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Opinion | It's Impossible Not to Know What's Going on in Gaza

Motty Perry and Ariel Rubinstein Dec 24, 2024 2:27 am IST

We don't purport to say anything here that hasn't already appeared in this newspaper. But someday our grandchildren will ask us about this dreadful period, and we looked for a way to voice our thoughts during these days of turmoil and confusion.

We are expressing our view because we know. Not because we were there or because of evidence that can be presented in a criminal proceeding. But because it's impossible not to know, unless we don't want to know. That's how life is: We know something when there's a preponderance of information, rumors and evidence – even if some is incorrect or at least imprecise. That's why people were endowed with common sense.

First of all, there are things we can know with certainty, even in the "fake" world in which we live. There are photographs, videos, aerial images and testimony from IDF soldiers. There are intentions expressed in calls for vengeance by official spokespersons of the State of Israel. There are politicians who openly proclaim such things as: "We can conquer Gaza and thin out its population by one-half within two years." There's violence in the streets, as expressed in the song "Those Who Hate You Will Die." And there's no accountability: After 14 months of combat, no one has been brought to justice for wanton killing.

We also know because of what we don't know.

At the beginning of the war, the IDF proudly displayed photographs of hordes of Hamas members who were taken prisoner. As the fighting intensified and after the fall of Hamas' leaders, it was reasonable to expect that the number of surrendering personnel would only increase, and that tens of thousands of Hamas fighters and officials would fill POW camps. Where are those camps? How many Hamas personnel are being held in prison facilities? We don't know.

In war, people are not only killed. Many are "only" wounded. Where are the wounded in Gaza being treated? In the demolished hospitals? In hospitals in Israel? In field hospitals established by the Red Crescent? We don't know.

When it suits Israel, it allows intrepid journalists to enter the battlefield, risking their lives to broadcast from the field. How many international and Israeli journalists have received permission to document the horrors of war and the suffering of Gaza's population? Why isn't Israel proudly showcasing the world's most moral army as it proves that it's possible to crush Hamas while treating 2 million noncombatants humanely? We don't know.

The detention camps of Hamas personnel are not subject to oversight. Why aren't Israeli Supreme Court justices and humanitarian organizations being invited to visit the camps to confirm that the incarcerated are being held in humane conditions? We don't know.

Israel boasts of its benevolence in allowing the supply of food and water to the residents of Gaza. The data on the number of supply trucks doesn't tell us much. Where do the

trucks end up? Who distributes the food? How much water and food ultimately reach the residents of Gaza – children, women, the infirm, the elderly and the other downtrodden people who once worked in our factories and fields? We don't know.

Everything we don't know can be known but is being kept from us. And when the things that we don't know pile up, we can't help but turn to the collective human memory about other times when things were silenced.

There are those who believe that the flattening of Gaza will convince the Palestinians to relinquish their national aspirations. Is that so? We know of one people whose national aspirations only grew stronger after losing one-third of its sons and daughters. We also know a neighboring people, less "chosen," that has weathered blow after blow and only become more resolute. According to Palestinian health officials and the United Nations, over 45,000 people in Gaza have died in the 14 months of the war – nearly 2 percent of the territory's prewar population. Nine in 10 Gazans have been driven from their homes. Nonetheless, the elders of Gaza are not surrendering and are not begging for the opportunity to serve the renewed Jewish settlements in Gush Netzarim. Isn't it true that vengeance primarily breeds vengeance?

We're terrified of the future. Horrible things tend to eventually come to light. In the coming years, we'll encounter soldiers who break the silence, shell-shocked and ridden with guilt. One will leave a suicide note, another will remove his kippa and tzitzit, and another will write a sequel to S. Yizhar's 1949 novel "Khirbet Khizeh." In the end, what

isn't known comes to light. And the sin of covering up is added to the crime.

Nakba 2 is transpiring in the Gaza Strip. Two million people have been driven from their homes, but nary a word of complaint or protest can be heard in Israel. Some Israelis are swept up in messianic dreams of a Jewish Israel "from the sea to the river" (and beyond). The state is systematically encroaching on Arab areas in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. In soccer stadiums and on TV screens, Arabs are viewed as two-legged beasts. Nakba 3 is knocking at the door.

Both of us were born here, remain here of our own free will and have never even considered the idea of emigrating. We're certain that we will continue to live here till our dying day. Nakba 3 will not only be a catastrophe for the Palestinians. It will also sound the death knell for the State of Israel we'd like to bequeath to future generations.

The events in the Middle East since the October 7 massacre are described as the butterfly effect. We envision the gorilla effect. The gorilla stands before us, waving its arms urgently trying to draw our attention. However, delusions and indulgence in the pleasures of life blind us to its presence. But the gorilla is not going anywhere and it threatens to stain Jewish history forever.

Motty Perry and Ariel Rubinstein, economics professors, were among the organizers of the 1978 Officers' Letter. Signed by 348 reserve officers, it called on then-Prime Minister Menachem Begin to choose peace over Greater Israel.

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