

The October 7th breach of the Gaza separation wall and the devastating attacks in Israel by the al-Qassim Brigade were met with surprise and shock in the West, though in radically different ways. Norman Finkelstein, the anti-Zionist historian, used his Substack to quote the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, who in 1831, implored the slavers for “immediate emancipation” to “cancel the debt of ages,” after the Nat Turner revolt. Jeffrey Goldberg, of *The Atlantic*, however, spent the next few days tweeting out articles entitled *Understanding Hamas’s Genocidal Ideology* and *Biden Will Be Guided By His Zionism*.

The subsequent Israeli fighter jet bombing of Gaza, which has, at time of writing, killed over 2300 people (including 700 children), was also received in binary. The Italian lawyer Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur for the occupied Palestinian territories, tweeted, on October 15th: “Secretary General. The delay in calling on Israel to cease taking revenge on millions of Palestinian civilians is intensifying the descent into abyss...Please call for a ceasefire now.” U.S. Senator Tom Cotton, on the same day, wrote: “Disgraceful, but not surprising,” after learning that Israel had been pressured to resume running water in Gaza. [Earlier, he, in a television interview, said: “As far as I’m concerned Israel can bounce the rubble in Gaza.”]

As perplexing (or not perplexing) these extremely different Western reactions are, some observers unfamiliar with the current Indian blogosphere might wonder why a deluge of online Indians—themselves former colonial subjects of the British, whose Nehru-led government was “Non-Aligned” and refused diplomatic relations with Israel for decades while meeting regularly with Palestinians— have been parroting hard-right Israel talking points and promoting false rumors of Hamas atrocities. “This is what the inhuman savages Hamas do to people,” tweeted one “Aditya Raj Kaul”, with a false story of a pregnant Israeli woman being killed and butchered (it was stolen from an actual incident inflicted on Palestinian refugees in the Sabra and Shatila camp massacre in 1982). *Why is so much anti-Palestine disinformation coming from India?* An Al-Jazeera article from October 16th asked.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/16/analysis-why-is-so-much-anti-palestinian-disinformation-coming-from-india>.

For India, a country that once led Third World efforts to decolonize from Europe, the descent to find itself shilling (and bill-changing) for the last European colonial settler project has been long and ignominious.

In the 1940s, Mohandas K. Gandhi (“The Mahatma”), though sympathetic to the suffering of European Jews, was not of the mind that they should (take British weapons to) fight the Arabs: *In my opinion, they have erred grievously in seeking to impose themselves on Palestine with the aid of America and Britain*, he wrote. Over the years Jewish friends worked on him to change his position, but he never endorsed the settler project.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, was also a supporter of Palestine. He viewed the conflict as a national one, echoing India's fight for freedom. He wrote: *Palestine was not an empty land fit for colonisation by outsiders. It was a well-populated and full land with little room*

*for large numbers of colonists from abroad. Is it any wonder that the Arabs objected to this intrusion?*

*If the Jews had been wise, they would have thrown in their lot with the Arab struggle for independence. Instead, they have chosen to side with British imperialism and to seek its protection against the people of the country....*

*The Arabs of Palestine will no doubt gain their independence, but this is likely to be a part of the larger unity of Arab peoples for which the countries of western Asia have so long hankered after, and this again will be part of the new order which will emerge out of present-day chaos. The Jews, if they are wise, will accept the teaching of history, and make friends with the Arabs and throw their weight on the side of the independence of Palestine, and not seek a position of advantage and dominance with the help of the imperialist power.*

<https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/india/nehru-word-zionist-aggression-against-palestinians-is-wrong>

Later on, after Nehru's death, his daughter, Indira Gandhi, who also became Prime Minister, became close with Palestinian Liberation Organization leader Yassir Arafat. He offered to campaign for her (she declined), and she supported him when he was trapped in Lebanon in the 1982-3 siege.

