



People carry Palestinian flags near an Israeli flag of a counter-protester during a rally in front of City Hall in Toronto, Canada on October 9, 2023.

PHOTO: REUTERS

How should we talk about Palestine, Hamas, and Israel?



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Days since Hamas – the militant group ruling Gaza – launched the deadliest attack on Israel in 50 years, with the death toll mounting to over 1,300, Israel's government has demanded that millions of Palestinians leave their homes and has pummeled the blockaded territory with airstrikes, already killing at least 2,000 civilians. As videos of families scrambling in the rubble flood our screens, everyone around the world feels somewhat compelled to engage in talks about moral responsibility. But the moral contest unfolding in the media and on social media is getting messy, taking attention away from questioning the complex geopolitical stakes and the factors that perpetuate the vicious cycle of terrorism and settler violence.

There's many muffled sides to the raging debates. On one side, there's the hypocritical West, which has selectively condemned Hamas' attack on Israeli citizens, and made excuses for Israel's violent retaliation – one with "unprecedented might," as Netanyahu said – dropping 6,000 bombs in only six days in Gaza, and launching white phosphorus bombs on one of the most densely populated areas in the world. As the horrors ensue, the European Union and the US have affirmed Israel's right to defend itself, putting up Israeli flags and banning pro-Palestine rallies. The Western nations are unequivocally endorsing and aiding the mass murder of Palestinian citizens, which they have done since the inception of the conflict. Specifically, the US and its quest to ensure worldwide democracy falls short in its unwarranted support for Israel's current far-right government championing militant Zionism. This consciousness of Western hypocrisy cannot be left out of the conversation.

Since the attack, there's also been a loud resurgence of the pro-Palestine left, who have been calling to contextualise the attack by Hamas. But this progressive movement calling for fair characterisation also has a fundamental flaw: taking it too far with self-defeating moral signalling. It has become almost fashionable at the moment to pounce upon anyone who condemns the killings

of both Israelis and Palestinians, with a fierce herd mentality that conflates the act of criticising Hamas – which is, as we speak, holding innocent people hostage – to enabling Israel's apartheid. Of course, it's important to remind ourselves of the ongoing Nakba – the 75 years of oppression that Palestinians continue to face. And of course, Palestinian citizens are the victims here. But in a world where the powerful need little reason to distort that fact, we must be careful about how to productively raise the issue of the victim versus the perpetrator in the wake of the Hamas attack. And we must do so in a way that does not abominably call for apathy towards the mass killing of innocent Jews.

One post being widely circulated reads: "Criticising Palestinian armed efforts while also criticising Israel is not a 'nuanced' stance, it's equalising the colonised with the coloniser." This position raises the much-required distinction between the colonised and coloniser, but it's strategically short-sighted in making its point. It can be interpreted as saying that decolonisation efforts in the Palestine liberation movement entails the killing of all innocent Israelis. The narrative can be twisted to fill anti-Semitic tropes and feed the Israeli far-right government's extremist actions. It is precisely this dialogue that has nurtured the bias of commentators in Western media, unproductively diverting the problem to being about progressives supporting the Palestinian liberation movement, rather than Israel's war crimes.

The movement for Palestinian liberation needs to address the creation of militant groups like Hamas – in the neo-colonial paradigm – which owe both their power and legitimacy to Israel in the first place. Just like anti-Soviet forces backed by the US after Moscow's invasion of Afghanistan mutated into the Al-Qaeda, which carried out the 9/11 attacks, Israel in fact helped create Hamas and its Muslim Brotherhood precursors to counter the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and the Fatah political party, led by Yasser Arafat (who himself referred to Hamas as a "creature of Israel"). Hamas, in other words, is the biggest blowback of Israel's

historical neo-colonial policies.

