

Zionism in Crisis after October 7?

What Crisis?

Neve Gordon

Editors' Note: The remarks below by Professor Neve Gordon were made at a teach-in on Gaza at Queen's University, Belfast (QUB) organised by the QUB University and College Union branch on 7 February 2024. They have been adapted for publication with his permission.

I was asked to speak on the topic of 'Gaza and the Crisis of Zionism'.

I am not sure there is a crisis in Zionism.

My view is based on analysis of developments in Israel, where it seems to me that 99% of Israeli Jews continue to identify as Zionist.

I might add that most Israeli Jews are still trapped in the pain, fear, and revenge of October 7 [2023], and are unwilling to lift their eyes and see the unfolding genocide in Gaza.

The malls and cafés are once again bustling with people.

Netanyahu has a vested personal interest to continue the war on Gaza while maintaining a certain level of violence against Hezbollah on Israel's Northern border with Lebanon, since the moment the violence subsides, he will become the centre of attention, a target of the opposition, and it is unclear if he will be able to hold on to his seat.

To be sure, many Israelis are hoping to replace the prime minister, but the problem is not only Netanyahu; it is also the regime.

But is Zionism undergoing a global crisis?

It is difficult to summarise the position of Zionism within the global context, but thinking of the West, we have witnessed massive grassroots resistance against the war. In London, the protests have been among

the largest we have seen for many years, while public opinion polls in the USA, Europe, and in Britain show that support for Israel is in decline.

Support for Israel is also in decline among American Jews, where the young generation is very critical of Netanyahu's government, the wholesale violation of Palestinian human rights, and the genocidal violence.

We have also witnessed the suspension of arms sales to Israel, first by Japan, then Belgium, and now Spain.

So, it is obvious, I think, that support for Zionism is eroding. What we have not seen, however, is a commitment among Western governments and the Western ruling elite to stop Israeli apartheid and settler-colonialism.

It is, as we all know, not only British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, but also Leader of the Opposition Keir Starmer and the Labour Party who continue to support Israeli policies, and have even failed to call for something so elementary as a ceasefire.

While in the future we might witness a change among elites and as we continue our call for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, it is necessary to ponder: given the unfolding genocide, how is it that we have not witnessed a crisis in Zionism among Western ruling elites?

I think there are several reasons for this, and I will mention only a few here.

First, there is European guilt for the crimes perpetuated against Jews on European soil. We need to remember in this context that offering Jews a homeland at the expense of Palestinians was, on the one hand, the European response to their own guilt; but on the other hand, the solution to the so-called ‘Jewish problem’ cannot be separated from age-old European antisemitism – it was, also, a way of removing Jews from Europe.

Second, certain ruling elites are attracted by the kind of Right-wing government that has developed in Israel. In my work, I call this settler-colonial regime a “democratic apartheid” – a regime that dramatically contracts the notion of “the people”, and offers those who are considered “the people” equality and democracy; while instituting a repressive form of racial governance over the remaining inhabitants of the land.

Indeed, we need to keep in mind that racism is at the heart of everything we have been witnessing in the past four months; it is integral to every form of settler-colonialism, and numerous leaders across the globe are attracted by the form of racial governance that Israel has instituted over the years.

Third, there is a Christian Right/Zionist bond, based, again, in large part on antisemitic grounds, where these Right-wing Christians believe in dispensationalism: namely that all Jews must gather in Israel and at one point convert to Christianity, and this will ensure the Second Coming of Christ. Particularly in the USA, but also elsewhere, these Christian Zionists are well connected with the powers that be.

Fourth, the corridors of Western power are also informed by deep-seated Islamophobia, which also helps explain part of the attraction towards Israel among ruling elites.

Fifth, there are thinly veiled racist geopolitical considerations, where some consider Israel as a Western outpost in the so-called Middle East jungle.

These and other reasons help explain the support ruling elites continue to lend to the Zionist project.

Yet, this support is now under unprecedented pressure.

Whether this amounts to a crisis or not is, I believe, still too early to say.

What I can say for certain is that ongoing pressure waged by students and student unions across Britain, Ireland, and elsewhere,

the plethora of large and small protests across the country,

the sit-ins and teach outs,

the graffiti in the streets,

the endless interventions on social media, combatting the mainstream renditions of events,

the direct action in train stations and corporate buildings,

the South African application to the International Court of Justice,

the opinion articles written by Palestinian and pro-Palestinian activists,

the student groups who are demanding that their universities end partnerships with their Israeli counterparts,

the calls by musicians, actors, and other influencers,

and even wearing political shirts, *keffiyehs*, and posting the watermelon symbol,

each and every activity in Britain, Ireland, and across the globe is a story, a story that challenges the Zionist narrative and the Zionist ethos.

And one day all these stories will somehow connect together and the ruling elites will have to listen.

It is therefore, I believe, our responsibility to continue raising our voices, continue going out to the street, continue posting on social media, continue calling our representatives, continue writing, and continue demanding Palestinian liberation. And indeed, one day all our stories will connect together and the ruling elites will have to listen.

Neve Gordon is an Israeli-born Professor of international law and human rights at Queen Mary University of London. His many books and publications include Human Shields: A History of People in the Line of Fire co-authored with Nicola Perugini (University of California Press, 2020).