

Midnight in the Century?

It is not only the total (genocidal ¹) destruction of Gaza by the Israeli state, with all that follows, that is a disaster and a great moment of decivilization, a plunge into barbarism. It is everything that surrounds it, the silence of the West, the abandonment of the Palestinians that imparts its moral as well as political dimension to this disastrous event. The silence of the West, during this entire sequence that has now lasted for more than a year, this is, first and foremost, for us, global democratic North, the heart of the disaster, its advanced point. The atrocities committed by *the Israelis* (as a community, the population being largely in solidarity, passively or actively, with the state and the army, in this context), this is not intended to surprise us - from this rogue, criminal state, we expect nothing but the worst, everything that preceded these mass exactions has prepared us for it. We will not be surprised or deplore the fact that they believe they can do anything they want; they have always done anything they want, both in terms of dispossession and disproportionate violence against the Palestinians and in their constantly violent and predatory relations with their neighbors.

They have always allowed themselves everything because they are devoid of any kind of scruples, prey to a *hubris* that never wanes, but also above all because they feel assured of impunity, protected by friends (in the Schmittian sense of the term) who are themselves untouchable because they are hegemonic. The reason of State is, for them, rooted in the fanaticism not of conservation, of survival, but of the perpetual expansion of power, in what one could call by antiphrasis the culture of impunity.

In this sense, the Israeli state does indeed have, all things being equal and all differences in circumstances and place being taken into account, solid affinities with the Nazi state. The reversal (transfiguration) of the motive of legitimate defense and vital threat into an unlimited and uninterrupted right of conquest lies at the foundation of this contiguity.

The worst is not what we could have anticipated in its general outlines (the destruction of Gaza finds its premises in a policy of attrition (the blockade) and bloodbath (the bombings formerly defined as "targeted") that has lasted for decades. The worst is, as always, what takes us by surprise because we could not have imagined it: the silence and passivity of states and public opinion, of the "international community" in general and of Western countries in the first place, faced with the way in which, for months and months, the Israelis have been sowing disaster, chaos and death not only in Gaza but now throughout the region, in the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Iran. Over the months, Israeli *hubris* has changed scale. It is now extending its ravages to the regional level; it is indeed a matter, as has been noted in the international press, of upsetting the configuration of relations between states, powers, throughout the Middle East. We will not say to change the rules of the game, so far are we here from anything that could resemble a game, but the rule pure

¹See here the definitive clarification from Israeli historian Amos Goldberg: "What is happening in Gaza is genocide, because Gaza no longer exists", *Le Monde*, 10/29/2024.

and simple by operating a demonstration of force based on the methods and using the means of state terrorism sometimes on a mass scale, sometimes in a "targeted" manner. All this is intended to create a global *fait accompli* according to which Israel would henceforth be the master, the indisputable *hegemon* of the region, capable, at any moment, of dissuading any protagonist whatsoever, state or not, from contesting this hegemony. Here too, the rapprochement (the comparison) with the Nazi state is necessary - it is indeed a question of establishing Israeli supremacy over the entire Middle East, in the manner in which the Nazi state undertook and temporarily succeeded in making itself master of Europe.

The heart of the disaster is the more than passive attitude of Israel's friends, of European governments, of Arab governments and, with rare exceptions, of the international community, in the face of this policy of terror, destruction and conquest. The heart of the disaster is also that in none of these countries have sufficient counter-forces emerged among the population, capable of imposing a radical change of direction on their leaders.

It would be wrong to speak here of helplessness, powerlessness – nothing prevents European leaders and other countries from recalling their ambassadors to Israel, except for petty domestic political calculations, or worse, rather, their deep affinities with Israeli leaders, whatever the crimes and abuses of which these are guilty.

Nothing obliges them to pretend to believe that this death machine that the state of Israel has become is the inevitable reparation in action for the Shoah, the Holocaust. Nothing obliges them to provide without interruption and whatever happens, military and other equipment allowing Israel to conduct a totally asymmetric war against the Palestinians and its neighbors.

The basis (ground) of silence here is not dismay or helplessness, but complicity. Western leaders try to put on a show by pretending to want to moderate the infinite violence of the Israeli terror apparatus, sometimes going so far as to mime disapproval or even indignation, brandishing the threat of suspending arms sales, with the French and Germans (not to mention the United States, of course) standing out in particular in terms of double-talk. But in practice, they are consistently *behind and with* the Israeli war machine.

