

# Douglas Murray Defends Israel and Admonishes the West

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## COMMENTARY

In the United States and Europe, university students and professors, journalists and diplomats, activists and NGOs, international court judges in The Hague, and international organization bureaucrats in Turtle Bay, Brussels, and Geneva take a peculiarly intense interest in condemning Israel. It would be bad enough if Western condemnations only demonstrated bias against the Jewish state. But they also display an antipathy to principles such as the dignity of the person and virtues such as the courage to defend one's family and nation with deep roots in Western civilization. Since Israel embodies these principles and virtues, which are essential to the preservation and flourishing of freedom and democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, learning from and standing by the Jewish state fortify the West.

The critics work overtime to vilify Israel, but their favorite accusations conflict with the facts and rely on gross double standards.

First, the critics allege that inspired by Zionism, Israel illegitimately embraces nationalism, conceiving of itself as the nation-state of the Jewish people. This allegation neglects that Israel remains the Middle East's lone rights-protecting democracy. It ignores that like all minorities in Israel, Arab citizens, some 21% of the population, enjoy full civil and political rights. (They are not required to serve in the army but may enlist.) And it overlooks that like Israel – but often with less success in integrating Muslim minorities – nation-states across Europe combine the protection of rights, democratic self-government, and devotion to nationhood.

Second, according to legions of detractors in the West, Israel occupies the West Bank (territory Israelis often refer to by the biblical names Judea and Samaria) and Gaza. Yet military imperatives compel Israel to maintain overall security responsibility for the West Bank where, within Palestinian Authority administered areas, Iran-backed Hamas plots against both the PA and Israel. Meanwhile, many in the West justify Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, massacre in southern Israel – Gaza jihadists killed around 1,200 persons, mostly civilians, and took around 250 persons hostages, mostly civilians – as laudable resistance to occupation, notwithstanding Israel's 2005 withdrawal from Gaza.

Yet the West seems generally unconcerned about clear-cut occupations and volatile territorial disputes elsewhere. Turkey invaded northeastern Cyprus in 1974, declaring the establishment of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, though hardly anyone in the West notices Ankara's more than 50 years of occupation of the Mediterranean island. Few in the

West (until recently) have given much attention to the bloody strife between Pakistan and India over Kashmir. And the Chinese Communist Party's unlawful seizure of, and snuffing out of freedom in, Hong Kong in 2020 excite little sympathy or engagement in the West.

Third, asserts the fashionable indictment, Israel's war-mongering visits death and destruction on the region. Yet fighting between Jews and Arabs over the last 100 years has stemmed primarily from Arab and Muslim determination initially to prevent the establishment of a Jewish state, and then to wipe out Israel. A comparative perspective is revealing. From the 1917 Balfour Declaration, in which the British government announced support for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, to Oct. 6, 2023, approximately 91,000 Arabs died in fighting against Jews living in their ancestral homeland. Since the terrorists' Oct. 7 assault on Israel, around 50,000 Arabs have been killed, according to Hamas, whose numbers don't distinguish combatants from noncombatants and don't consider the jihadists' use of Palestinian noncombatants as human shields. In addition, according to its own estimates, the Israel Defense Forces have killed 3,800 Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon after the Iran-backed militia opened on Oct. 8, 2023, a northern front against the Jewish state.

Despite the terrible death toll in Gaza over the last 19 months, Arab fatalities in the Middle East at the hands of other Arabs in just the last 14 years exceed by more than sevenfold the total number of Arab deaths in all the wars that Arabs have waged against the Jews for more than 100 years. Since 2014, nearly 400,000 Arabs have perished in the Yemen civil war fomented by the Iran-backed Houthis. And since 2011, approximately 650,000 Arabs have been killed in Syria in deposed Iran-backed Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad's war against his people. Few and far between, however, are the best and the brightest in the West who act as if the massive loss of Arab life in the Middle East in which Israel played no role should trouble the humanitarian conscience.

