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Andrew Perez: My fellow progressives — you've been lied to about Israel

Many on the left are blind to the suffering experienced by both Israelis and the global Jewish community over the past 15 months

By Andrew Perez, [Special to National Post](#)

Published Jan 23, 2025 Last updated Jan 23, 2025 7 minute read [169 Comments](#)



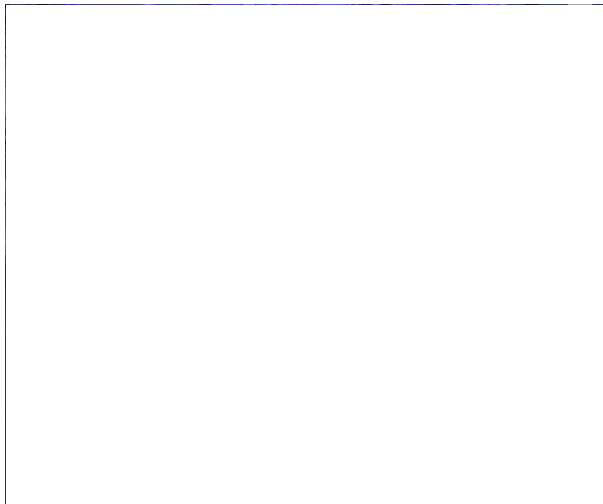
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Supporters and relatives of Israeli hostages held captive in the Gaza Strip since the October 7, 2023 attacks by Hamas militants, demonstrate in Tel Aviv on January 20, 2025. (Photo by MENAHEM KAHANA/AFP via Getty Images)

In the wake of the October 7, 2023 Hamas terrorist attack on Israeli soil the discourse

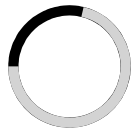
educate myself about Israel and its ongoing war with Hamas, mainstream media and influencers on the progressive left have glossed over the complexities and nuances of this war in a deliberate fashion.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW



The public discourse surrounding Israel has long been shaped by distorted narratives that obscure facts and polarize debates: a trend exacerbated by the meteoric rise of social media apps like TikTok and Instagram. Many of the claims advanced by progressives rely on half-truths or outright fabrications that demonize Israel while erasing the complexities of the region. These inaccurate narratives aren't merely unfair to Israel: they deny Palestinians the dignity of an honest

and nuanced conversation about their ongoing plight



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When it comes to Israel, many progressives have been lied to by leaders and institutions on the progressive left.

As part of a commitment to better understanding Israel and its war with Hamas, I travelled to the Middle East’s only democracy with a group of Canadian journalists in late October at the invitation of Exigent Foundation. The non-profit organization was founded in the months following October 7 to foster awareness

about the extremist threats faced by Israel
and other liberal democracies


Southern Levant. The trip represented an emotional roller coaster: in 10 days, I witnessed the very best and very worst of a state that has grappled with its security and very existence since the day it was created 76 years ago.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW


As a non-Jew in Israel for the first time, I experienced the bustling and diverse streets of Tel Aviv seemingly unperturbed by the collective trauma of the past year, the historic religious sites of Jerusalem and the gorgeous scenery of a country that comprises a mere 22,000 square kilometres: roughly the size of the state of New Jersey.

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As I criss-crossed from one end of Israel to the other I came away with three key

October 7 didn't represent a moment in time for Israelis. It marked a "new normal" accompanied by collective trauma

I saw with my own eyes where the absolute horrors that transpired on October 7 occurred: the Reim Music Festival site where 364 people were murdered and the ravaged kibbutzim that lie near the armistice line between Israel and the Gaza Strip. Our journey also took us to Northern Israel along the Lebanon border where we visited mixed Jewish-Arab Israeli villages regularly terrorized by deadly Hezbollah rockets.

Through my travels, I was struck by one harsh reality: the terrors of October 7 weren't merely an awful moment in time for Israelis. They shook Israelis to their core reawakening collective trauma and reminding them of the existential threats their country has long faced. I bore witness to this collective trauma for it's omnipresent throughout today's Israel: "Bring them Home Now!" hostage placards adorn public infrastructure virtually everywhere across the country.

Yet many progressives appear blind to the immense trauma and suffering experienced by both Israelis and the global Jewish community over the past 15 months. This isn't to understate the extreme plight of the Palestinian people: the horrid images and videos emerging from Gaza are heartbreaking.