The signs that do not lie are numerous: when Iran pretends to retaliate (very timidly - the Iranian leaders are terrified at the idea of a direct confrontation whose outcome, probably unfavorable for them, would throw them into the dustbins of History), the leaders of the United States, Britain, and France join as one man with the Israelis to stop the drones of the common enemy; when the activists of the Israeli colonization in the West Bank organize a big party in Paris to which they invite the notorious supremacist and fascist Betzalel Smotrich, nothing is done, officially, to prohibit this fascist from entering French territory and the police protect this infamous gathering. At the same time, by contrast, all the means of the Parisian police are implemented to find the weak-minded person who, a few days earlier, exhibited in the metro a T-shirt emblazoned with "Anti-Jewish"...

We cannot, therefore, if we want to keep up with the disaster in progress, speak of a permanent Munich, a mega-Munich orchestrated by the Chamberlains and Daladiers of the Western chancelleries in the face of the scorched earth policy and the spirit of

conquest embodied by Netanyahu and his generals. We cannot speak of a perpetual capitulation fueled by some kind of bad realism or atavistic pusillanimity – it is not a question of retreat, procrastination, or indecision that is at stake here, but rather of *unalterable solidarity* and support for a criminal state whose fundamental principle of action is based on an inconceivable theory of pure exception: *everything is permitted, it can allow itself all it likes, since it is what it is* - the untouchable protégé and spoiled child of the West - and this exorbitant right is its exclusive prerogative. Which, in practical terms of the deployment of state and armed power and violence, translates into: as soon as it concerns Israel, *everything is possible* – including therefore, *genocide*, which is supposed to embody in the eyes of the international community and international law, since the Second World War, the major, absolute crime.

This *everything is possible* stands out insofar as it is based on a theory of pure exception: everything is possible for the Israelis in this respect, precisely: what they can allow themselves, in all areas and in all respects, is what, for others, *for all others*, constitutes a pure and simple, flagrant and unbearable violation of the elementary principles of international law, of the law of nations, and, more generally, of the foundations of civilized life. When the Russian army bombs a hospital, when Russian drones kill civilians, women and children on Ukrainian territory, this provides, in the eyes of the leaders and power elites of the Western world, proof of the intrinsic barbarity of the sponsors of these exactions – Putin, the totalitarian and autocratic Russian state.

The norms and values that are supposed to be inscribed in the foundation of the contemporary international order dictate the movements of disapproval that take shape each time an actor, state or not, engages in this kind of exaction – *except* Israel, the absolute and perpetual exception. Israel has every right, can do anything – reduce the Gaza Strip to ashes, destroy its hospitals, schools, archaeological sites, and facilities, massacre the population, starve the survivors, practice ethnic cleansing on a large scale, bomb and ruin the villages of southern Lebanon and the working-class neighborhoods of Beirut, kill and mutilate dozens of people using booby-trapped electronic devices, remotely assassinate a leader of a Palestinian faction in the Iranian capital, liquidate one after the other the leaders of Hamas and Hezbollah, periodically carry out air strikes on targets located in Syria, defy the UN and international jurisdictions...

For having committed a tenth of these crimes (including genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, terrorist actions, targeted assassinations, etc.), any other power, state or not, would be doomed to be placed outside human society, designated as an enemy of the human race, a criminal state, and a public danger that must be urgently put out of action, incapacitated – *except Israel*. Israel can do anything because whatever this death machine does, it is written off by the rulers, the elites of the West and, for a good part, Western opinion. It is a matter of *perpetual absent-mindedness*, it does not strike, it does not impress, in striking contrast to the way in which the violent actions of other state powers, not to mention groups labeled as terrorists – there, on the contrary, nothing is allowed to pass, the newspapers immediately make

headlines, opinions are heated to white heat, the famous values of which the West is the self-appointed guardian are invoked in the most melodramatic tones, etc.

This regime of perpetual, unwavering immunity, granted to a terrorist, criminal, and rogue State, totally uninhibited and withdrawn in the feeling of its right in all circumstances, this regime of immunity is truly astounding, *inconceivable*. This is undoubtedly the reason why, insofar as it pushes the limits of everything we can imagine, this situation plunges opinions and the public into such a *state of shock and stupor*. The truly overwhelming phenomenon is that this absolute exception can tend to create habituation. We are becoming accustomed to the fact that the crimes and violence perpetrated by the Israeli power are placed under the regime of the *normalized exception* – a special, unique regime, normalized as a pure exception.

How can such a perpetual scandal be normalized? How can silence, abstention, avoidance, and evasion instituted as a line of conduct prosper indefinitely under this regime of events, of politics that must be called by its name – terror or, if you like, terrorism? What weight do the cumulative crimes committed by the main franchises of international Islamist terrorism (Al Qaeda, Islamic State, etc.) have, in comparison to those who, for over a year, have been massively perpetrated, this in the wake of an immemorial series of violence intended primarily to *prevent the Palestinian people from existing among other peoples* – not to mention all the rest (the wars in Lebanon, bombings and commando actions in Syria, etc.)?

