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# The True Test of One's Commitment to Free Speech

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One's commitment to the foundational, noble ideals of Western, liberal society is most revealingly tested in times of emergency and mortal danger. Core principles such as individualism, bodily autonomy, tolerance, pluralism, and informed consent are easy to support in abstract theory — until such issues carry real societal ramifications and reputational costs.

The past few years have provided no shortage of international uprisings surrounding race relations, viruses, vaccines, elections, and Middle Eastern affairs where peoples' principle commitments immediately implode in the face of emotionally inflaming injustices (accurately understood or not).

The recent appalling terrorist attack lead by Hamas in Israel took more than 1,300 lives while 200 civilians remain hostage. In this time — just as in during the early waves of Covid, the killing of George Floyd, and the aftermath of 9/11 — human emotions are highly charged. Even the most sober-minded, objective observers will understandably have a hard time abstaining from descending into reactive outrage in response to horrifying images of child mutilations and Hamas kidnapping women.

Horrific events in the Middle East have now sprung aggressive state measures across the West to clamp down on Hamas-sympathizing public expressions in the name of fighting anti-Semitic vitriol and terrorist activity.

It is precisely in this time of one's support of free speech and opposition to cancel culture is proven as sincere and principled or politically self-advancing and ultimately fraudulent.

Unfortunately, many prominent figures have failed this test.

Several Western countries such as Germany, France, and the Netherlands have prohibited or threatened state intervention specifically for pro-Palestinian protests.

In the UK, the Home Secretary's letter to police chiefs urging the crackdown of pro-Palestinian demonstrations which intimidate or target the Jewish community generated serious concerns among free speech advocates, but London's Deputy Commissioner Dame Lynne Owens clarified that the mere "expression of support for the Palestinian people more broadly, including flying the Palestinian flag, does not, alone, constitute a criminal offence."

"What we cannot do is interpret support for the Palestinian cause more broadly as automatically being support for Hamas or any other proscribed group," she stated.

France's interior minister Gérald Darmanin ordered a ban on all pro-Palestinian protests on the basis that it is "likely to generate public order disturbances." "The organization of these prohibited demonstrations should lead to arrests," he stated.

One can't help but wonder which public demonstrations — pro-life, Black Lives Matter, anti-Covid mandates, NBA championship celebrations etc — are immune from "likely" generating any form of disturbances in the state's eye.

In response to France's ban, conservative commentator Dave Rubin (whose show I have appeared on several times) asserted, "Maybe the West has a chance."

“They’re calling for genocide,” he states in a following tweet responding to a commenter arguing, “Let them protest.” Indeed, a fringe minority of protests around the world have seen its attendants egregiously call for violence. In Sydney, Australia one pro-Palestine rally sparked genocidal chants of “gas the jews.”

Another demonstration in Melbourne reportedly had a group of men stating they were “on the hunt to kill Jews.” As every sensible person can agree, individuals inciting violence against the Jewish community ought to be reprimanded and punished by the state.

But this has been, by far, the exception, not the norm.

Instead, the resounding sentiment across a number of rallies around the world has been a morally confused, misguided, and reprehensible glorification of Palestinian resistance in opposition to Israel. The Hamas terrorist attack is seen as a predictable and proportionate consequence of Israel’s perceived oppression. Journalists Olivia Reingold and Francesca Block carefully document the tenor of pro-Palestinian protests in Midtown Manhattan:

Statements such as “Resistance is justified when people are oppressed!” and “ Hamas is a logical conclusion for people struggling and uprising” at this protest capture the dominant ethos of the worldwide demonstrations.

None of this speech is a call to violence. It should be protected and defended with all our ethical convictions — because free speech commitments matter most when our opponents and enemies are attacked.

