

MIDDLE EAST

War between Israel and Hamas extends to West.

WORLD

06_06_2025



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"They speak of peace, but in their hearts they have war," says the psalmist. This is a judgement that comes naturally on the eve of another weekend of pro-Gaza and pro-Israel public demonstrations, this time in the capital of Italy, Rome.

The radicalisation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict concerns not only the Middle East, but also the West, Europe and Italy specifically this weekend. On Saturday, 7 June,

the **left will march in Rome** against the destruction of Gaza perpetrated by the Israeli army. It is all too predictable that what will be on display is yet another demonstration of anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish sentiment.

Attempts to disguise the true nature of the demonstration with calls for the release of Israeli hostages still in Hamas's hands are pathetic. None of those who will walk the length of Rome's streets were seen demonstrating in the aftermath of the 7 October 2023 massacre, when Palestinian terrorists crossed the border and killed around 1,200 people and kidnapped 250 more. Indeed, many found justification at the time in the abuses committed by Israel over the years.

Peace is not what these people want: they want the erasure of Israel from the map and the elimination of the Jews, as supported by Hamas and its allies. Proof of this can be seen in the exponential increase in anti-Semitic violence across the West.

Even more worrying is that this position is not confined to the Middle East conflict; it goes hand in hand with complicity — if not outright alliance — with European organisations linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, to which Hamas also belongs. Consequently, this so-called 'pacifism' is laying the foundations for a religious war in Europe too. That this is already happening in France, the United Kingdom and Germany should teach us something.

Conversely, the Italian daily, *Il Riformista's* appeal, 'On the side of Israel', rightly denounces the significance of the 7 October massacre and the danger posed by Hamas. However, it is wrong to dismiss any criticism of the Netanyahu government's actions as anti-Semitic. The government is now explicitly pursuing the goal of completely occupying Gaza and moving its two million inhabitants elsewhere, in addition to colonising the West Bank.

Equating criticism of the Israeli government and condemnation of the massacres in Gaza with anti-Semitism is an equivalence that must be rejected outright. While this may be true for many of those who will be on the streets of Rome on Saturday, it is clearly false for many others who, while defending Israel's right to exist and security, cannot turn a blind eye to the Israeli army's brutal methods, the project to deport an entire population and the use of hunger if not starvation, as a weapon of war.

The fact that Hamas uses civilians as human shields and aims to maximise Palestinian civilian casualties for propaganda purposes does not justify indiscriminate bombing and attacks that no longer distinguish between civilians and military targets.

While the actual death toll is open to debate (as the only source is the Hamas government), there is no doubt that it is very high. It is also the Israeli government that is preventing independent observers and journalists from entering Gaza to verify the situation.

In November 2023, when Netanyahu's approach to the war against Hamas was clear, the *Daily Compass* wrote, quoting the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, that 'if there is a right to defend oneself against terrorism, this cannot be exercised in the absence of moral and legal rules, since the fight against terrorists must be conducted in accordance with human rights and the principles of the rule of law'. In other words, despite Hamas militants' tactics of using civilians as shields, which make 'clean' military operations difficult, indiscriminate bombing that razes cities to the ground and causes an indefinite number of deaths and hundreds of thousands of new refugees cannot be acceptable.

Today, after 19 months, the situation has worsened dramatically and is even more unjustifiable when we consider that eliminating Hamas is an **unachievable** political-military objective.

It must be reiterated that the end does not justify the means and that there is a significant difference between the use of force and violence. The security of a people cannot be achieved by sowing hatred.

Unfortunately, the mutual desire for annihilation that defies logic and was **denounced by the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa**, in November 2023 has also taken hold in the hearts of many here. This makes everything even more difficult for the Middle East as well as Europe.