

ASSESSMENT

Israel's war for survival ignores international laws

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One day before the Church unites in a day of prayer and fasting and after a year of war against Hamas, Israel acts like a 'maverick', outside any international laws, claiming its own right to exist, whilst ignoring the prerogatives of other peoples. This is what has

been happening since 7 October last year, i.e. ever since the Hamas militiamen with a terrorist action - which the Israeli leadership knew about and probably ignored - set off that spark that ignited a fire and a catastrophe whose end is not in sight. After a year of hostilities, according to the Israeli army and official Jewish state sources, 1,546 Israelis were killed, including some foreign nationals; most of them on or immediately after 7 October. The figure includes 346 soldiers killed in Gaza or along the border with Israel since the ground operation began, while 2,284 have been wounded. Also on that tragic date, some 250 hostages were captured, but to date only about a hundred are believed to still be alive.

A year later, one still wonders why Israel did not stop the Hamas militiamen, despite knowing that the terrorist organisation was preparing an operation to intrude into its territory and was practising hostage-taking. Unit 8200, the elite interception unit of military intelligence, reportedly informed the army leadership. Also the government was aware of this. A document released by the Israeli media casts a shadow over the official version of Benjamin Netanyahu's government, according to which nobody in Tel Aviv foresaw the extent of Operation *Al-Aqsa Flood*.

Could the massacre have been avoided? And with it everything that happened afterwards?

Israel's reaction to that attack was violent and brutal. And perhaps that was the real intention. From 7 October to date, in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli army, according to Hamas' count, has killed 41,878 people and injured 96,794. Most are women and children. But, particularly horrifying is that countless families have been completely wiped out.

"I call once again for a ceasefire on all fronts, for the release of hostages, to help the exhausted population.' These are words of Pope Francis. Ignored words, like those of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, who on more than one occasion, addressed the belligerent parties. War is a defeat for all. On the anniversary of 7 October, Pope Francis asked everyone to pray and fast on this day when we ask God for peace in the world'. Patriarch Pizzaballa, in a letter to the faithful, also spoke of the 'need to pray, to bring our pain and our desire for peace before God. We need to convert, to do penance and to implore forgiveness'.

For a year, the bombing of the Gaza Strip has been incessant. But now, the conflict has spread to the West Bank, Lebanon and Yemen. The situation in the southern suburbs of Beirut, among the most populous in the capital, is dramatic. The artery

connecting the Land of the Cedars with Syria has been rendered impassable. Hashem Safieddine was in the crosshairs of the Jewish Air Force. He was a possible successor to Hassam Nasrallah, who was killed in an Israeli attack last week. But he too has been reportedly killed now, according to Israeli security sources.

Yesterday in Tehran, the Supreme Guide of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, with a rifle at his side, during the commemoration for Nasrallah, urged Muslim nations to unite to defend themselves against the common enemy, urging Afghanistan, Yemen, Iran, Gaza and Lebanon. 'Israel,' he declared, 'will never achieve victory over Hezbollah and Hamas. He added: 'The US focus on Israel's security is a cover for its policy of hoarding the region's resources'. Meanwhile, Nasrallah's body has reportedly been temporarily buried in an undisclosed location, to prevent Israel from ordering an attack if a public funeral is organised.

The situation in Lebanon worsens by the hour. The number of victims may already have exceeded a thousand, while the number of wounded is six thousand. More than a million people are displaced. A part of the Syrian population, who fled the civil war and found refuge in Lebanon, is currently returning to their country of origin, where hostilities are far from over. 'Most of the displaced have fled without anything, are occupying public buildings or wandering the streets in search of food,' said a Salesian from Beirut, who prefers to remain anonymous for fear of reprisals. 'We try to offer them the essentials for living: a place to sleep, clothes, food, childcare. Psychological support for the little ones will be very important, they are experiencing a drama that they will find hard to forget'.

In the meantime, Israel's action continues to be increasingly destructive and hammering; especially in the places where Hezbollah is present, in the capital and the rest of the country, but also in centres such as Mayssara (Kesrouan) or Aley, where even the slightest presence of Shiite communities, which host men of the Party of God, becomes the object of air raids. In the Christian neighbourhoods of East Beirut, mostly run by Kataeb and the Lebanese Forces, which have always been hostile to Hezbollah, flags of Christian right-wing parties begin to be displayed. There is concern, but there is no desire to succumb.

There is one question on everyone's lips: why does America, with its President Biden, preach peace and then supply a huge amount of weapons to Israel to kill innocent victims?

"There is sorrow at the horror of the disaster in Lebanon. From the coast to the mountains, destruction and death. But the prolonged Israeli aggression, which has

caused hundreds of martyrs and innocent victims, is also condemned'. This is what is stated in a note made public at the end of the monthly assembly of the Maronite bishops, chaired by Patriarch Béchara Boutros Pierre Raï. The prelates also address the international community, asking it 'to assume its responsibilities, committing itself to an immediate ceasefire', with specific reference to UN Resolution no. 1701.

But the Israeli Air Force also strikes cities in the West Bank. In Tulkarem, a Hamas commander who was planning, according to military sources, a large-scale terrorist attack on the first anniversary of 7 October was killed. At least eighteen Palestinians were killed. The Israeli army is on high alert for any further attempts, both in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

One thing is certain, before 7 October 2023, Netanyahu's position, politically and socially, was unstable, weak in consensus and under investigation for corruption, today he is difficult to replace, despite the protests and discontent against him. Prolonging the conflict, exasperating it, effectively sabotaging attempts at negotiations, not designing a plan for what will happen after the end of hostilities serves his personal and political interest.