



Israel-Gaza War: The Urgent Need for Rational—Not Emotional—Responses

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): When I look back on the 9/11 attack and the various wars that followed under the umbrella of the war on terror, I think the one thing I recall most is the amount of unity that the United States had and that Americans had in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the intensity of the emotions that attack provoked. As I have talked about before, I lived in Manhattan, I worked in Manhattan when 9/11 happened; I remember like it was yesterday, the sensations of watching those two buildings in southern Manhattan crumble to the ground on top of 3000 American citizens. The Pentagon was attacked. For weeks in New York you could smell the burning of the rubble, of the bodies, of the chemicals. Everywhere you went, on every corner, there were desperate signs filling every street corner, every street lamp on every street corner from desperate families, hoping against hope that their missing loved ones were somehow with amnesia or unconscious or in a hospital instead of the horrible truth, which is that they were almost all dead. In fact, all dead; those missing were under the rubble in the World Trade Centre. And the emotions that everyone I knew felt that I felt as well was extremely out of rage and shock and trauma and a desire for vengeance. And so what ended up happening was that the government successfully exploited those emotions as very real human emotions. We all watched videos that were heavily provocative and inflammatory of our emotions. Videos of people jumping out of the World Trade Centre as the only hope that they had for escaping a fire that was consuming them. Of 911 calls or calls to families as people had their lives extinguished when those buildings fell on top of them.

And of course this generated enormous amounts of disgust and rage and a desire for vengeance against the people responsible. And most people felt that and most people felt it for a long time. And that's why the government was able to convince Americans to essentially acquiesce to anything and everything that was done in the name of punishing or

destroying the people who were responsible for that horrific attack. That took the form of multiple wars, of the initiation of a worldwide torture regime that didn't just involve waterboarding, but all sorts of other techniques that had long by the United States been punished as torture, of kidnapping programs, of kidnapping people off the streets of Europe and sending them to Egypt and Syria and other countries that were allied with the United States to be tortured. Of due process free prisons around the world, including at Bagram and Guantanamo, where people were in prison with no charges. There are still people, of course, in Guantanamo who have never been charged with any crime, never convicted of any crime and that have sat there for 20 years. There was the hideous, disastrous invasion of Iraq. Regimes change wars all over the world. And the transformation of our own domestic politics, of the introduction of things like the Patriot Act and mass NSA spying and all kinds of authoritarian projects that seeped into and contaminated Americans form of government; all justified in the name of fighting against and destroying the people who launched this horrific attack. And I think the lesson that most Americans have learned from 9/11 is that a lot of what was done ended up being excessive or abusive or morally shameful or at the very least just counterproductive. We ended up occupying Afghanistan for 20 years. Spent trillions of dollars on this war on terror. Only at the end of the 20 years for the Taliban to just waltz back into power as though nothing had happened. Tens of thousands of people, American troops, died. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions in those countries that we were at war with died as well for very little benefit, for very little progress that was ultimately made. And the lesson ought to have been that no matter how horrific that attack was, no matter how righteous and justified the anger was, that what was crucial at the time was to have the ability to use reason rather than emotion to make assessments about the best course of action, and most importantly, to create the space to actually debate what the best course of action was.

I think more than any other policy, what most bothered me at the time and what ultimately propelled me into journalism was the fact that the climate that had been created in the wake of 9/11 was so repressive, that anybody who was at all off note, who was it all questioning of government policy done in the name of fighting terrorists, was immediately accused of being an apologist for terrorism or supporting terrorism or being on the side of the terrorist, an incredibly toxic and unhealthy environment that destroyed the ability to engage in reason and to ask, okay, even if you're horrified by these attacks, even if you find them completely lacking in anything human and you're enraged by them, even if that's true, you still have to question, what was the best course of action, as well as whether or not we played any role in creating the climate that caused so many people to want to come do harm to the United States. Obviously, 9/11 was not the first terrorist attack against the United States. There was an attack on the World Trade Centre just a few years earlier that succeeded a little bit, nowhere near 9/11, obviously. There had been attacks all over the Muslim world against US forces in Lebanon and in Somalia and in all kinds of other places. There was an incredible amount of hatred for the United States that ultimately culminated in the 9/11 attack, and it took years to be able to create the space to say, Are we doing anything in terms of interfering in that part of the world, in terms of occupying people's lands, in terms of our policies in that

