Opinion
Guest Voices
Columns
Social Justice



Buildings destroyed by Israeli airstrikes are seen in Gaza City Oct. 10, 2023. Israel launched airstrikes on the Gaza Strip in retaliation for the Oct. 7 assault in which Hamas militants killed about 1,200 people in Israel and took about 240 more as hostages. More than 40,000 people in Gaza have died since then. (OSV News/Reuters/Mohammed Salem)



by Joan Chittister

View Author Profile

Follow on Twitter at @joanchittister

Join the Conversation

October 3, 2024

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

I'm a news freak and everybody knows it: News first, breakfast next. What's happening to Ukraine and Russia, Israel and Palenstine, etc.

It's a commitment. It's also heartbreaking, frustrating — and it's unreal.

The morning I wrote this column for instance, I heard that there have been over a million casualties in the Ukraine-Russian debacle. So, who's winning? Who knows?

Then I heard that the hostages are still underground in Gaza. For what purpose are they now being denied freedom and life after so many in Gaza are dead or have been displaced?

Then I heard that unless Pennsylvania wins the electoral vote — one no human being ever really votes for — voters will find the whole system in question.

All those statements are within possibility; all of them introduce new and difficult circumstances to people beyond themselves.

Worse, in one way or another, all of them are out of control.

> Where are the religious voices that should be calling for peace and love in every scripture in every country?
>
> Tweet this

Every morning, Donald Trump, the man who has been playing shadow president for four years now, repeats the same old rant and lies and comedy act that is being called politics in this country these days, and no one stops it.

Every day, Amnesty International reminds 130 countries of their commitment to the 2013 "Arms Trade Treaty" of the United Nations, which also enables defense programs to be able to refuse military weapons to countries at war. And no one stops this, either.

In the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, the journalist Yossi Merman reports that an Israeli Air Force official said that "without U.S. aid we could not fight beyond a few months."

So, America, what do we do with all of this now? We're on those lists. We're the military suppliers of the world. So, is this our war? Our responsibility?

What has been solved for Ukraine, for Russia, for the far right in Israel, for the defenseless in Palestine, Jerusalem and the West Bank as well as for the border states around them — whether they voted for this war or not?

And while we're at it, someone has to stop undercutting the meaning of the Shoah — the indiscriminate mass destruction of people who themselves have done nothing against their tormentors, except go on living.

The Shoah, the Holocaust, that we all promised ourselves we would never again permit, is now releasing new waves of antisemitism into pods of people everywhere. As the Israelis keep driving Palestinians off Palestinian property — which contravenes international law — and threatening states around them in the name of "defense," nothing gets better but it does go on getting worse.



Mourners attend a funeral ceremony in Lviv, Ukraine, Sept. 6 for Evgenia Bazylevych and her three daughters, killed during a Russian missile attack on Sept. 4. Yaroslav, her husband, was the only family who survived the attack. (OSV News/Reuters/Roman Baluk)

The fact is that Israel's "defense" has claimed the entire Gaza Strip, run Palestinians out of their homes on the West Bank, denied them the right of return and so — despite international law — nothing can possibly be negotiated. Not to mention the fact that civilian hostages are still being held in inhuman circumstances — underground — and for no clear reason.

And so what? Plenty. Everybody "has the right to defend themselves" the Shoah taught us, yes. But the question is: How is anyone allowed — able — to "defend themselves" when their unarmed enemy can no longer even attempt to recreate their own lives?

The real horror of runaway wars lies in the fact that they are being waged by countries who announce their technological genius regularly but cannot figure out how to enforce rational human decisions instead.

Most of all, where are the religious voices that should be calling for peace and love in every scripture in every country? Instead, Ha'aretz, Israel's self-described left-of-center newspaper, never blinks to publish the common Israeli street insult, "Palestinians are animals" as Israelis risk what they hate.

One morning the world woke up to see Israelis standing by the thousands in Tel Aviv. They went to the streets by the thousands to stop this war while their own prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, goes on trying to lead them into their own international destruction in order to protect himself.

In all of this, the United Nations stands by weeping. The world turns its back weeping. The children of each side grow up weeping rather than learning to respect the unarmed civilians around them while the protesters in Israel denounce their own leaders.

And all the while, newspapers everywhere bark out a few details every day, apparently unconscious of the historical background of who owns what and who got it when — and why. So those on each side are unaware of the skullduggery it takes

to get average people to think that any kind of war is important enough to be fought and died for in this one without examining both its beginnings and its ends.

Until a world at peace refuses to be warmakers, our own lives are in danger of dying for what we have created. Or refuse to refuse.

The national cry, of course, is that we can't leave the under trodden to the fate of an enemy. No, but we could take arms away from the enemy, too. We take visas away. We take land away. We take foreign criminals out of the mainstream. We stop whole populations from crossing streets on red lights.

Surely the amount of military materiel we produce could be limited to each nation as well as we distribute tomatoes.

We have, after all, been able to restrain the use of nuclear weapons because we have determined how many it will take to destroy us all — and find it purposeless.

Advertisement

From where I stand, the point is this: When we want this to stop, we can stop it. We have the United Nations for this very advance. So how is it that we are allowing single nations — our own included — to veto the world's desire for peace at the United Nations assembly rather than find a rational resolution of its differences?

After all, surely nothing mentioned here is half as extreme as war itself.

On the other hand, we don't, it seems, read much wisdom literature, either.

A version of this story appeared in the **Oct. 25-Nov. 7, 2024** print issue under the headline: We are all tired of war, so why don't we just stop it?.