Terrorism that finds its full measure is *state-based* – and Israel is its prophet, its tireless seeker and scout. Israel is constantly innovating not in counter-terrorism but in state terrorism, and in this respect not only for its own benefit but for all its friends and allies ; this, by practicing on a scale hitherto unknown the doctrine of using *disproportionate means* intended to produce a saturation effect on the ground, both in Gaza and in Lebanon, by decapitating enemy groups with overwhelming selective precision, by resorting to destructive technology of a sophistication hitherto unknown (booby-trapped pagers), by resorting to new methods of attrition, demoralization and *terrorization* of the population adorned with the most cynical humanitarian alibis – calls to evacuate this or that zone before bombing, then targeting the displaced persons who have complied with these injunctions, etc.

The Israeli army never stops innovating in this realm, in the field of a strategy that no longer makes any distinction between armed opposition and civilian population and whose principle is openly *exterminationist* - in order to annihilate the adversary, everything is permitted and it is necessary to "drain the swamp", i.e. to directly attack the populations in which the enemy is immersed. The methods tested today by the Israelis in Gaza are in line with those of the US military in Vietnam, the French in Algeria, those of counter-insurgency in a context where the link between armed movements and the population is intimate. But they do not just follow this lineage, they renew it and radicalize them. Both the French and the Americans relied, with varying results, on local auxiliaries, in particular with the idea of mobilizing part of the local population, through them, to their side against the insurgents. The Israelis, for their part, make do with paid informants, considering the Palestinians, uniformly,

as the enemy, which is consistent with the denial that they constantly practice of their existence as a people.

In their practices of attrition, destruction and extermination, they no longer differentiate between the fighters and the population. The massacre of several dozen civilians as the price of eliminating a Hamas or Hezbollah leader has become a standard, a norm of their counter-insurgency strategy. And the worst thing is that international opinion, particularly Western opinion, is getting used to it and, at the rate things are going, will soon no longer find anything to complain about.

From this point of view too, the affinities of this state power with the Nazis are striking – the enemy is not only what actively resists, it is, on the scale of any population, a collective living body, insofar as it just resists by surviving. What the Israeli leaders and military are practicing is no longer so much a war as what Michel Foucault calls a continuous *thanatopolitics*, with its moments of intensification and its paroxysms, as has been the case since October 7, 2023. What is being reduced to a *purely residual condition* is a population as a whole, assigned to its ethnic, cultural, historical origin – the Palestinians – ensuring that their destiny is that which fell to the first peoples of North America – the Indians on their reservations. The Israelis are increasingly waging a *race war openly*, and like all race wars, this one is marked by phantasmagoria – the Palestinians are not a race but a people, and the Israelis themselves are anything but a race.

Faced with this situation, in this configuration, pure and simple indignation is a trap and a dead end: it is not a question of being indignant that the guardians of values – the democrats, the progressives, the humanists, the friends of the people and the peoples – are watching this barbaric frenzy without reacting, as passive spectators. This is an approach to the problem that is not only superficial, epidermal, but biased, false in its premises. It cannot be overemphasized that Western democracies, starting with their leaders and elites, but also including what we persist, no doubt wrongly, in calling their opinions (publics entirely anesthetized by the general system of a "communication" that has become increasingly indistinct from propaganda, in truth) are not, here, *passive spectators* of a large-scale "drama" - they are, one and all, *stakeholders*, more or less active and consciously engaged, in a policy conducted by a criminal state that involves them all, directly and indirectly. This begins with all those who, in France and in Western countries, believe that the "rise of anti-Semitism" is truly the main concern of the moment.

Those who lend a hand to this perpetual diversion are included in the field of this criminal policy and this disaster.

Consequently, the indignation whose natural outlet and the perpetual adjuration of the rulers to "do more" in order to moderate the destructive and conquering passions of the Israeli death apparatus constantly misleads the guardians of values: the primary problem is not to "convince" the power elites (of all stripes) to mobilize more with a view to saving ceasefires, it is to take the measure of what is meant by the general configuration in which, in truth, these elites are, obstinately as much as hypocritically, but actively, in one way or another, *behind the Israelis, at their side. It is this disaster that it is important to take the full measure of*, because what is clearly

drawn here are the contours of a disaster that is not local but global and of which the West, *i.e.* the essentially white, democratic and global North world, is both the promoter and the center of gravity.