region to interfere in and control their lives or using violence against them that have caused anti-Americanism to exist? None of this debate was permissible. And I think a lesson of an 9/11, that if you look at polling United States most people have learned is that a lot of what was done, that most of us supported right in the aftermath of 9/11 because of our anger and rage and our blinding indignation and desire for vengeance, turned out to be, at best, quite misguided. And that it's extremely important, especially when it comes time to war, when emotions are at their highest to create space for permissible debate, for permissible questioning.

Now it is an oddity that when the Russian invasion of Ukraine happened and it was time for the United States to get involved in that war, even though there was an attempt made to suppress debate, to crush debate or dissent, to call everybody who questioned it a Russian agent, just like anyone questioning the war on terror was called on the side of terrorists, there was still an ability to have that debate. I, in fact, did a lot of programs on the show in the days and weeks and months after the invasion of Ukraine and the US involvement in that war where I questioned it, where I opposed it, where I denounced it and of course I got accused of a lot of different things. But being accused of things is something you can live with. There was at least some space to question it, even though there wasn't much. I think there was even more space when it came to the war on terror. There were a lot of people who were opposed to the Iraq war. There were people after the first few weeks who even opposed the Patriot Act. And yet somehow when it's not our wars, but when it's Israel, it seems as though there's even less space to question. In fact, people spent the weekend on a lookout for anybody who is even slightly off note in order to accuse them of being on the side of Hamas or justifying these horrific massacres that fighters for Hamas engaged in deliberately aimed at civilians. And I think the first thing to note is that in reality, there was virtually nobody defending massacres of civilians against Israeli citizens. There wasn't that there was nobody, you can always find people advocating any position. But certainly nobody in power, not just in the United States or in the West, defended or justified or mitigated the atrocities committed by some of those people who invaded Israel, not who attacked police stations or military bases, as some of them did, which are generally considered legitimate targets, but who did things like go to a rave where a large number of young people in their twenties were having an all night party and then just shot them, massacred them. We don't know how many. There are lots of claims and wars that get circulated for which there is no evidence. Things like mass rapes get alleged. But we haven't really seen evidence of that. There were clearly horrific atrocities committed, and everyone that I heard at least pretty much is opposed to that, finds that morally repugnant, because even if you think there are legitimate grievances that the Palestinians have, you have to draw the line at basic humanitarianism.

You can never sanction the deliberate targeting of civilians. I think there's even an important distinction to be drawn between the acts of violence that are likely to cause the death of civilians and you do it anyway. Everybody at war does those. Remember, the United States did Shock and Awe in Baghdad. You could watch Baghdad and see enormous bombs

exploding all throughout the city. And the explicit purpose was to terrorise the population into submission, to use Shock and Awe, to force them to surrender, to believe that it was helpless. And obviously the United States government knew a large number of civilians were going to die in those bombs. And they did. And obviously the war in Ukraine tells that. Everyone tells that when Hamas shoots rockets into Israel, they hope that they're going to hit a police station or a military base, but there's a high likelihood they're going to hit civilian targets and they do it anyway. When Israel goes and drops massive bombs in one of the most densely populated places on Earth, which is Gaza, of course, there's a knowledge that they're going to kill large numbers of civilians in Gaza. They have every time they've done it, and yet they still do it as well. There's still a difference between what you could call collateral damage and going to a place, what you immediately see there are only civilians, like a dance festival or rave and gunning people down. There has to still be a moral line that is drawn where nobody can justifiably cross that the way a lot of the militants that entered Israel did. And I don't think anybody can possibly in good conscience justify that. And the reality is almost nobody did. In fact, I think the only person I saw who did was somebody who was at a protest in New York City, a pro-Palestinian protest sponsored by the DSA, the Democratic Socialists of America. It was a single speaker. No one knows the person's name. Even people at this protest objected to it, said that they disassociate themselves from that. There were a lot of people expressing support for the Palestinian side without justifying what Hamas did. And the fact that we had to watch this person search for them and hold them up shows how difficult it was to find people who actually supported the worst elements of Hamas, the worst actions that Hamas took. But there's a deliberate attempt to suggest that unless you're 100% on board with everything that Israel does, suggesting that everything they do is justified, everything the Palestinians do is unjustified, the Israelis are the upstanding, morally superior humans, and the Palestinians are animals who don't have human value unless you're willing to say essentially that you get accused of being supportive of acts that you're actually actively denouncing.

