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Exchange Between Bill Moyers and Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League

Following [Bill Moyers' reflections on the events in Gaza](#) on the JOURNAL last week, Anti-Defamation League National Director Abraham Foxman sent him this letter:

Mr. Moyers,

In less than a thousand words, you managed to fit into your January 9 commentary: (1) moral equivalency between Hamas, a radical Islamic terrorist group whose anti-Semitic charter cites the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, and Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East and perhaps America's greatest ally in the world; (2) historical revisionism, asserting that Canaanites were Arabs; (3) anti-Semitism, declaring that Jews are "genetically coded" for violence; (4) ignorance of the terrorist threat against Israel, claiming that checkpoints, the security fence, and the Gaza operation are tactics of humiliation rather than counter-terrorism; and (5) promotion of an individual, the Norwegian doctor in Gaza, who has publicly expressed support for the September 11 attacks.

I have seen and read serious critiques of Israel's military campaign in Gaza, and I have disagreed with many of them. Your commentary, however, is different, consisting mostly of intellectually and morally faulty claims that do a great disservice to the PBS audience. It invites not disagreement, but rebuke.

On one point you are correct – "America has officially chosen sides." And rightly so. Fortunately for our nation, very few of our citizens engage in the same moral equivalency, racism, historical revisionism, and indifference to terrorism as you. If the reverse held, it would not be a country that any decent person would want to live in.

Sincerely,

Abraham H. Foxman
National Director
Anti-Defamation League

In response, Bill Moyers sent Mr. Foxman the following message:

Dear Mr. Foxman:

You made several errors in your letter to me of January 13 and I am writing to correct them.

First, to call someone a racist for lamenting the slaughter of civilians by the Israeli military offensive in Gaza is a slur unworthy of the tragedy unfolding there. Your resort to such a tactic is reprehensible.

Earlier this week it was [widely reported](#) that the International Red Cross "was

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so outraged it broke its usual silence over an attack in which the Israeli army herded a Palestinian family into a building and then shelled it, killing 30 people and leaving the surviving children clinging to the bodies of their dead mothers. The army prevented rescuers from reaching the survivors for four days."

When American troops committed a similar atrocity in Vietnam, it was called My Lai and Lt. Calley went to prison for it. As the publisher of a large newspaper at the time, I instructed our editorial staff to cover the atrocity fully because Americans should know what our military was doing in our name and with our funding. To say "my country right or wrong" is like saying "my mother drunk or sober." Patriots owe their country more than that, whether their government and their taxes are supporting atrocities in Vietnam, Iraq, or, in this case, Gaza.

Contrary to your claim, I made no reference whatsoever to "moral equivalency" between Hamas and Israel. That is an old canard often resorted to by propagandists trying to divert attention from facts on the ground, and, it, too, is unworthy of the slaughter in Gaza. Contrary to imputing "moral equivalency" between Hamas and Israel, I said that "Hamas would like to see every Jew in Israel dead." I said that "a radical stream of Islam now seeks to eliminate Israel from the face of the earth." And I described the new spate of anti-Semitism across the continent of Europe. I am curious as to why you ignored remarks which clearly counter the notion of "moral equivalency."

And although I specifically referred to "the rockets from Hamas" falling on Israel and said that "every nation has the right to defend itself, and Israel is no exception," you nonetheless accuse me of "ignorance of the terrorist threat against Israel." Once again, you are quite selective in your reading of my essay.

Your claim that "the checkpoints, the security fence and the Gaza operation" [I used the more accurate "onslaught"] are not humiliating of the Palestinians is lamentable. I did not claim that these were, as you write, "tactics of humiliation *rather* [emphasis mine] than counter-terrorism," but perhaps it is overly simplistic to think they are one and not the other, when they are both. Also lamentable is your description of my "promotion" of the Norwegian doctor in Gaza when in fact I was simply quoting what he told CBS News: "It's like Dante's *Inferno*. They are bombing one and a half million people in a cage." The whole world has been able to see for itself what he was talking about, and as one major news organization after another has been reporting, is reeling from the sight.

And, to your claim that I was "declaring Jews are 'genetically coded' for violence," you are mistaken. My comment - obviously not sufficiently precise - was not directed at a specific people but to the fact that the human race has violence in its DNA, as the biblical stories so strongly affirm. I also had in mind the relationship between all the descendents of Abraham who love the same biblical land and come to such grief over it.

From my days in President Johnson's White House forward, I have defended Israel's right to defend itself, and still do. But sometimes an honest critic is a government's best friend, and I am appalled by Israel's devastation of innocent civilians in this battle, all the more so because, as I said in my column, it is exactly what Hamas wanted to happen. To be so indifferent to that suffering is, sadly, to be as blind in Gaza as Samson.

Sincerely,

Bill Moyers

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