In Canada, Conservative Senator Leo Housakos sent a [letter](#) to Ottawa, Toronto, and Vancouver’s police departments asserting planned pro-Palestinian rallies “must be stopped.” “This is a matter of public safety,” he goes on. The letter was written in response to The Palestinian Youth Movement’s [Facebook posts](#) advertising rallies in the aforementioned Canadian cities:

[Link](#)

The posts call on Canadians to “uplift and honour” the Hamas terrorists who carried out the “offensive attack” to murder and kidnap innocent Israeli civilians. As abhorrent as these views may be, they are not calls to violence and law enforcement should never ban such protests (which were peaceful across Canada).

In the United States, free speech concerns surrounding this issue pertain not to protests but [blacklists of students](#) who signed onto a Harvard student group letter holding the “Israeli regime entirely responsible for all unfolding violence.”

Vast legions of conservative thinkers and public figures have supported public blacklists of such students, including Megyn Kelly (someone who I personally consider a role model). Substack writer and blogger Max Meyer proceeded to create a “College Terror List” in response to billionaire hedge fund manager Bill Ackman demanding that Harvard release the names of all of the students who signed the letter.

This egregious precedent will surely come back to haunt conservatives who vigorously oppose “cancel culture.” Students who sign letters opposing Black Lives Matter or radical gender ideology may find themselves on a future blacklist, rendering themselves unhireable at progressive-owned companies.

The sophistic conservative defence is that all signatories of the letter are genocidal maniacs. This is most certainly false. The vast majority of students arguably have a grossly incorrect view of history and the geopolitical context of the Hamas massacre, but they are

not bloodthirsty barbarians cheering infanticide. To pretend otherwise is incredibly disingenuous.

Megyn Kelly and Dave Rubin have every right not to hire individuals with morally misguided views, but demanding public lists is an extreme step in the wrong direction.

At bare minimum, one need not be a Middle Eastern expert to recognize the moral depravity of celebrating jihadist “resistance” — rather than explicitly condemning terrorist activity (while sympathizing with the plight of Gazan civilians) — in the immediate aftermath of a heinous bloodbath. It would be similarly inhumane in an American context if protesters gathered by the thousands celebrating Blue Lives Matter (police officers’ heroism) in the day following an unjustifiable act of police brutality.

Even if one is sympathetic to the suffering of Palestinians under the rule of a terrorist organization, failing to decry the barbaric actions of Hamas is an appalling moral failure that has been all-too-common across the West over the past week.

And yet at the same time, free speech ought to be defended for views we consider even abhorrent and indefensible. Protests defending Palestinian resistance are legitimate expressions of free speech. Some individuals, such as my friend Kim Iversen, have also expressed rational concerns about Israeli excessive force in response to Hamas' terror attack.

None of these people — ranging from radical and morally compromised to sensible and humanitarian — should have their free speech rights curtailed.

The West is indeed on the decline if large numbers of individuals in its borders hold values radically at odds with core liberalism — as conservatives correctly note — but criminalizing free speech under the guise of tolerance would undermine the West's sacred value of free speech, not support it.



Principles matter. Especially in times of emergency.

Many people faced the same dilemma during Covid. Did the purported societal benefit (which quickly proved to be wildly false) of mandating Covid vaccines override people's foundational rights of informed consent and bodily autonomy?

Governments around the world took the wrong side on this issue, barring its citizens from leaving the country, exercising at a gym, working in federally regulated jobs, and maintaining their livelihoods.

Free speech was also attacked during Covid-19 in the name of preventing needless deaths. Should the tragic lives lost to Covid-19 give the state power to censor "misinformation" online discouraging potentially life-saving vaccination and promoting deranged conspiracy theories? The *Missouri v. Biden* case proves the federal government coerced social media companies to censor views that deviated from their public health agenda.

These policies ought to be opposed not (merely) because the state's version of the scientific facts were wrong time and time again, but because they infringed upon Americans' First Amendment rights.

Moral emergencies are the times when our principles are most vulnerable to negotiation and even complete collapse due to ideological views and emotionally charged reactions. Unfortunately, many public figures crusading against cancel culture have proven the superiority of their ideological commitments first and foremost as they instantaneously discard their free speech jerseys now that governments around the West support their views and are willing to use their power to crack down on dissidents.

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