

Missing in Gaza: Global leaders & peacemakers

If relief was palpable on both sides, the rubble we saw in Gaza was just as stark. Having received both images from Israel-Palestine (to name these intermingled territories in alphabetical order), the world will soon also obtain answers to the question, "What after the truce?"

On the third day of the truce (November 26), when Prime Minister (PM) Benjamin Netanyahu, unannounced, landed in Gaza to join Israeli troops there, he told them (and everyone else) that "we are continuing until the end — until victory". Adding, "We have three goals in this war: Eliminate Hamas, return all of our hostages and ensure that Gaza will not go back to being a threat to the State of Israel." Netanyahu also claimed that Israel had "the force, the strength, the will and the determination to achieve all of our goals."

Undenied reports claim that Israel plans to wipe out a future threat from the thin Gaza strip (which has an area, roughly, of about 140 square miles, and which Hamas controlled) either by pushing its more than two million Palestinians south into Egypt's Sinai province — or by forcing them inside a tiny seashore enclave of a handful of square miles within Gaza but close to Egypt.

That would be ethnic cleansing and concentration camp creation in the most literal sense, but for the world to allow it to happen is not impossible. On October 27, 120 countries (including France) indeed voted for a UN General Assembly resolution asking Israel to revoke its call for an evacuation of northern Gaza. However, if Netanyahu orders the evacuation of 90% or even all of Gaza, will Egypt or other Arab countries, Iran or Turkey, or the UN or BRICS (all of whom have condemned the scale and nature of Israel's retribution after October 7), or any force in the world, intervene physically?

We don't know, but at least some countries will feel intense pressure to intervene.

We should mark, moreover, that in some possibly significant ways, the end of 2023 seems different from earlier occasions when the world silently watched the forced expulsion of Palestinians from their homes and lands.

One, Palestinians will remember that on October 7, with the whole world watching, they showed the will and ability to overcome

Israeli barriers even as, evidently, great cruelty too was shown. Two, wrath among the Palestinians will go very deep, producing at some point another grim response, if they are once more treated, again with the world watching, not as human beings but as animal or worse. Three, and this may be at least as important, the populations of both Israel and the western world as a whole now possess powerful and influential segments deeply convinced of Palestine's need for a secure and dignified homeland. The women and men of different faiths and races who've been demonstrating in large numbers on European and American streets for Palestinian rights are not likely to vanish. If anything, their ranks may grow. And the same can probably be said for the many Israelis who now accept the Palestinians' right to an independent State.

In the days to come, Donald Trump will, of course, say or do anything he likes. Yet the video of what he said on November 9, which CNN played on November 10, may indicate a chink in the supposed solidarity of American opinion in Israel's favour. "So many are dying," said Trump in that video, adding, "There is no hatred like the Palestinian hatred for Israel and the Jewish people, and probably the other way around also."

Would Trump have uttered that last phrase a month earlier?

And while PM Modi has justified Israel's right to defend itself, his government has also reiterated, through the external affairs ministry, India's call for "direct negotiations" toward a "sovereign, independent, and viable State of Palestine living within secure and recognised borders, side by side, at peace with Israel".

More than 20 years ago at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, a visiting Indian political scientist gave his clear opinion that the Israeli-Palestinian dispute was easier to resolve than the India-Pakistan friction. Whichever one is harder to resolve, the similarities should be acknowledged. Many Palestinians continue to resent the fact that Israel was created through fresh settlements on land that for centuries had been Palestinian. Many Israelis resent the existence of Palestinians in their neighbourhood as also within the Israeli State. Similarly, there are many Indians today who imagine a world that doesn't include Pakistan.

For a cricket match or two, Pakistan may re-enter our world, but then it must make a quick and clean exit. It shouldn't be allowed to disturb our picture of the world. We can enjoy our lives without Pakistan, thank you very much. Many Pakistanis would likewise prefer a world where India or Indians didn't exist. However, like it or not, both India and Pakistan are around. Just as Israelis and Palestinians are both around.

Are powerful peacemakers around? That may be the most important question of all. Is there any country strong enough, or a group of influential countries, working to take forward, one step at a time, the current merciful truce between Israel and Hamas towards mutually acceptable coexistence between Israelis and the Palestinians?

Is there leadership in the world?



Rajmohan Gandhi



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Rajmohan Gandhi's last book was *India After 1947: Reflections and Recollections* (2022).

The views expressed are personal