

## Gaza: The Graveyard of Liberal Values

**Faisal Kutty**

Earlier this year, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell called Gaza “a graveyard for tens of thousands of people and also a graveyard for many of the most important principles of humanitarian law.”

The reality may be even worse. I fear it may become the graveyard of liberalism itself.

Three decades ago, liberalism was the lead chariot in the procession of the liberal democratic project. New democracies were emerging in Europe; the Soviet Union had crumbled, and Russia was in transition; the Berlin Wall had fallen; and South Africa’s apartheid regime was collapsing. Even China exhibited signs of change.

Liberal democracy appeared invincible, both in practice and in theory. There appeared to be no real competition as it stood out as a triumphant and principled form of governance.

Ask any well-versed political theory student, and they will recite that liberalism is a political and philosophical ideology centred on the principles of individual liberty, equality, and limited government.

They will point out that it emphasizes the protection of individual rights and freedoms, including freedom of speech, religion, and assembly, as well as the rule of law and democratic governance.

While advocating for a market-based economy with private property rights, free trade, and minimal government regulation, liberalism also promotes social welfare programs to alleviate disadvantages and ensure equal opportunities for all citizens.

Additionally, liberalism supports the idea of pluralism, tolerance, and diversity, aiming to create societies where individuals can pursue their own interests



and live according to their own beliefs without undue interference from the state.

The essence of liberalism lies in its commitment to the rule of law and human rights.

Sounds amazing, so what’s the problem, you may be asking?

### **Liberalism shaken to its core**

Those observing the “plausible genocide” without a propaganda lens over the last year have had front-row seats to a systematic erosion of liberal values and ideals. Gaza has exposed Western hypocrisy and double standards, and it has shaken liberalism to its core.

Both domestic and international commitment to the rule of law, human rights, and a rules-based order are being undermined by, arguably, the most powerful lobby in the world. Pro-Israel lobbies have hijacked most Western liberal democracies

The whole world is now privy to the shameless pimping of Western politicians previously documented in Congressman Paul Findley’s 1985 book *They Dare to Speak Out* and reinforced by the 2007 book *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy*, by political scientists John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt.



As an anonymous commentator wrote: “People think Gaza is occupied, but in reality, Gaza is free but the whole world is occupied.”

Liberal elites and leaders who joined millions in support of free speech and proclaimed “Je suis Charlie” in solidarity with the French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo after terrorists killed 12 people at its Paris offices in 2015 to try to shut it down are now calling for suppression of free speech.

By a vote of 377-44-1, the US House of Representatives passed a resolution that the “slogan, ‘from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free’ is antisemitic and its use must be condemned.” Of course, the statement is not threatening or condemnable if you substitute “Palestine” with “Israel,” as you see being done by many Israeli supporters and in the Likud manifesto.

The University of Southern California, in an unprecedented move, canceled Muslim valedictorian, Asna Tabassum’s address. Tabassum, who minored in genocide studies, was prevented from delivering her address because of alleged threats from pro-Israeli groups. They cited unspecified “security concerns”.

I thought the idea was never to give in to clearly “terrorist” demands.

To make matters worse, due to the fallout, in another unprecedented move, the university subsequently canceled all other speakers and honorary doctorate presentations during convocation. Where are the “Je suis Asna” calls from liberal elites and institutions?

Hundreds of students and faculty at Columbia, Yale, and New York University were arrested for peacefully (in the words of the police chief) protesting against the killings in Gaza by Israel. Another 200 mostly Jewish protesters were arrested in front of Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer’s Brooklyn residence, where they gathered for the seder, a ritual that marks the second night of the Passover holiday celebrated as a festival of freedom by Jews worldwide. No free speech mobilization by liberal elites was

anywhere to be seen.

Those who championed freedom of expression are now banning the keffiyeh, the traditional Palestinian headdress, because it is making some people uncomfortable. A few months ago, the Ontario legislature banned the headdress, forcing a scheduled meeting between legislators and pro-Palestinian protesters to be held outside the legislative buildings because the activists had donned their keffiyehs.

Israeli military dog tags, Israeli flags, and other political symbols, of course, are not political in the same way.

### **Illiberal goals**

The situation is no different in many European countries.

Who thought that liberalism was so fragile and malleable by those who seek to subvert it for their own illiberal goals, namely promoting ethnic cleansing by the ethno-nationalist and racist state of Israel?

In the wake of the mass killings of the Second World War and the Holocaust, the new liberal world order enacted human rights treaties and enacted humanitarian laws to make sure that such massacres and abuses were “never again” repeated.

Rising out of the horrors of the Second World War, we saw the establishment of the United Nations and the drafting of the International Bill of Human Rights that would obligate “every state to recognize the equal right of every individual on its territory to life, liberty and property, religious freedom and the use of his own language”.

The bill included the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

We also saw the enactment of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, which sought to improve the legal protection of non-combatants, medical personnel, medical facilities and equipment, and wounded and sick civilians.

Despite these advances claimed by liberals, today we are witnessing war crimes, crimes against humanity and “plausible genocide”, according to the International Court of Justice, being live-streamed to our devices.

If liberalism cannot offer a moral and ethical form of governance, then what good is it? What are the grandiose declarations, pronouncements, and treaties good for?

### **Moral high ground**

In the midst of such an unprecedented attack on a corralled civilian population by a Western colonial implant and ally, if liberalism shows no will, ability, or desire to protect civilian life, regional security, a nation's own national interests, and global order, then its mission-defining claims of principle and competence collapse.

Liberal intellectuals have long claimed the moral high ground by championing justice, whether it be in favor or against Western interests. Why is the Israeli situation different? When blind loyalty becomes the sole or primary consideration, then what makes liberalism different from tribalism?

When global security and safety can be sacrificed

at the altar of friendship and similarity, what becomes of the West's claim to authority as a political and military custodian of a rules-based international order?

Might and dominance can be mistaken for right, but let's not forget that dissenting minorities, the oppressed and colonized, may conclude that their only choice is to resist by any means necessary, and revolution is always a higher likelihood.

Even domestically, history has proven that societies that combine responsiveness to their people's will with robust protections for individuals and minority groups are in the best position to strike a flexible and sustainable balance among these competing forces.

We can only hope and pray (sorry, are we still allowed to do that?) that this is some glitch or malfunction, and liberal elites and intellectuals will wake up from their slumber and remind liberal politicians that the very *raison d'être* of the liberal democratic project is under threat of collapse.

It is almost too late, but how liberal elites respond to the Gaza challenge and salvage whatever shreds of credibility remain will dictate the legacy of liberalism.

Liberals must stand up for their principles or forever hang their heads in shame.

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