But as progressives, we must openly acknowledge the human suffering experienced by both sides of this prolonged conflict. The tragedy of October 7 wasn't a geopolitical event that must be understood within a broader context: no action of Israel's in the recent or distant past can explain, nor justify Hamas's barbarism and complete disregard for the sanctity of all life. What Israelis experienced on October 7 was a profound human tragedy: one that demands empathy and moral clarity among

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progressives committed to equity and social
justice

complicit in genocide

Witnessing the scale of Israel's ethnic and racial diversity up close was illuminating. It's baffling to me that so many progressives continue to portray Israel as a "white European, settler-colonial state": a characterization that belies historical facts.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Israel was created in 1948 for Jews fleeing Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa, Ethiopia, Asia and for survivors from Nazi concentration camps in Nazi Germany. Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews of North African and Middle Eastern descent comprise a majority in Israel today: it's estimated that only about 31.8 per cent of Israeli Jews were

Ashkenazi or descendants of European Jews

as of 2018

Even during periods of mass exile, there has always been a recognized Jewish presence maintained in Israel.

The Israel-Hamas war is often depicted as a conflict between the oppressed — the Palestinian people — and the oppressor — Israel: particularly among left-leaning academics, postsecondary students and the NGO-class that comprise today's progressive left.

This simplistic narrative has emboldened many progressives to accuse Israel of being an apartheid state complicit in genocide: an outrageous claim levelled against a people who experienced and survived an actual genocide.

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Yet these malicious representations are being amplified among mainstream audiences in

someone very active on social media, I've often witnessed the dissemination of misinformation and disinformation — even outright propaganda relating to Israel's history, its people and the assumptions underpinning this war.

These false narratives have distorted the views and assumptions of many progressives. Their debilitating impacts have been most palpable among young people drawn to the social currency associated with identity politics, cancel culture and the oppressor-oppressed paradigm.

Progressives must stop viewing Israel and its actions through a privileged Western lens

Criticizing Israeli policies is legitimate, but reducing Israel to a singular caricature — oppressor, colonizer, or aggressor — ignores the complexity of its reality.

Like any liberal democracy, Israel is imperfect: it wrestles with tensions between its liberal values and the challenges posed by prolonged conflict, and the diverse views of

its citizens. The conduct of Israel's
government and military should always bear

resources is problematic and a major obstacle
to an eventual two-state solution.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

But progressives must seek to genuinely understand Israel's unique history and unconventional opponents that have made peace impossible. The murderous goals of Hamas, the elected governing authority in Gaza since 2007, is often downplayed by western progressives. While it claims to represent Palestinian liberation, its actions and ideology betray this mission. Its charter openly calls for the destruction of Israel and the murder of Jews worldwide.

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Hamas's actions — targeting civilians, using human shields and diverting resources from

Supporting the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel shouldn't require progressives to endorse or excuse Hamas. Progressivism demands that we stand against oppression and for human dignity everywhere. This includes solidarity with Palestinians; it also includes recognizing the right of Israelis to live without the constant threat of terrorism and annihilation. These principles are not mutually exclusive.

Months later, one conversation from my time in Israel is seared into my memory

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

It was a gorgeous Saturday afternoon on the humming streets of Tel Aviv and I was socializing with a group of gay Israeli men

during my last weekend in the country. We were drinking beer on a patio in the sun

contrast to most middle eastern countries, as well as in Gaza, where same-sex activity is illegal and punishable by imprisonment or even death. In Israel, queer and trans people can serve openly in the military, and the Israel Defense Forces covers the costs associated with transitioning genders.

The conversation suddenly turned more ominous with breaking reports that Iran had just served notice that it would once again launch a barrage of rockets into Israel: within 48 hours this time.

I froze. I'd still be in the country within two days, I reasoned. My newfound Israeli friends appeared unfazed: they immediately assured me that everything would be fine. "If it wasn't for the Iron Dome, the death toll in Israel over the past 15 months would have been catastrophic," exclaimed one.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

In that moment, I gleaned a fleeting window into the frightening realities of life in Israel in a post-October 7 world. A reality that many progressives fail to grasp due to an unwillingness to challenge their underlining assumptions about Israel and this war.

Progressives: if we're to engage in good faith on Israel, we must embrace complexity and nuance. We must reject slogans that reduce this war to black-and-white narratives. We must listen to voices — Israeli and Palestinian — calling for peace, coexistence and mutual recognition. And we must challenge ourselves to advocate for solutions that honour the humanity and rights of all people in the region.

The tragedy of October 7 reminds us what's at stake: the lives and futures of millions of our fellow human beings in a region most of us scarcely understand. As progressives, our role isn't to take sides and fan the flames

with divisive rhetoric predicated on misinformation. Instead, we must take a firm

Andrew Perez is a Toronto-based public affairs strategist, freelance writer and political commentator. He travelled to Israel in late October at the invitation of Exigent Foundation, a Canadian non-profit organization.



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