In "On Democracies and Death Cults: Israel and the Future of Civilization," Douglas Murray excoriates the Western hypocrisy, mendacity, and malignancy that fuel enthusiasm for Hamas' butchery of Jewish civilians and antipathy toward Israel's exercise of its right to self-defense. A New York Times bestselling author of eight books, senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, intrepid war correspondent on three continents, prolific commentator in magazines and newspapers on politics and culture, and eloquent and unflappable debater and talk-show guest, Murray has warned the West for years about the perils of indulging Islamic extremism.

Murray's new book deepens that warning. He describes Hamas' atrocities and chronicles Israelis' heroism. He analyzes the moral pathology that impels educated Western men and women to hate Jews and side with their murderers. And he sketches lessons that citizens of the West must learn in order to overcome the internal disarray and the self-loathing that spur them to make common cause with jihadists who loathe individual freedom and equality under law.

On Oct. 8, 2023, Murray attended a hastily arranged demonstration in New York City's Times Square. "But it was not a protest against the horrors of the previous day," writes Murray. "It was not a protest against the terrorists of Hamas. It was instead a protest of the State of Israel and the citizens of the world's only Jewish state." He encountered banners and signs adorned with slogans – subsequently made familiar by student encampments at America's elite campuses – affirming Hamas' genocidal intentions and extending the war against Israel to the West: "From the River to the Sea," "Resistance Is Justified," "Resistance Is Not Terrorism," "Fight White Supremacy," "Long Live the Intifada," and "By Any Means Necessary."

New York, where the British-born Murray makes his home, was not an exception. In numerous European cities huge crowds celebrated the mass slaughter of Jews. Yet, he ruefully notes, "there was not a single major protest against Hamas in any Western city."

Murray, who first visited Israel in 2006 to report on the war with Hezbollah and has returned many times since, resolved to show solidarity with Israel, cover Hamas' war of extermination against the Jewish state, and clarify its larger implications. Arriving in Israel shortly after the Oct. 7 attack and staying for many months, he traveled to the kibbutzim and towns where Hamas perpetrated the massacre. He visited survivors of the slaughter and victims' and hostages' families. He went to the morgues to confront Hamas' sadism embodied in charred and mutilated corpses. He entered Gaza to observe the treacherous urban warfare. He consulted with Israeli political officials, military commanders, and soldiers. He conversed with a multitude of ordinary Israelis. He not only provided courageous on-the-scene reporting and astute political and military analysis but also bore witness to Israeli suffering and resilience, establishing himself as a tireless champion of the Jewish state.

In Hamas, Murray observes, Israel faces a distinctively evil enemy. The jihadists' atrocities were "something uncommon even in the long history of violence," he argues. Whereas the Nazis hid their extermination of the Jews, "the terrorists of October 7 did what they did with such relish," writes Murray. "Not just the endless shouting of their war cries. Or the visible glee you could see in their faces and hear in their voices. It was the fact that all of this gave them such intense joy. And that they were proud of their actions."

In antisemitism, Murray maintains, Israel and the Jewish people confront a particularly virulent form of hatred. In lines from novelist Vasily Grossman's masterpiece, "Life and Fate," Murray finds antisemitism's essence. "Anti-Semitism is always a means rather than an end; it is a measure of the contradictions yet to be resolved," writes Grossman. "It is a mirror for the failings of individuals, social structures and State systems. Tell me what you accuse the Jews of – I'll tell you what you're guilty of." Antisemitism endures because Jews provide a convenient scapegoat exploited by the enduring human tendency to attribute one's faults to others and exact revenge on them for one's failings.

How did Israel turn the tide against jihadists who proudly declare their love of death? What must the West do to overcome the contagion of antisemitism, recognize the evils of Islamic extremism, and grasp the best within the West?

Murray finds an answer in God's exhortation to "all Israel" in Deuteronomy, Chapter 30: "[C]hoose life." Biblically understood this means not only surviving but also embracing the good, which includes cherishing the dignity of the person while summoning the courage to defend one's family and nation. Israel, Murray shows, provides an inspiring example of choosing life.

For the West at this juncture, choosing life must include learning from and standing by the Jewish state.

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