NZZ: Neither Israel nor the Palestinians are ready for peace

The ceasefire in Gaza and the release of the hostages are a triumph of diplomacy – but NZZ editor-in-chief Eric Gujer warns against deceptive optimism in his commentary.

After two years of war, silence reigns over the ruins of Gaza. But the real battle, writes Eric Gujer, is now beginning – the battle for sovereignty of interpretation. The massacre on October 7 and the subsequent Gaza war are “the deepest caesura in Jewish-Palestinian history for decades”.

For Israel, this day is the revival of the Holocaust in the collective memory. “Never again” – what has become an empty formula in Germany remains a “true reason of state” for Israel. It will be some time before the citizens see their country as a safe home again. Hamas had triggered “the Jewish Nakba”, a trauma that would shape generations.

Gujer warns against reversing cause and effect: “The massacres are the cause, the war is the consequence.” Anyone who denies this or interprets Hamas’ violence as “self-defense against apartheid” makes themselves “an accomplice to barbarism”. Especially in Europe and among parts of the left, he sees this moral reversal well advanced.

Hamas has time – and will strike again

The NZZ editor-in-chief describes the Gaza war as a fratricidal war between Cain and Abel – not as a classic conflict between states, but as an “atavistic, internal conflict” in which the old Middle East manifests itself. While Israel has achieved its goals in Iran and Lebanon with limited strikes, Gaza is “mired in an operation without strategy and self-restraint”.

According to Gujer, Hamas only agreed to Trump’s peace plan because it had “lost all support” after two years of war. But the movement will strike again: “The Muslim Brotherhood are pragmatic fanatics. They know how to wait and see.” A ceasefire would only buy them time. The Islamists would not allow themselves to be disarmed, “because they believe they are doing God’s work”.

Gujer also believes that Israel has not reached its goal, but is in a breathing space. Netanyahu’s government had pushed through the return of the hostages, but had accepted a security risk. Among the released prisoners are “experienced cadres who strengthen the thinned ranks of Hamas”.

In order to come to terms with its own “Nakba”, Israel must face up to the lie of its life: The security walls had prevented attacks, but also suppressed awareness of the existence of the Palestinians “Out of sight, out of mind”, writes Gujer – the fence had created an illusion: Peace without a Palestinian question.

Shift to the right and blockade

In the meantime, the settler movement has conquered the political center of Israel. “There are no compromises with them and no two-state solution.” The result is a government that “revolves around itself” and can no longer find a strategic line.

At international level, Gujer diagnoses a devastating double standard: the war in Sudan does not move anyone in Europe, but the Israeli war is accompanied by unprecedented outrage – an expression of a “new hatred of Jews, elegantly disguised as criticism of Israel”.

Meanwhile, the Arab regimes had frozen their relations with Israel, while Trump paradoxically placed Qatar – once the patron of the Islamists – under personal protection. The result: a dynamic that has also seen Israel “overrun by events”.

In the end, Gujer draws a sobering conclusion: neither Israel nor the Palestinians are ready for real peace. Israel relies too much on its military superiority – “when you have a hammer, all problems look like nails” – while the Palestinians remain trapped in religious fatalism. “Israel continues to rely on military strength – although, as Gujer writes, ‘strength alone does not create peace’. “Source: NZZ from October 17 (paywall)