<https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/not-an-inch-in-jerusalem-and-yet/225720>

Five decades later, the situation has changed dramatically. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a chauvinistic "Hindu-First" party, whose roots go back to the same organization as Gandhi's assassin, now rules. Billions of dollars transfer to Israel every year for state-of-the-art weapons (including the controversial Pegasus spyware often used against journalists). Though India continues to participate in the BRICS (with Brazil, Russia, China and South Africa) grouping, its main concerns now seem to be global recognition from the U.S. and Europe, contested borders with China, and the pacification of the majority-Muslim state of Kashmir, which they despise, but want to subdue. Less important are the fraternal sentiments with other Third World leaders, like Nehru enjoyed with Gamal Nasser of Egypt and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana.

In his recent book, *Hostile Homelands* (Pluto Press, 2023), journalist Azad Essa highlights a moment in 2017, when, in a penultimate escalation, BJP Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Israel: "...Modi arrived in Tel Aviv to a bear hug from Netanyahu. "Prime Minister, we've been waiting for you a long time," Netanyahu said. Modi's visit did not include the occupied Palestinian territories. In doing so, Modi showed he was willing to view Israel as a single and complete entity. Palestinians were no longer part of the equation."

Nehru himself, in 1962, applying a kind of *realpolitik*, opened the door for the current situation. He needed arms to repel China, who were advancing in the Ladakh region of Kashmir, and when Egypt and others could not supply him, wrote to David Ben Gurion, Prime Minister of

Israel. "All states big or small must be guaranteed of our sovereignty," Ben Gurion responded, affirmatively, and quickly. "Nehru requested the weapons be transported in ships that did not carry the Israeli flag. Ben Gurion refused. And Nehru had no choice but to accept," Essa writes. Slowly by slowly, then, through these back-channel arms deals, and, later, in a post-9/11 world, through a shared obsession with surveillance and scapegoating, Palestine faded in the Indian imagination while Israel rose.

In Ishmael Reed's play, *The Conductor*, performed this year at The Theatre For The New City, a muckraking, bibliophilic, Hindi-speaking African American journalist named Warren Chipp finds himself hiding Shashi Paramar, an Indian American conservative targeted by white mobs incensed by an international incident involving India and the United States. Paramar, who once defended Eurocentrism publically, now finds himself relying on Chipp to understand the reasons for the anti-Indian riots. Chipp presses Paramar to discard his identification with Whiteness and his implicit caste privilege to embrace a more historically expansive view of Indian Americans as amongst those both victimized by—and willing to help—dismantle colonialism and White Supremacy. Chipp is successful (partially), and ultimately helps Paramar get out alive, to regroup and reevaluate.

Poor ethics creates blind spots, and in India, a reality—and morality—check is needed. A tweet this week by the online Sikh historian @sialmirzagoraya, in response to a photo of a pro-Israel prayer session at the river Ganges, read: "The Israelis should consider setting up an India Trade Company, and set up warehouse-fort complexes in Bombay, Madras, Calcutta." What will happen when the political winds change and the nuclear-laden West wants to encroach on some essential resources or minerals or land in Indian territory? The same Indian upper-caste elites might find that for Israel—a country that bombs defenseless civilians—friendship goes no deeper than its pockets. But having insulted many of their own country-folk—Muslims, Christians, Dalits, and, increasingly, Sikhs (Indian agents recently assassinated a Sikh activist in Vancouver)—as well as many of its Third World neighbors, who will join them?

"I don't believe India can learn any lessons from Tel Aviv," dissident historian Vijay Prashad wrote in an article from the 2014 collection *From India to Palestine: Essays In Solidarity*. "I...write about Israel in the hopes that others will join in the campaign to end India's subsidy for Israel's human rights violations. As India increases its purchases from Israel it underwrites Israel's military occupation of the Palestinian lands."

It is not too late for India to reevaluate its trajectory, and choose a relationship with Palestine that puts solidarity with the oppressed over military strategy, and that respects India's own independence struggle.

As Gandhi wrote, in 1938:

*Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English or France to the French. It is wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs. What is going on in*

*Palestine today cannot be justified by any moral code of conduct...I am not defending the Arab excesses. I wish they had chosen the way of non-violence in resisting what they rightly regarded as an unwarrantable encroachment upon their country. But according to the accepted canons of right and wrong, nothing can be said against the Arab resistance in the face of overwhelming odds.*

Hence, this call.

**Transnational Conductors, Wanted.**