The heart of the disaster is this pure insanity: these are the guardians of global democracy, those who have made this master signifier the pivot of the fight against their adversaries and competitors designated more and more openly as absolute, systemic enemies; those who are in a perpetual crusade against terrorism on a national and international scale, against rogue states and the totalitarian hydra ; those who proclaim themselves vicars of the international order based on law or, as they now say more cautiously, on "rules"; those who never stop promoting civilized norms and values as the legitimate foundations of their hegemony on a global scale - *these are the ones who since October 7, 2023 have been the most constant, stubborn, invariant supporters of mass state terrorism, of the exterminations practiced by the Israeli power.*

The current disaster is this *arrangement* of the name of democracy and democracy as a more or less informal power bloc (but supported by solid institutions such as NATO) on the scorched earth policy pursued with consistency by the Israeli state. A policy of chaos conducted by fascists, supremacists driven by an unlimited appetite for destruction and conquest. By people whose war is the element of predilection. Whose force is the only criterion, for whom destruction has become the natural element. The heart of the contemporary disaster is this: it is the powers, the rulers, the global "influencers" (whites, democrats, global North) who have made the defense and promotion of human rights, law in general and "values" their banner who are the most stubborn supporters of this new brown or black plague which is given free rein in all directions in the Middle East under the colors of Israel - a state without a constitution but whose legitimacy is based on the memory of the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis; a state that sees itself as compensation, redress for the harm done to the Jews, that endlessly takes advantage of its privilege as the heir of the victims; it is these crusaders of global democracy who, in the name of the allegedly most virtuous cause, the fight against anti-Semitism, have persevered in their unwavering support for the Israeli death machine.

Here, I think that we need to change our approach to the issue of war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide; we need, in the face of Gaza and everything surrounding its destruction since October 7, to change the terms of the conversation on state criminality in its most extreme state of concentration – with everything that goes with it: radical evil, the imprescriptible, the extreme, the unforgivable, all these motifs that have saturated the intellectual debate in the West in the last decades of the last century with reference to the Holocaust and in particular under the effect of Claude Lanzmann's film, *Shoah* .

According to the legitimized approach to genocide, the framework of which was set by the promoter of the term, Raphaël Lemkin, a jurist, it is defined according to its own characteristics, which call for a specific legal qualification - crimes against humanity, the crime of genocide are imprescriptible to the extent that the object of

genocide presents distinctly identifiable features; among these, the *intention* of the criminal power occupies a primordial place, as well as the means related to it: intention to make a human group disappear, designated according to its ethnic, racial, religious, social characteristics as well, and implementation of the extermination process intended to achieve this end. The means used, the procedures and techniques for implementing the elimination of this supposedly homogeneous population can vary considerably, but it is always a question of removing, that is annihilating a segment of humanity considered inferior, dehumanized, decried as harmful and dangerous.

The approach to genocide that has imposed its authority in the tradition established by Lemkin is based on these premises – the strictly genocidal intention of the perpetrator, the systematicity of the extermination project and that of the means implemented – it is indeed a question of eliminating the targeted group to the end, *to the last one*, as is commonly said.

The genocidal undertaking based on the combination of systematic destruction of the living environment, massacres, particularly by air, and ethnic cleansing, as the Israeli state is conducting in Gaza, leads us to a change in this approach. On the one hand, the destruction of the targeted population, the Palestinians, takes the form of an increasingly massive and brutal *attrition* intended to gradually reduce this population to a purely residual condition; in this sense, it differs in its implementation from the exterminations carried out by the Nazis or the Rwandan genocidaires; it is part of another form of *rationalization* of the elimination of the population concerned, even if, for the most part, the strategic aim, the "historical" horizon of the operation remains the same - to reduce to nothing the chances, the possibility for a people or a population to live among other peoples, to occupy its place, its own space on this planet.

On the other hand, and this is the crucial point, the specific feature of the genocidal enterprise conducted by Israel in Gaza is obvious, it can be detected with the naked eye, so massive is it, provided that one does not shirk its examination: what makes this work of death possible, what creates its very conditions of possibility, is not the perpetrator's own power, the abysmal, intrinsic disproportion of forces between the criminal and his victim (as is the case both during the implementation of the Shoah by the Nazis who, at the time, dominated all of Europe or when the genocide of the Tutsis was carried out in Rwanda). What in the first place the conditions of genocide are made of is an *external factor*: the support given to the State of Israel, support of all kinds, but to armed violence in the first place, by a vast coalition of external forces, at the center of which are the Western democracies.

