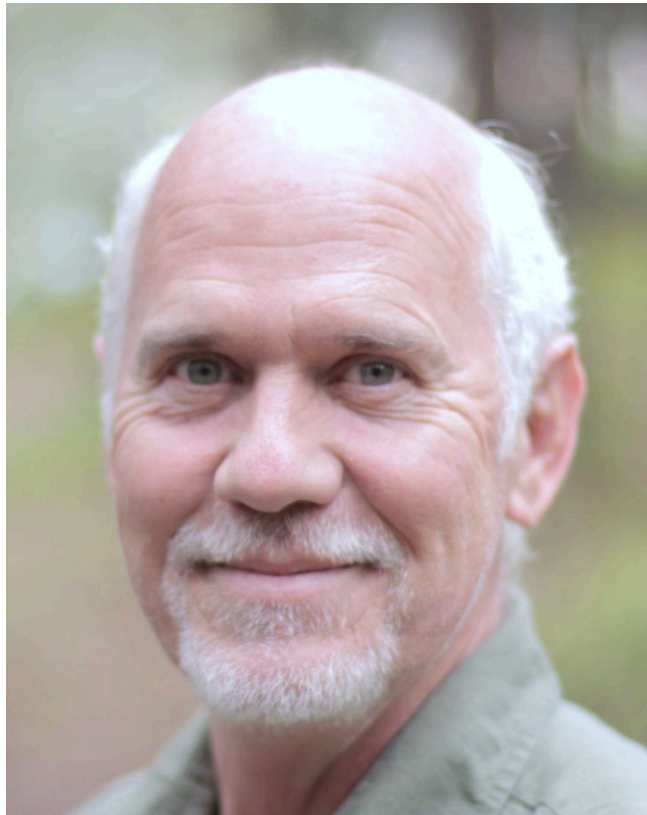

In My View: An eye for an eye

November 20, 2023



It has been over a month since the Hamas terrorists attacked Israel and captured over 200 hostages. It is justified that people should condemn this attack on Israel. It is also reasonable to have concerns about the rising death toll on Palestinian civilians.

Most people living in Gaza are not terrorists, yet many innocent people are being killed in Israel's retaliatory response to Hamas. This will lead the Palestinian people to call for revenge and the cycle of violence will continue. Mahatma Gandhi said, "An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind."

Crescent City

On November 6, the Crescent City Council considered approving a letter in support of Israel stating in part, "We adamantly condemn these acts committed by the terrorist organization Hamas. We send our condolences and our prayers to those affected by these atrocities and pray for the safe return of those that were kidnapped. No person should have to fear perpetual acts of violence just because of who they are."

It is unusual for a local agency to weigh in on an international issue and I wondered what the people of Crescent City would think of this. I attended this meeting to see what would happen.

People Spoke

There were four people who vehemently expressed their opposition to approving a letter offering blanket support for Israel. They mentioned allegations of war crimes and genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza by the Israeli Defense Forces.

There were also two Jewish Americans that had very different opinions. The first one explained that she supported Israel but is not happy with the Israeli government right now. She did not think it was the right time for sending this letter but asked us to “Pray for Peace.”

The second Jewish person that testified was Triplicate reporter Roger Gitlin. After disclosing that he is writing a story, he stated that he supported sending this letter. He expressed rational fears of a repeat of the holocaust. His support for Israel was unequivocal.

Council Debate

Councilmember Jason Greenough made an impassioned speech in support of approving this letter. He argued that this is not political. He reiterated that silence in the face of great evil is evil. Greenough dismissed the concerns about civilian Palestinian casualties, asserting that their blood is on Hamas’ hands.

Councilmember Inscore responded that this is political and “not where we should be.” Though he helped to draft the letter, he observed that things looked very different two weeks ago. He recommended that they step back and take a breath. Greenough made a motion to approve the letter. The motion died for lack of a second.

The other City Councilmembers were largely silent on this issue, but they were clearly uncomfortable with the conflict. It should not be surprising that if a divisive issue is brought up, there will be division. Every other part of the meeting was productive. This one issue introduced enmity into an otherwise cordial City Council.

Collateral Damage

I have mixed feelings on the intent of the City’s letter. It is appropriate to condemn a terrorist attack and express condolences for the 1400 Israelis who were killed by Hamas on October 7. But it is also right to express concern for the 10,000 Palestinians, including 4000 children that have been killed since then.

In every war there is collateral damage. Generally, this used as a euphemism for the unintended civilian death toll that occurs as a side effect of war. When you consider the size of the Gaza Strip it is hard to imagine a strategy that could avoid killing civilians. Gaza is 25 miles long and 3.7 to 7.5 miles wide. No place is safe.

Imagine what it would be like if we were surrounded and prevented from leaving the coastal plain between Crescent City and Brookings and every day missiles are fired at us from Hiouchi. Where could you go?

Hate Crimes

Around the world people are protesting the widespread killing of innocent civilians. In the United States hate crimes have increased since the October 7 attack. There have been a growing number of incidents of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. All elected officials should be cautious not to inflame this situation.

The United States is treading a fine line. While we advocate for humanitarian assistance, we are also considering \$14 billion in military aid. We are providing the weapons that are killing these civilians. We also are risking an expansion of war to other parts of the Middle East.

This is a very treacherous diplomatic balancing act. The underlying issues and long history of conflict in the Middle East make this very difficult to resolve. We can ask for a humanitarian pause, but Israel does not have to listen. Israel has pledged to eliminate Hamas, but at what cost to the people of Gaza?

Democratic Platform

Every time the California Democratic Party Platform is updated, the most heated issue is the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Because there are Democrats that represent perspectives from both sides of this issue, the policy statements have been carefully crafted to represent the nuances of this controversy.

The following two excerpts from the Democratic Party Platform provide a balanced policy guidance:

“Continue to work toward a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict directly negotiated by the parties that guarantees equality, security and democracy for all; recognizes Israel’s future as a secure and democratic Jewish state with recognized borders; and provides Palestinians with independence, sovereignty, and dignity.”

“Recognize that Israelis and Palestinians deserve security, recognition, and a normal life free from terror and incitement and respectively should be free to govern themselves, each in their own viable states in peace and with dignity.”

Good Intentions

My takeaway after witnessing this attempt by a local agency to engage in international politics is that it is a distraction from the practical business of the City Council.

Even if everyone approaches the debate with good intentions, divisive issues inevitably sow division.

Rather than choosing sides in a foreign war, we should advocate for a peaceful coexistence at home and abroad.

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