So here's the one person that I think people could find. And again, the fact that people have to point to this person who nobody knows, has no power, was not an elected official, who has no standing in media, shows how marginalised this view was.

Speaker: When the Palestinians broke through the fence [shouting and applause]. And as you might have seen, there was some sort of rave or desert party where they were having a great time until the resistance came in electrified hang gliders, and took at least several dozen hipsters. But I'm sure they're doing very fine, despite what the New York Post said.

Glenn Greenwald (GG): No, obviously they're not doing fine. We all saw the videos of people's corpses laying on the ground because they were shot by the people who invaded Israel. And maybe you had two or three people or four people screaming, their approval in this crowd. But this was a repulsive position that everybody I know, including people who have long been critics of Israel or support of the Palestinian cause, repudiated. And so the

idea that if you at all question the Israeli government or if you question the Biden administration's support for it, it somehow means that you're a proponent of the worst acts of Hamas is just as intellectually dishonest, just as manipulative, just as designed to suppress dissent, as those who claim that opponents of the Iraq war were pro Saddam Hussein. Or that people who questioned the war on terror were on the side of Al Qaeda, or that people who oppose US support for Ukraine are pro Putin. It's all part of the same tactic. That you should not fall for and you should not tolerate if you are even a minimally intellectually honest person.

Now, I again understand that the reality is that all those videos that people were subjected to over the weekend, all those claims about atrocities committed against Israelis, obviously have produced a great amount of anger and a great amount of sickness, not just in Israel, but in foreign countries as well; for people who feel an affinity toward Israel. And in the United States, there are a lot of people who feel an affinity for Israel. There are not just American Jews who do, but evangelical Christians, who wield a lot of political power as well, and who feel an affinity toward Israel for religious reasons or cultural reasons. But there's also the foreign policy establishment and Neocons and militarist who see Israel as an important and always have as an important military ally of the United States. And so the energy and the emotion surrounding this topic, I'm aware, are very high and there's not a lot of people who want to hear any questioning right now. And I think it's very important to be careful, but not be willing to refrain from asking the questions or making the points that I think ought to be raised. And one of the things I did when I was thinking about coming on tonight and talking about this war and how to do it was I went back and watched the video that I did immediately following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, where pretty much the same thing happened. We spent the first day or the first two days bombarded with images of Russian violence against Ukrainians of Ukrainian civilians crying, of mourning, of grieving, of weeping, the kind of thing that we almost never see when America is involved in wars. We almost never see interviews with the victims of our bombs or our drones when it's innocent people. But we do get shown that when it comes time for a war that the US government wants to instigate support for it. And so people were just drowning in videos. And obviously if you're a decent person and you look at videos of Ukrainian women crying over the death of their children or you're a decent person, you're going to be emotionally moved by that.

But it can't mean that that means that you're not allowed to question or even oppose your country's involvement in that war, because then you get accused of supporting Russian violence or being indifferent to the suffering of people because there's wars all the time in every part of the world. And obviously there has to be space for you to say, I don't think my government should get involved in this war, or I think this war is more complicated than the morality play we're being presented with. And so I went back and I watched what I tried to communicate in the day after the Russian invasion, knowing that the same kind of propaganda, the same kind of emotional intensity will immediately arrive as it is with us now, when it comes to what is now a war between Israel and Gaza. I just want to show you a little

bit of what I tried to communicate, because I think it's so incredibly relevant to what we have to do now and how we have to think about this war that not only is involving Israel and Gaza, but also the United States and a lot of other countries. So let me just show you a couple excerpts from, this is February 24th, 2022. So it was the night of or the day after the Russian invasion.

