

Co-Dependency and Its Discontents

Let's see now: the first thing we need to understand is that genocide is the denial of the right of existence to an entire national, ethnic, religious, or racial group. We need to remember that it involves murdering its members; causing them severe bodily or mental harm; inflicting on them conditions meant to destroy them in whole or in part; imposing measures aimed at preventing births within the group; and forcibly transferring its children to another group.

In January 2024, South Africa brought suit against Israel before the International Court of Justice, arguing that Israel was committing genocide in its military attack on Gaza. In bringing the case, South Africa acknowledged that Israel was responding to a brutal attack from Gaza the previous October 7. Israel protested at length, arguing that South Africa's suit was groundless and ill-documented, and that South Africa had no standing to sue.

On January 24, the Court ruled that South Africa was entitled to sue and had established a plausible case of genocide against Israel, while making the point that Gaza's civilian population was "extremely vulnerable." And so it ordered Israel to stop all genocidal actions in Gaza, to hold the offenders accountable, and to keep full and transparent records of any genocidal actions. Though the court did not call for a ceasefire, it also ordered Israel to provide adequate food, clean water, shelter, medical care, and sanitation to Gaza's people.

Keep in mind that the presiding judge in the case was Joan Donoghue, an American who had previously worked for the State Department.

Immediately thereafter, Benjamin Netanyahu shot back with a statement calling the Court order a "blood libel." Citing Israel's right to defend itself, he made it plain that he would continue doing whatever he pleased about Gaza. He repeatedly predicted that the war in Gaza would continue for months, regardless how widely it might expand. A little later on, Joseph Biden condemned the Court's ruling in similar terms, claiming that Israel was doing everything in its power to limit harm to civilians. As Biden made his views known, two hundred nine members of the House of Representatives added their own screed blasting the ICJ ruling.

Meanwhile, the flow of American weapons and intelligence to Israel has continued unabated, along with US naval backup in the eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea. After all, Biden once gave Bibi a bear hug. Apparently the embrace packs iron.

Paradoxically enough, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken had been working with Egypt and Qatar in hopes of establishing a six-week humanitarian pause in the fighting, which by then had claimed the lives of almost 26,000 Gazan civilians, most of them women and children. There was no criticism of Israel involved in his work.

In December 2023, a Data for Progress poll revealed that 76 percent of Democrats, 49 percent of Republicans, and 61 percent of Americans as a whole favored a full and lasting ceasefire in Gaza. Protests are continuing worldwide, and America's reputation for decency has been sinking across the global south and most of the rest of the world.

By late January, the Center for Constitutional Rights filed a genocide suit against President Biden, Anthony Blinken, and Lloyd Austin in Oakland, California's federal court, complete with testimony from Palestinian-Americans and Palestinians in Gaza who have had family members sickened, wounded, or killed. Though it guaranteed no redress, citing the case's complicated legal questions, the court agreed to hear the case anyway. And though the judge in charge declared that the case was beyond the court's jurisdiction because it was about foreign policy, he added that the Center's argument was sound on its merits.

Evidently that annoyed Nancy Pelosi, who lives in nearby San Francisco. On January 28, she declared without proof that people calling for a Gaza ceasefire must have Russian connections, and called for an FBI investigation. It looks like she'd have a lot of people to investigate, even the some she acknowledged might be sincere. At the time of her comment, that included some eighteen municipalities across the nation from coast to coast, including Atlanta, Detroit, Oakland, Chicago, and Pelosi's own San Francisco; also the Ann Arbor, Michigan school board, the Texas AFL-CIO, the United Electrical Workers Union, the Service Employees International Union, the United Auto Workers, The American Postal Workers, the American Federation of Teachers, and the National Education Association. One might ask if the FBI can keep up.

As if the pile of rubble weren't high enough, there was the decision by the US and sixteen of its allies to cut off funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency, even though its head, Philippe Lazzarini, had fired its people who were accused of being members of Hamas and ordered a full investigation. In this instance, neither good sense nor good deed go unpunished. Empire spank.

Sadly enough, this is how the United States and Israel, once considered beacons of democracy, become pariah nations.

Why is this happening? Consider this: ever since its founding, Israel has been America's gendarme in the often uneasy Middle East. After all, there's oil and access to the Suez Canal to be had, along with the moral glow in providing a national home for Holocaust survivors, even if that meant pushing aside several hundred thousand Palestinians. To do the job, Israel needs American weapons. American military contractors are all too happy to oblige, because the money from the weapons trade returns to them in the form of increased profit. Along the way, their operations have become a major part of the economy in every congressional district, with the military-industrial complex successfully advertising itself as a job provider. The advertising appears all over the place, at football games, on television, and in social media. Never mind that both Brown University's Costs of War Project and the National Priorities Project have shown that a similarly large investment in health care, education, environmental protection, and public works would mean two to three times as many jobs. Among the power brokers and most of those running for public office, the fix is in, and none of them can kick the habit. Nor, it seems, can some of the general public—at least not yet.

But now that most of the world-American public included-wants a ceasefire in Gaza, maybe things are starting to change, even if it means that the power brokers have to go cold turkey to get free of their military Jones.

As of January 31, seventy US municipalities had called for a Gaza ceasefire, according to Reuters news service. Any of you interested in adding to that number in your own neighborhood can help by going to the US Campaign for Palestinian Rights website. There you can learn not only about the ongoing damage in Gaza and the West Bank and how it makes a sad joke out of international law, but also what this cruel mayhem costs your own communities in unmet human needs and how you might do something about it.