Yitzhak Segev, who served as Israel's military governor in the 1980s, later told *The New York Times* that he financed the Palestinian Islamist Group with a budget. In 2009, Avner Cohen, a former Israeli religious affairs official, also told *The Wall Street Journal* that Israel had made a "mistake," and adopted a divide-and-rule strategy in Palestine, helping to build up a militant strain of Palestinian Islamists, in the form of Hamas, to fight left-wing Palestinian rivals for influence in Gaza and the West Bank. After the suicide bombings in 1994, when it became clear that Hamas wanted their own power in the region, Israel's military cracked down with force, which in turn increased the ordinary Palestinian's appeal to the militant group. The result of Israel's so-called "mistake" has led to the past two decades of violent power struggle. And the global dragnet, launched by the US against Islamist extremists since 9/11, has served to justify the current Israeli government's apartheid and its unprovoked attacks and unhinged killings of Palestinian civilians.

The analogies with the 9/11 attacks – which lie in the shock and unpreparedness of Israel's much-vaunted intelligence – are pertinent, as the consequences of Israel's war-mongering response create havoc in Gaza, with rigorous US backing. For better part of the last few decades, the US has invaded countries in the name of expunging terrorists, and made strategic blunders leading to unexplainable civilian casualties. And the lesson of Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, with tacit US backing, must not be forgotten. The Lebanese Christian militia allied to Israel massacred Lebanese citizens and thousands of Palestinians in refugee camps. In response, Syria and Iran formed a collaborative resistance, which continues to shape the tense geopolitics of the region. Over the past four decades, if history has taught us anything, it's this: costly wars to wipe out militants perpetuate cycles of violence and lead to worse conundrums.

Hamas, which has been backed by Iran for decades, also attacked at a time when Israel and Saudi Arabia were cozying up with US backing, which was to slam the brakes on the China-brokered deal to launch rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia. There are always complex politics underlying war crimes of such scale. It's never so black-and-white as the politicians present it to be. And, in that light, misinformation and social media noise largely detract the public from asking or examining the difficult, real questions.

The Pope's global warming challenge to world leaders

AN OPEN DIALOGUE



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The need for urgent action to address global warming has been the key point in a major document released by the Vatican on October 4. In his appeal to the world leaders, entitled *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis expressed hope that the forthcoming COP28 meeting "will allow for a decisive acceleration of energy transition, with effective commitments subject to ongoing monitoring."

The Pope's urging comes at an appropriate juncture in the now-flagging momentum of the global environmental movement. The Northern Hemisphere experienced its hottest summer this year. Climate change had all but disappeared from US media for almost a year since the war in Ukraine became the talking point and the presidential elections came rolling around.

It has almost been eight years since the Paris Climate Accord, an international treaty on climate change, was adopted in December

as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) say is essential to tackle the climate crisis.

Will the Pope's appeal make any difference? The answer is a qualified "yes." He is the leader of 1.3 billion Catholics and has been a consistent advocate for a cleaner environment and carbon-free energy sources. In 2015, prior to the Paris meeting, the Pope made a similar declaration to world leaders to come to an agreement to reduce emissions and finance mitigation and adaptation. His words did not fall on deaf ears then. And now, at a time of chaos and crises around the world, the Pope is considered a solid rock, or even like the North Star, during these turbulent times.

To mollify the sceptics, Bill McKibben, the founder of 350.org, an international environmental organisation, said, "The work of spiritual leaders around the world may be our best chance of getting hold of things...



In the new document, released ahead of the COP28 conference next month in Dubai, Pope Francis said the transition to clean, renewable energy and the abandonment of fossil fuels was not going fast enough.

PHOTO: REUTERS

2015. The Accord has laudable goals for climate mitigation, adaptation, and finance. But much water has flown down the Ganges since then, and progress has been very slow on all fronts. While the bar was set very high, the goals seemed achievable by 2030. It was stipulated in the Accord that emissions should be reduced as soon as possible and should reach net zero by the middle of this century. To stay below 1.5 degrees Celsius of global warming, emissions needed to be cut by roughly 50 percent by 2030.

But the UN warned last month that the world is not on track to meet these goals, and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) reported that 2023 will be the hottest year in human history.

One important point raised by the Vatican was that the world's wealthiest countries are responsible for the rapid change in the environment and exhorted that the consumption patterns of the wealthiest nations have to change. The Pope notes that "emissions per individual in the United States are about two times greater than those of individuals living in China, and about seven times greater than the average of the poorest countries."