GG in clip: So it's always an extraordinarily horrific episode to watch a new war break out any time. That's just always true. And precisely for that reason, we react very emotionally to the outbreak of a new war, as we should. Given that, it generally means that large numbers of human beings, innocent civilians, are going to have their lives extinguished. Bombs are falling, destroying cities, destroying ancient structures, disrupting lives, causing thousands or hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions of displaced human beings, whoever we assign blame to for that war., We naturally are going to have a huge amount of intense emotion toward that country of rage and anger and a desire for vengeance. And conversely, we're going to have an enormous amount of sympathy and a desire to help and protect and defend whoever we regard as the victim. It's for any normal, healthy, well-adjusted human being at a time of extremely high emotions.

And I think we need to be aware of that for two reasons. The first of which is that any time we're in a state of high emotions, by definition, necessarily, our capacity to reason diminishes. If we're reacting to something with intense emotions, our ability to use rationality to react to the situation, to analyse it is crowded out by the intensity of those emotions, even when those emotions are valid. In fact, particularly when those emotions are valid as the emotions that are pervasive now, watching what's happening between Russia and Ukraine undoubtedly are. It doesn't matter whether the emotions are valid or not. The mere existence of intense emotions means that we lose our capacity, at least for the moment, to evaluate events and what our response should be and how we should think about them with reason, with rationality. Now, it's just that we ought to be aware of what the reaction is when our brains are flooded with high emotions, when our emotions are part of a collective reaction, and therefore even more intense given that we're social and political animals and we're tribal and we feed on one another's emotions. And so the more we all feel intense emotions, collectively, the emotions intensify. It's important to realise what that means for our reasoning ability, which is our ability or our willingness even to think about things rationally and the reason, as opposed to these emotions diminished. We're in a diminished state of reason when we react to things emotionally. And that's why whenever events like this happen, you can go through every single event that you might want to compare a new war to. Look at 9/11, for example, in the days after 9/11, we were all in lockstep about various ideas and emotions and reactions that a month later, two months later, a year later, 20 years later, many of us who embrace those emotions of the time have come to re-evaluate and regard as misguided. There's no question that a week from now, a month from now, a year from now, we're going to be thinking about these events differently than we're able to think about them right now.

GG: So I think you're seeing an enormous amount of that. Obviously you've seen it in Israel, but you're seeing it in the United States too. I cannot tell you how many people I've seen, conservatives and liberals and Republicans and Democrats, where there's really very little difference or dissent, even though a lot of people try and claim there is, the reality is that the overwhelming majority of mainstream American politics and the vast majority of the people in both parties have as much unity in support of Israel as they did in this moment in support of Ukraine when Russia invaded. There are places around the world that see things much differently. There are thousands or tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of people in the Arab world out on the street expressing solidarity for Palestinians. And if you are subjected to that media and that discourse, you would think a lot differently. But the reality is there is a unity of thought and emotion, which sometimes is justified, but it also creates the danger that because we're tribal animals, because we're social and political animals, and especially now with social media, that where we feed on the same collective notions and nobody wants to be cast aside, no one wants to be excluded, societal scorn is a big punishment for social animals, there is a danger that we can get swept away in these emotions: I'm so angry with the Palestinians, with these Hamas monsters that I'm just ready to turn Gaza into a parking lot without regard to the implications of that of the wider world that would spark of the humanitarian disaster that would generate. And I think it's important to try and step back and use your reason and not just your emotion, because we have so many examples where using that emotion led us wildly astray.

GG: Thanks for watching this clip from System Update, our live show that airs every Monday through Friday at 7 p.m. Eastern, exclusively on Rumble. You can catch the full nightly shows live or view the backlog of episodes for free on our Rumble page. You can also find full episodes the morning after they air across all major podcasting platforms, including Spotify and Apple. All the information you need is linked below, we hope to see you there.

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