Everyone knows that Israel is entirely dependent, both militarily, technologically and politically, on this support. Deprived of the latest military equipment provided by Western democracies, with the United States at the forefront, Israel would be quite incapable of successfully carrying out the all-out destruction operations that it is conducting on all fronts, in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and Iran – not to mention, of course, the unwavering moral (propagandist) support provided by this coalition to these operations. For a long time now, the Israeli Army has only been conducting totally asymmetrical warfare operations, like the United States Army in Iraq and

Afghanistan, desk and highly technological warfare operations that primarily target civilian populations, with losses that are increasingly disproportionate between an army that has all the technological means to strike the enemy from a distance, without exposing itself, and opponents equipped, at best, with light weapons or makeshift equipment. The myth of the IDF, an army of the people valiantly resisting the assault of its allied neighbors determined to throw the Jews into the sea, has long been shattered. No more in Gaza than in the West Bank, it is a war in the classical sense of the term that the Israeli Army is conducting against the Palestinians, armed or not; this totally asymmetrical war is made of operations of combing, "pacification" and colonial counter-insurgency, that is terror, more and more distinctly inscribed in an exterminationist horizon.

What must be measured in its full scope is therefore this: the Israeli power of death only exists insofar as it is carried on its shoulders by its supporters, notably Western ones. In this sense, the genocide underway in Gaza is a *joint venture* : the powers that provide the means and provide the political cover fully share the responsibility for it. This figure is new, as a historical formation – the perpetrators of genocide usually act alone, on their own behalf, which has the effect that they alone bear, in the face of History, the responsibility for their crimes – Nazi leaders, Rwandan genocidaires, Khmer Rouge, without forgetting the instigators and executors of the Armenian genocide of 1915...

One step further, one could go so far as to say that Israeli leaders are *in mission*, on assignment, when they implement as they are currently doing the "solution" they intend to bring to the supposed "Palestinian question" - that which consists in definitively rendering null and void any chance for the Palestinians to exist as a people among peoples. They act here less as *proxies* than as delegates or maybe vanguard - it is up to them to do the dirty work, but in doing so, they have every reason to feel assured of their rears. With the return of Trump to power and the rise to power in the Global North of neo-fascists who are increasingly fans of Netanyahu and Israeli supremacism, these arrangements will become ever clearer. Israel is not only an ally, it is a pioneer, in the face of supposedly hostile worlds. The reason why Taiwan's power elites have such unconditional admiration for Israeli leaders and see the state of Israel as an unsurpassable model is that they dream of playing, vis-à-vis China, the same role as the Western outpost that Israel occupies vis-à-vis the Arab-Muslim world.

This obscure disaster is, in this sense, much worse than that of the 1930s and 40s. In this configuration at least, Nazism and its allies, fascism in general, were distinctly and massively identified by the opinions of Western democracies as evil. Nazism and the various fascisms made no secret of their hostility to democracy and promoted openly their own vitalist, racist, conquering ideology; their own obscurantist mythologies, their regressive phantasmagorias. This allowed democrats, humanists, progressives, rationalists, those who saw themselves as continuers and promoters of the spirit of the Enlightenment to form a front against them. This made it possible for

the lines of confrontation between proliferating, conquering fascism and what opposed it to be clearly drawn. Which created the conditions for the visibility of the antagonism, its lines of force, the stakes of the confrontation.

The worst thing in the current configuration is the interweaving of this new fascism, of the uninhibited Israeli supremacism, as it is now setting and example for the West and beyond, of the new spirit of conquest, of the intrinsic nihilism, of the appetite for chaos and destruction concentrated in the Israeli death machine with what is supposed to oppose it, to resist it - *democracy*. It is the way in which this headlong rush, flight of the deadly power takes with it the name of democracy and the most incontestable, most consensual good causes - the fight against racial prejudice and the injunctions of collective memory - to prevent the return, the repetition of the obscure disaster – the Holocaust.

But le probleme is that these injunctions do not only come along the repetition of the disaster but its expansion and completion. The fight against anti-Semitism has become the auxiliary, the perfect cover of this new fascism. The circle is closed when the defense and promotion of values, when the very name of civilization (now inseparable from that of democracy) become the best adjuvants of nihilism on a grand scale, of the new barbarism embodied by Netanyahu and his gang. Beyond any dialectical figure or possibility or even, quite simply, any possible representation of a confrontation between good and evil: those, a tiny minority, who do not give up calling a spade a spade, Netanyahu a fascist and Israel a criminal state are at every moment exposed to the risk of being criminalized and assimilated to terrorism. When it gets to the point where those who say the name of the thing about the destruction of Gaza - genocide - are labeled anti-Semitic, then yes, *it is indeed midnight in the century* .