

Blue Light, Green Blood: Edifice Politics for Israel

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It has been a few days of slaughter-filled accounts. Starting on October 7 on the Jewish day of Simchat Torah, the State of Israel has faced assaults from hundreds of Hamas militants. Directed from southwards in the country, the mayhem has rattled the security and intelligence establishment smugly convinced in their reading of Palestinian motivations and capabilities. But outside the conflict, the commemorations for the dead are to be held according to a specific blueprint.

Across a slew of Western capitals and cities - self-described their presses as The World, blue and white lights have splashed buildings, offering a plaster of virtue over the policies of a state. It would be futile, and tiresome, to document each example of such selective privileging. But for those countries aligned or sympathetic to Israel, some particularly reluctant to decry policies that have violated, with breezy disdain, the dictates of international law, you will not see buildings illuminated by the flag colours of Palestine.

The Berlin Wall received such treatment. Ditto the Berlaymont, the headquarters of the European Commission's building in Brussels. But surely no country, in terms of number, came close to the United States, Israel's unqualified political and military backer. In New York alone, under direction by Governor Kathy Hochul, such landmarks as the One World Trade Centre, the Moynihan Train Hall and the Empire State Building received the nocturnal blue-white bathing of light. "New York stands with Israel - today and every day," Hochul [reiterated](#).

Very clear statements have been made in taking such a position: to the dead we owe the truth, but only a certain truth, and only to certain dead. There are some truths to be told slant and circuitous, and others to be avoided altogether.

A noisy, agitated example of this unfolded in response to the decision made by the New South Wales government to illuminate Australia's most famous architectural construction in

the colours of the Israeli flag. Reporters went about sniffing to see whether the protests organised by Palestinian activists outside the Sydney Opera House emitted a certain antisemitic tang. If not antisemitic, anything that could be seen as pro-Hamas or laudatory of attacks on the Israeli state would also be picked up.

Political figures did not wait long before the red mist descended. Had the protesters been pro-Israel, Jewish and celebrating Israel, that would have been a different matter. But here, we saw protests by Palestinians against the decision to bathe the Opera House's famous sails in such selective illumination. A prudent measure might have been to avoid doing so altogether: once sides are taken, other sides are excluded.

The focus, however, was not on the building's preferential lighting scheme but the insensitive audacity of the Palestinian protesters who turned up like desecrators at a holy event. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese [expressed the view](#) that "people need to really take a step back," and that the march be abandoned.

Allegra Spender, the independent federal MP for the Sydney seat of Wentworth, made it clear where her side of the vote counted. She [called protests](#) outside the Opera Hall "abhorrent. At a time when there should be solidarity with our Jewish community, they have been subject to appalling abuse." She demanded to know how such an unsympathetic rabble had been permitted to protest in the first place. No mention that the protest was directly challenging the illumination of the edifice in the colours of a flag associated with the military and economic incarceration of Gaza, the occupation of the West Bank, the brake on recognising Palestine as a sovereign state.

Attacks by Hamas, Spender raged [in a separate statement](#), were not seen as "acts of resistance" but those of a crazed terrorist outfit. "People should not let sympathy for the Palestinian's legitimate aspirations for statehood blind them to the fact that Hamas remains dedicated to a Palestinian state where Israel does not exist." Spender could also have noted that the stillborn nature of Palestinian statehood has become the default policy of the Netanyahu government.

Former diplomat Dave Sharma, who had also previously served as a Liberal MP for Wentworth, expressed his "outrage" on ABC News Breakfast because the protesters should have "picked another evening" to march. This should have been Israel's day, the day for Jews. The Palestinian marchers should have protested *appropriately*, always the mealy-mouthed recipe for the ducking brigade who favour power over principle. NSW Premier, Chris Minns, fumed Sharma, should never have given the state police permission for the protests to take place.

For his part, Minns managed to aggravate a goodly number by permitting the illumination of the Opera House to take place, not disallowing the rally in response to that decision while warning the Jewish community to stay away for reasons of safety. Regarding the protests themselves, they were, [according](#) to the Premier's office, "horrible" and did "not represent the people of NSW." As horrible as they were, not a single arrest took place.

While Australian politicians complained and sniffed, Israel has imposed another blockade of Gaza, with news reporters limply avoiding the point that the enclave of two million inhabitants was already blockaded. Such a political entity was barely breathing to begin with, but the promise now is to cut off water ([97% of the water](#) in Gaza is already

contaminated), food, fuel and access to electricity (this was already subject to regular outages) is seen as a logical, natural barbarism. Searching for the appropriate word, the Israeli forces had dubbed this latest measure a “siege”.

During a visit to the Israeli Air Force’s underground command centre, Defence Minister Yoav Gallant [summed up the attitude](#) to this approach of even deeper deprivation against an already exhausted civilian population. “We are fighting animals and are acting accordingly.”

Hardly the voice of a restraint-filled, law abiding official. But back in Australia, Sharma was full of greasy apologetics: “You have to understand, this is a war.” And whenever it waged war, Israel would only do “in accordance with international law”. Hardly – but at least we can light up a few buildings in blue and white.

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