

The West believes antisemitism is a more egregious problem than genocide

By Henry Reynolds

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The loss of Western authority as a result of Israel's genocidal attack on Gaza has merely sped up changes already underway for a generation.



It was a coincidence of course.

As Australia Day came to an end the seventeen judges of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) were preparing to deliver their preliminary response to the South African genocide case against Israel presented to the Court on the 29th of December 2023.

South Africa had taken this action as a leading member of the Global South and a founding member of the BRICS economic block. Thirty countries supported the case. Only two European states, Ireland and Slovenia, joined the twenty eight countries from all parts of the Global South.

By a very large majority of 16 to 1 on some points and 15 to 2 on others the Court found for South Africa, accepting that there was a plausible case that the Palestinians should be protected 'from acts of genocide.' The Court did not accede to the South African request for a demand for a ceasefire but it set out a series of conditions that Israel was required to meet 'in accordance with its obligations under the genocide Convention.' It was ordered to 'take all measures within its power' to prevent the commission of acts prohibited by the Convention, in particular killings, causing serious physical or mental harm or the deliberate infliction of conditions of life calculated to bring about the physical destruction of the population in whole or in part.'

These provisional measures were legally binding on Israel, which simply ignored them and the mass killing, profound suffering and physical destruction continued without pause. And the rest of the world looked on with horror. While the countries of the Western World did not go as far as Netanyahu in claiming that the ICJ was acting as 'the legal arm of Hamas' they were dismissive. The American leadership declared that they could not see any evidence of genocide and that the South African case was meritless. Like Australia, other countries simply ignored what had happened, its gravity notwithstanding. In our case there has been no official reaction, no legal briefing from the Attorney General and no known use of the word genocide by anyone in government. It clearly has been a case of well-disciplined avoidance.

But it's not Western governments alone that have deliberately crafted their language and their diplomacy to protect Israel from the outrage felt around the world, arguing with well-rehearsed casuistry that antisemitism is a more egregious problem than genocide. The Western media is equally culpable. Surveys from outside and leaks from inside tell the same story. There has been a deliberate corruption of the news to defend Israel itself and the sensibility of Zionists everywhere else. And this applies to the great bastions of the liberal intellectual establishment—*The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, the *BBC* and the *ABC*. And now with the rise of student activism the most prestigious American universities are behaving in exactly the same way sending in riot police to crush the student movement and then to blame the resulting violence and turmoil on the victims.

And at what cost? Do any of Israel's cheer squad estimate the catastrophic loss of moral authority visited on the major western powers and their minor camp followers? Who will ever again tolerate those tiresome lectures about "the international rules based order" which Australian leaders proclaim all around the world. There are also those homilies about human rights and the corollary that the Western democracies are the exemplary models to be admired and emulated. Perhaps the most damaging aspect of all is that America and the leading European powers have been shown to be arch hypocrites who don't practice what they preach. One only has to look at Israel and observe that it has ignored international law and evaded innumerable U.N Declarations virtually since its foundation since 1948. This is the country that Foreign Minister Wong has called a 'steadfast friend' for whom we provide 'immovable support.' A week or so ago, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian referred to the discovery of mass graves at the al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City. As far as we can tell this event was not reported in our mainstream media nor commented by anyone in the Australian Government. He observed that vast swathes of Gaza were now left in rubble and more than a million civilians 'were struggling in despair on the brink of death.' The fact that this was happening in the 21st century was 'an outrage to the moral conscience of humanity and tramples on the most fundamental aspect of international justice.' While it is true that the devil can quote scripture, this statement is far closer to global opinion than the cautious weasel words which emanate from Australian commentators.

The loss of Western authority as a result of Israel's genocidal attack on Gaza has merely sped up changes already underway for a generation. The latest iteration of decolonisation has seen a pervasive re-interpretation of the history of European imperialism, which has analysed the reasons for the rise of the West and focussed attention on the pillage of the outer world's resources, the role of slavery and the theft of indigenous land. Demands for reparation grow louder. Respect for the old Imperial powers is withering away. It is a process which has been observed for some time now by the Singaporean intellectual leader, Kishore Mahbubani, who wrote in London's *Financial Times* in December last year that: 'It's no secret that the west captured the imagination and respect of the rest of the world for centuries. However, what is a secret—because it is happening silently and invisibly in the minds of billions—is that the west is now losing that respect.'

It is here that the campus rebellions that have spread from America are doing the work that would have been impossible for the discredited leaders of government, the media and the universities in the West. They are taking a stand for human rights and those other principles that have been corrupted by support for Israel's catastrophic siege of Gaza. They have intimated to the rest of the world that redemption is possible.