As we know, wealth, energy use, and the consumption of goods and services are unevenly distributed across the world. In 2021, the average North American emitted 11 times more energy-related CO₂ than the average African. Yet, variations across income groups are even more significant. The top one percent of emitters globally each had carbon footprints amounting to over 50 tonnes of CO₂ in 2021, at least a thousand times greater than those of the bottom one percent of emitters. These sharp contrasts reflect great differences in income and wealth, and in lifestyles and consumption patterns. It is about time that the United States and other wealthy countries reiterate their commitment to do more to help poor nations, which have contributed the least to the climate crisis.

This brings us to the next step needed to revive the climate push and the possible reason why the global environmental movement will welcome the Pope's encyclical. The COP28 meeting is only a few weeks away before it assembles in Expo City, Dubai next month. Taking place from November 30 to December 12, it will provide an unprecedented opportunity to change course and create a better world for people, nature, and the climate. It is noteworthy that the host of the conference is Sultan Al Jaber, the CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, who was named the president of COP28.

To allay any fears that an oil tycoon may not be best suited for the new role, Al Jaber has recently made more ambitious statements saying the world must "phase down" fossil fuels themselves. But he has so far avoided calling for the complete phasing out of oil, coal, and gas that scientific organisations such

Yes, the engineers have done their job. Yes, the scientists have done their job. But it's high time for the human heart to do its job. That's what we need this leadership for."

Let me wrap up this note by summarising the current state of affairs and the takeaway from the Pope's message: 1) Rich countries need to reduce their consumption, 2) The polluters must provide support to poorer countries to adapt and mitigate, and 3) The global leaders can take action to reallocate resources away from the greedy and towards the needy.

To note, the Pope repeatedly mentioned "global warming" in his message rather than the broader "climate change." And this caught a lot of attention. We need a more engaging slogan to end climate change. Climate leaders must also emphasise that we need more

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funding for the poor. "COP28 also needs to ensure that finance going to the Global South to fund this transition is massively increased. Currently, Africa has 39 percent of the world's potential for renewable energy, yet it receives just two percent of global investment in the sector."

One can hope that the Pope will go further in his follow-ups and urge the rich countries to provide support to the poorer countries. "Wealthy nations must provide the finance necessary to make adaptation possible in the countries that need it most," said a report from Washington, DC-based think-tank World Resources Institute. An op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal* on October 7 said that, of the \$3 trillion investment in rich countries for greener technology, only a fraction is allocated to improving the lot of the poor and an even smaller fraction is being channelled to funding for projects in the poor countries.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Wash against
 - 6 "The Godfather" group
 - 11 Suspect's story
 - 12 Gladden
 - 13 Nocturnal wanderer
 - 15 Young one
 - 16 Signing need
 - 17 Starter's stat
 - 18 Paper fasteners
 - 20 Diet no-no
 - 21 Went ahead
 - 22 Remote button
 - 23 Powerful beam
 - 26 Trimmed
 - 27 Singer Fitzgerald
 - 28 Scandal subject
 - 29 Quarterback
- DOWN**
- 30 Looked for
 - 34 Piston convector
 - 35 Vegas
 - 36 In the style of
 - 37 One who wheedles
 - 40 Acid type
 - 41 Brother's daughter
 - 42 Looks after
 - 43 Exams
- 6** Where-withal
- 7** Maximum amount
- 8** Fluffy wrap
- 9** Repeat
- 10** Filled with bubbles
- 14** Hoe target
- 19** Entreaty
- 22** Long skirt
- 23** Ogles
- 24** Door-opening phrase
- 25** Arrive feet first
- 26** Lowly farmer
- 28** Try for a fly
- 30** Some singers
- 31** Grabs
- 32** Vote in
- 33** Challenges
- 38** Break off
- 39** Recline



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

SCAMS TESSE
CADET ALONE
IRATE MILAN
FEMAPEART
ITSAMIRACLE
BOPREXGEAR
BORED PESTS
OPEN PAN
ITSAMISTAKE
LIT YETWAX
EMOTER OHARE
DAMEROKER
LEES SPENT