynamic at work between those in the West who fashion foreign policy and those in whose names it is executed. Let us try to understand this transformation. It is significant, and it is possibly historic in its implications.

To begin at the beginning, there is the question of nomenclature. We must always name things properly if we are to understand them and act capably in response to events. We now witness—in real time when the Israeli authorities permit media coverage—a genocide. This term is now flung about so frequently we are in danger of devaluing it. We must not allow this to happen. The Israelis' savage campaign in Gaza must be counted a genocide by all serious definitions. It is among our responsibilities to grasp the gravity of this term and condemn Israel without apology or compromise.

As we witness this genocide, most of us stand by as the U.S. and its allies in the trans-Atlantic alliance endorse the brute, altogether primitive savagery of the Israel Defense Forces. This official support is rendered, precisely according to tradition, in our names whether we stand for or against the IDF's daily massacres.

It is the magnitude of apartheid Israel's crimes, combined with the significance of the Israeli state in the West's geopolitical design, that prompts the shifting dynamic I describe. On one hand, the policy cliques are desperate—not too strong a term—to secure popular support, or at least popular acquiescence, as Israel proceeds in Gaza. On the other, those in whose names Israel receives U.S. and European backing are challenged, by the nearly unprecedented enormity of Israel's crimes against humanity, to transcend the old tradition and take responsibility for their governments' actions.

The extent Israel's pathological murder spree in Gaza is unacceptable, this is to say, is the extent to which we in the West are to be forced by whatever means to accept it. Turning this thought over, the extent to which we are forced to accept the unacceptable is the extent to which we must refuse to do so.

On both sides of the Atlantic we now find incessant attacks against anyone who criticizes Israel's brutality or questions the Zionist project. This is now marked down as "hate speech" or "anti-Semitism." There are bans on public support for the Palestinian cause across Europe; to protest, or simply to insist that the long history of Israel's violent repression of the Palestinian people be remembered, is called support for terrorism. The more condemnable the IDF's savagery, the more intense are these gross distortions of reality.

We must recognize these daily events as part of a concerted, coordinated effort to protect Israel from judgment by the most basic standards of human conduct—to redeem the irredeemable, this is to say. These "whole-of-society" campaigns effectively require citizens of the Western democracies—and we must not miss this—to surrender their morality, their decency, their consciousness of what it means to be human in the service of a barbarism with few equivalents in modern history.

We are force-marched, to put this point another way, into a state of either amorality or immorality, and at this moment I am not sure which is the intent. As Israelis behave barbarically, so are we required to become barbarians. To coerce people into such a state, to outlaw independent

thinking in favor of a degrading orthodoxy: Does this suggest Western societies now turn toward a new variant of totalitarianism? I am not one to use language irresponsibly, but with bitterness I will pose the question.

Peter Dimock, the distinguished American novelist and a dear friend, accuses the Biden regime and all those viciously insisting that Israel must be supported even as it murders a people, of creating “an unlivable world.” In [an open letter to President Biden](#), published Sunday in *The Floutist*, Dimock adds, “The complicity of every American with genocide implicit in your administration’s policies destroys our political, ethical, and moral world as a livable form of human solidarity and forces us all into a necessary consideration of first principles.”

Our complicity: This is what we must all face, come to terms with, and act upon. We in the West cannot and should not any longer count on the rest of the world to excuse us—to say, These policies are the American government’s, or the French government’s, and the Americans or the French are not responsible for them. We merit no such dispensation.

Americans and by extension many Europeans lived through a similar passage during the Vietnam war. For many of us the indecency, the offense to our common humanity and morality, forced us to exert ourselves—via what we wrote, how we organized, the streets we marched—into the policy process as best we could. The policy elites so long sequestered were no longer so.

The Vietnamese won the Vietnam war, but those in the West who grasped their responsibilities and acted out of their consciences made a difference. The mark of that time remains. The mark of this time will similarly remain. And it is ours to determine what this mark will be.

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