



Amy Neustein

# Why Was the International Community Slow to Condemn the Rape of Israelis?

Secretary of State Antony Blinken told CNN's Jake Tapper on "State of the Union" on Dec. 10 that "the sexual violence that we saw on Oct. 7 is beyond anything I've seen."

When asked by Tapper why the United Nations and the international community were so slow to respond to the allegations of sexual violence, Blinken said, "I think it is a question that these organizations ... need to ask themselves."

Earlier this month, during the special panel hosted by Israel at the U.N. headquarters in New York, we got a glimpse at the extent of brutalities that were met with dismissiveness by the human rights group known as U.N. Women and by the women's movement writ large toward the atrocities meted out to the Israeli women and girls during the Hamas rampage on kibbutzim and towns along the Gazan border.

Those speaking at this session pointed out that Israeli police investigators, rape crisis centers and forensic medical examiners were abundantly clear in describing the horrors of sexual violence perpetrated against Israeli women and girls residing in the Kibbutzim and towns near the Gazan border.

There were 1,500 eyewitness statements, detailed pathology reports and ample video recordings. The findings were unsparingly gruesome: Women were shot in the face while being gang raped; pregnant women were raped, disemboweled and their fetuses dismembered; nails and other rusty metal objects were found inside the feminine orifices of the women who had been mutilated and murdered.

Sadly, this litany of horror was not enough to elicit rage from the women's movement that has prided itself as the defender of the #MeToo campaign — the show of unconditional support for all women who are

victims of sexual violence.

What this showed was that in a short window of time, the aloneness of being Jewish and female was made perfectly clear to every Jewish woman around the world. Jewish men, likewise, enraged over the brutal assault on Jewish women and girls, felt the betrayal of the global community. Many in the Jewish community, aside from the collective support of one another, knew that they stood alone in their pain, anguish and grief, as they have for thousands of years.

Certainly, at this critical time, we sorely needed the support of the women's movement to validate our feelings of outrage and to publicly decry the violation of Jewish women and girls. Such inhumane sexual acts have resonated profoundly in our community. Every young girl assaulted by the Hamas attackers was a future Jewish mother; and every woman who was profanely violated was a mother, a grandmother, a sister, or an aunt.

As our women were defiled, debased and dishonored, this represented a "Churban" — massive destruction and desecration — of Jewish women who are the fulcrum of community life. Desecration resonates so deeply in our religion that our calendars are marked with holidays and fast days to commemorate those events in our history. The reason is, we use the date of desecration as a marker to delineate our inextinguishable flame of survival against all odds. This is something we, as Jews, understand intrinsically. However, others do not. They have neither endured cycles of persecution, murder and annihilation, nor have they been repeatedly scorned by cadres of enemies.

Surely, our disappointment in the failure of the women's movement to denounce our attackers might stem from too much credit given to our "assimilation" in today's modern world.

On one hand, at no other time in Jewish history have we so seamlessly integrated with non-Jewish populations. Except for insular Chasidic communities, the modern Jew today exists in a world of all nationalities and faiths — no doubt a stark contrast to those close-knit small-town European "shtetl" communities.

On the other hand, assimilation is often deceptive since it offers a false sense of integration with other ethnic groups and faiths when the reality belies this myth. We saw this play out in the wake of the Oct. 7 massacre when women's groups were reluctant to support their Jewish sisters.

Alas, our sisters in solidarity, with whom we've worked laboriously on reproductive freedom, ERA, LGBTQ rights, along with other important women's issues, have woefully disappointed us. They were slow to respond, if at all, to our searing pain.

Where we expected "rachmones" — sympathy, empathy, understanding — to flow from the faucets of human kindness we found, instead, the ashes of the Shoah hitting us in the face. Once again, we were alone, forced to navigate our fate sans champions to take up our cause.

All in all, the ruse of modern times may have led most of us to think we have successfully assimilated when in truth we stand very much alone.

Perhaps this is a wake-up call? If so, we need to reevaluate, recalibrate and reconsider our role in the women's movement of today. Our tradition teaches us to be strong and to never give up. It also teaches us to stand up for what's right.

And that includes demanding accountability from the women's movement and the international community for their shameful silence on the Oct. 7 massacre. ■

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## Israel

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And then, the crux of the matter: "(ii) Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force."

This is precisely the position the Abraham Accords

countries have taken. It is far from a wobbly "right to exist" at the sufferance of others. Israel's life is not an "are not!" "am too!" argument with regional bullies or meddling superpowers.

Israel has rights.

Friends of Israel should demand that the U.N. Security Council put its muscle — such as it is — in service of the resolution it passed in 1967. The U.S. government should notify states or parties that do not accept the resolution that American political and military support will not be forthcoming the way it has been — take note, Jordan and Qatar. The U.S.

should notify the Palestinian leadership as well. The fact that there was none in 1967 doesn't change the requirement to terminate its claims and state of belligerency. It is the only way forward for them. Friends of Israel should demand that Congress adopt the language of the resolution as American policy.

I look forward to attending the dinner again next year, but I hope we will be more self-confident on behalf of our friend and ally Israel. ■

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